

# Paper D1

## Encouraging worship leading and preaching in the URC

### Education and learning committee

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Mission Council resolves:</b>  <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>1. That from autumn 2020, the standard route, against which other routes will be measured, to becoming a synod-recognised lay preacher in the United Reformed Church and the standard route for progression to becoming an Assembly-accredited lay preacher will be based on Stepwise, in accordance with the proposals given in Appendix A of this paper;</b></li><li><b>2. To request the education and learning committee in consultation with the ministries committee and appropriate committees and officers of the synods, to develop and publish detailed guidance by July 2020 for implementing resolution one.</b></li></ol>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	The aim of the resolution is to ensure that there is continuity of provision for equipping worship leaders and lay preachers in the United Reformed Church, within changing times and contexts.
<b>Main points</b>	There are many strengths in the current system through which people gradually develop their ability to lead worship in the United Reformed Church. Stepwise seeks to equip people for whole life discipleship and an element of this for some people will be to exercise leadership of worship in a variety of contexts. This is an opportunity to create a more coherent system of development than has been possible in recent years.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Report to Mission Council on the development of Stepwise in November 2017; Lay Preaching Strategy Proposal (resolution 35) accepted by General Assembly 2002.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	The Stepwise task and finish group (which has overall responsibility for the development of Stepwise), the ministries and education and learning committees, Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners, Synod

	Training and Development Officers, the design group for the faith-filled worship stream of Stepwise, and the convenors of the committees in each synod responsible for lay development.
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## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	It will cost much less to become Assembly-accredited than previously, when Stepwise is fully in place. The proposal is in tune with the discipleship development strategy adopted by Mission Council in March 2018 which advocated for more “joining the dots” between resources from synods and General Assembly.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	It is important that lay ministries can be seen to be ecumenically equivalent. This proposal allows stronger parallels particularly between Methodist Worship Leaders and synod-recognised Lay Preachers than has been the case previously.

## 1. Purpose

- 1.1 Keeping the needs and expectations of congregations in mind, this paper suggests how Stepwise, as a discipleship development programme, can contribute to the confidence and competence of people called to help others to offer worship to God through the United Reformed Church.

## 2. Origin and development of the paper

- 2.1 Various drafts of this paper have been discussed by the Stepwise task and finish group (which has overall responsibility for the development of Stepwise), the ministries and education and learning committees, the annual meeting of the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioners, Synod Training and Development Officers, and the design group for the faith-filled worship stream of Stepwise. A draft was circulated for comment to the convenors of the committees in each synod responsible for lay development. Insights from these groups have shaped this paper.

## 3. Reality and terminology

- 3.1 The term “Lay Preacher” does not describe the breadth and variety in what is happening on the ground amongst congregations. One commentator on the paper contrasted the lack of large numbers of people currently expressing a desire to train as accredited lay preachers with their observation in many places of people, often in small groups, who want to serve their local church, and possibly other churches around, by leading acts of worship.
- 3.2 “Breaking open the Word” i.e. wrestling with the Bible and drawing meaning from it for today is important. This is as much about facilitating discussion, prayer, reflection, and teaching as it is about preaching a sermon. The worship research project report of 2019 endorses creativity, depth, imagination, flexibility, diversity, and accessibility in worship. It identifies the importance of resourcing people to start where they are and keep developing. This seedbed for worship leading deserves to be valued and nurtured through Stepwise, as well as Stepwise

equipping people for the public role of lay preacher through synod-recognition and Assembly accreditation.

- 3.3 This paper is informed by the United Reformed Church's twin desires to move with the spirit and cherish people's gifts and vocations, while ensuring that there is proper order and accountability of people who somehow represent the church.

## **4. Beginning to lead worship**

- 4.1 This can start with being asked to read one of the lessons on Sunday, or offer prayers during a house group, or use musical or artistic skill in some way during the service – every individual who is involved in leading worship in the URC begins somewhere.
- 4.2 Through a series of small, possibly faltering steps someone is taken further in their journey of discipleship and may be enabled to lead other disciples in worship. The means through which they decide to develop their skills and insight so that they keep deepening their abilities will vary.
- 4.3 Support structures include church members and friends, elders, ministers of all kinds, involvement in house groups and bible studies, local church training sessions including TLS-LITE, synod events, Resource Centre for Learning summer schools and conferences – what works for an individual will be particular to them although the awareness that someone has a gift for helping others to worship is collectively discerned, in the congregation, through trust.
- 4.4 In autumn 2020, the faith-filled worship Stepwise stream will become available for anyone who, having completed faith-filled life is drawn to delve deeper in order to experience more of shaping and leading worship, for whatever purpose.
- 4.5 The majority of people who engage in the faith-filled worship stream are likely to use what they learn simply for their own faith development and to serve their local church. That will be a valuable, considerable outcome. Much of the rest of this paper discusses how someone who finds themselves called to serve the URC in more public roles and wider responsibility could draw on their involvement in Stepwise for this.

## **5. Lay Preachers in the URC – current system**

- 5.1 Although “Lay Preacher” is not always a helpful term, it is widely used and understood in the URC. For the sake of clarity, it is the term used in the rest of this paper. It should be remembered that the elders meeting of any United Reformed Church congregation or pastorate is free to ask anyone they wish to lead worship, other than presiding at the Sacraments.
- 5.2 The URC has reached a situation of having two kinds of “lay preacher”: synod-recognised and Assembly-accredited. In some cases synod-recognised is known as locally-recognised. Appendix B of this paper describes how the current system works.
- 5.3 Two areas for improvement which the new system will address are:

- i. Having a clear progression route from synod-recognition to Assembly accreditation;
- ii. Enabling transfer of synod-recognition when a lay preacher moves to another synod.

## 6. Synod involvement

- 6.1 Synods have a significant part to play in supporting all kinds of worship leading and lay preaching, through their Training and Development Officers, Lay Preaching Commissioners, education/discipleship/ministries committees, and TLS Regional Organisers where these still exist.
- 6.2 Some synods have offered the same level of financial support to synod-recognised Lay Preachers as is available to Assembly-accredited Lay Preachers. Synods often organise conferences and events which are open to anyone wishing to develop their confidence and competence in leading worship, regardless of being recognised or accredited as a Lay Preacher.
- 6.3 Clearly, synods are also key to the development of Stepwise as a locally supported discipleship development programme with five streams, including faith-filled worship.

## 7. Taking forward the best qualities of the current system

- a. *Starting where people are:* Development from within the context of congregations creates a strong foundation which can be built upon in ways that suit individual and local needs, strengths, resources and conditions. There are opportunities built into the system to encounter disciples with contrasting expectations and experiences.
- b. *Comparability between synods:* Prior to the introduction of LITE (Local Introductory Training Experiences) each synod had its own programme for preparing people for leading worship locally. These programmes varied and so LITE responded to a demand for a self-contained, easily accessed, locally available set of courses with in-built consistency. One synod has recently designed its own course which can result in synod-recognition, although most continue to use LITE.
- c. *Progression:* Since 2016, *Transitional TLS* has been a way of someone undertaking LITE and having the option of either seeking synod-recognition on completion or progressing to Assembly-accreditation as a Lay Preacher through further study and practice.
- d. *Flexibility, consistency and rigour:* These apparently contradictory aspects are observed and valued in the current system. Using TLS as the standard (in its previous form and currently in transitional TLS) has made it possible to acknowledge the previous learning and experience which individuals have evidenced when seeking synod-recognition or non-standard progression to Assembly-accreditation. The URC is a small Church and can respond to individual circumstances through the insights of local church, synod, and General Assembly.

- e. *Leadership development*: synod-recognition and Assembly-accreditation give individuals and their synods some confidence that the person can be called upon to exercise leadership locally in an accountable way. They exercise a ministry on behalf of the whole church, in widening circles of influence and responsibility if called to do so and if a vocation to this is discerned.

## 8. Ecumenical considerations

- 8.1 Assembly-Accreditation by the URC is recognised by the Methodist Church as being equivalent to a Local Preacher with mutual recognition of each other's training routes. Someone who has trained through the other denomination's route is able to complete an additional module to show that they understand the ethos of the Methodist Church or URC in order to be accepted by that church as Local Preacher or Assembly-accredited Lay Preacher respectively.
- 8.2 The URC has similar ways of recognising prior learning of people who have trained as an Anglican Reader. The ecumenical equivalence of synod-recognition is not applied consistently.
- 8.3 Steps are currently being taken to assist Methodist Local Preachers meetings to understand and accept synod-recognition, in conjunction with the appropriate officers of the Methodist Connexion. Ecumenical equivalence is yet to be fully explored with other Churches across the three nations of the URC, on a denomination by denomination basis, or within ecumenical alliances e.g. EMU (Episcopal, Methodist, United Reformed Church) in Scotland.

## 9. The proposed system using Stepwise

- 9.1 Through engagement with their local faith-filled life Stepwise group and discussion with their Stepwise mentor in exploring what discipleship means for them, it is anticipated that some people will come to feel that they would like to develop their skills in leading worship and helping to break open the Word. The routes through which they will be able to pursue this from autumn 2020 using Stepwise are described in Appendix A. The key features of the proposed system are:
  - i. There will be local, seedbed development – Stepwise faith-filled worship will be available for people who simply want to develop their abilities to lead worship and preach where they are, for the benefit of their local congregation(s) without seeking synod-recognition or Assembly-accreditation;
  - ii. Synod-recognition will become the accepted initial destination of everyone seeking to be known publicly as a lay preacher in the URC and will be transferable between synods. Subsequent progression to Assembly-accreditation will be one means among others of encouraging further development.
  - iii. The standards for worship leading and preaching to be used throughout the denomination for Lay Preachers will be those associated with Stepwise.

## 10. Routes other than Stepwise

- 10.1 Someone called to lay preaching in the URC may have had relevant training from another denomination or education and experience elsewhere. A synod may feel that the person is ready for synod-recognition, when measured against the Stepwise standards agreed and published by the education and learning committee. It would be for the synod to make such a decision and synod-recognition remains an important step.
- 10.2 Where an experienced person seeks progression to Assembly-accreditation through routes other than Stepwise the synod will make an application on their behalf to the URC studies panel<sup>1</sup> for recognition of prior learning. The Stepwise route to Assembly-accreditation will be the standard against which the prior learning of applicants is calibrated.

## 11. Continuing development for lay preachers

- 11.1 Times and contexts change, and it is important that people who are entrusted to break open God's Word with congregations are continually nourished in their hearts and minds, as has been reiterated in the Worship Research Project report of 2019. An increasing emphasis on local leadership of congregations requires that resources are devoted to re-equipping lay preachers to take on new roles as these emerge.
- 11.2 The URC will look to synods and Resource Centres for Learning to continue to offer development opportunities through local events, and regular lay preaching conferences. Peer support is also important and strengthening of local and regional networks of worship leaders and lay preachers is something that synods have encouraged.
- 11.3 A specific area where local equipping is of particular relevance is that of preparing lay preachers to conduct occasional offices. Synods already prepare people to be authorised for presiding at the sacraments of communion and baptism. Some synods and the Resource Centres for Learning are also offering training in presiding at funerals.
- 11.4 It would seem best to continue and develop this provision as it is, rather than try and include it as a core part of the Stepwise faith-filled worship stream. Such skills and knowledge are best addressed when people find themselves required and ready to exercise them.
- 11.5 Continuing development opportunities would be helped if there were a standard pattern of assistance across synods, perhaps supported by a combination of synod and Assembly funds.

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<sup>1</sup> The URC Studies Panel, meeting electronically, is chaired by the Convenor of the education and learning committee and includes the Secretaries for education and learning and Ministries, the Stepwise Programme Manager, the Convenor of the Stepwise Learning Standards Board, and the Assembly Advocate for Leading Worship.

## 12. What happens for people currently in TLS transition?

- 12.1 Transitional TLS is currently still available. TLS LITE and LITE PLUS continue to be offered, and Gateways into Worship is running for the final time in the academic year 2019/20. Anyone who has been given synod-recognition through TLS-LITE or other equivalent routes will be able to seek progression to Assembly-recognition if they so choose, using the Stepwise route described in Appendix A or its equivalent as described in section ten above.

# Appendix A

## 1. Stepwise and Lay Preaching: a proposal

- 1.1 Through engagement with the local Stepwise group and discussion with their Stepwise mentor in exploring what discipleship means for them, it is anticipated that some people will come to feel that they would like to develop their skills in leading worship and breaking open the word, i.e. wrestling with the Bible and drawing meaning from it for today. This is as much about facilitating discussion, prayer, reflection, and teaching as it is about preaching a sermon.
- 1.2 The following proposal is written as if:
- it is autumn 2020 and all the Stepwise streams are available;
  - the proposal is addressed to an individual;
  - the individual has completed faith-filled life previously
  - the individual has discerned a calling to develop their skills in leading worship

## 2. Working on the fine detail

- 2.1 There is further work to do, to make this proposal into a thorough and sustainable scheme which can cope with the range of expectations from local congregations, synods and ecumenical partners. Acceptance of the outline ideas within it by Mission Council in November 2019 will enable the education and learning and ministries committees to work with relevant synod committees to provide the necessary guidance and agreements on practice by autumn 2020.

## 3. Becoming a Lay Preacher in the URC (from autumn 2020)

**If you simply want to be better at leading worship in your local church**

3.1 You would complete the core of faith-filled worship through the usual means. Beyond the core blended learning you could choose to undertake additional activities for your own development:

- i. producing a portfolio of evidence during faith-filled worship through assignments which help you to reflect on your experience and skill development;
- ii. an assessed service at the end of the stream which you can ask to be conducted to give you feedback on your progress.

## **If you feel called to become a Lay Preacher in the URC**

3.2 Everyone seeking to become a Lay Preacher in the URC will be expected to seek synod-recognition in the first instance.

3.3 You will complete the core of faith-filled worship through the usual means. In addition you will be required to:

- i. produce a portfolio of evidence during faith-filled worship through assignments which help you to reflect on your experience and skill development;
- ii. undertake an assessed service at the end of the stream. If your synod is satisfied with your competence according to URC-wide standards they will grant you synod-recognition as a Lay Preacher. This will be subject to you meeting safeguarding requirements set by the URC for synod-recognised Lay Preachers.

3.4 Synod-recognition will be transferable to other synods if you subsequently move. All synods will be expected to provide a reasonable and consistent level of resourcing for the continuing development of synod-recognised Lay Preachers. They will be helped to do so, where necessary, from the URC's Discipleship Development Fund and the Inter-Synod Resource Sharing Scheme.

## **Progression to seeking Assembly-accreditation**

3.5 For many people it will be enough to be synod-recognised as a Lay Preacher. However, progression has the following advantages for individuals and the United Reformed Church:

- i. developing an individual's abilities
- ii. formal acknowledgement of the deepening and broadening of competence
- iii. greater flexibility in lay ministry to meet a variety of contexts
- iv. ecumenical equivalence to Licensed Lay Ministers/Readers in the Anglican Church and Local Preachers in the Methodist Church.

3.6 There are two parts to progression:

- a. While serving as a synod-recognised Lay Preacher you will need to show evidence of having conducted a minimum of 12 services of worship, within a period of 12 to 24 months, in a range of styles and settings.

Your synod will be encouraged to provide an experienced worship leader to spend two to three sessions helping you to reflect on your strengths and development needs as a Lay Preacher, in order to decide which of the Stepwise Streams is the most appropriate for you to pursue. This could be the person who was your mentor for faith-filled worship or it may be someone else set aside for the purpose.



- b. You will then be expected to complete one of the other Stepwise Streams, or a programme of equal rigour and depth. The stream you choose will depend on:
  - i. the possibilities and needs of the context that you and the synod have agreed is where your calling lies;
  - ii. the experience you already have, so either deepening what you've already done in a subject area or branching out into a new subject area.

The portfolio that you create in this stream will relate to the ministry of leading worship and preaching. Having completed the stream, you will have another assessed service. If the synod, representing the Assembly, is satisfied with this and the evidence from your portfolio they will recommend you to the existing routes for Assembly accreditation. This is essentially commendation from the URC education and learning committee to the URC ministries committee, which then grants Assembly accreditation as a Lay Preacher. This is under the authority of the General Assembly.

- 3.7 Assembly-accreditation is valid throughout the whole of the URC. Once accredited, you will be eligible to apply for a reasonable and consistent level of resourcing for your continuing development from the relevant committee of General Assembly, through your synod.

## Appendix B

### **Current recognition of Lay Preachers in the URC (September 2019)**

As mentioned above, the term “Lay Preacher” is not always a helpful term, although widely used and understood in the URC. For the sake of clarity, it is the term used in this paper. It should be remembered that the elders meeting of any United Reformed Church congregation or pastorate is free to ask anyone they wish to lead worship, other than presiding at the Sacraments.

The United Reformed Church has reached a situation of having two kinds of “lay preacher”: Synod-recognised and Assembly-accredited. (In some cases, synod-recognised is known as locally-recognised.) What follows below is a description of how the normal system works currently.

*Synod-recognised Lay Preachers* usually pursue a programme of training which takes about 12 months through their synod. In many synods this consists of a series of five Local Introductory Training Experience ([LITE](#)) courses taken in small groups close to their home church, with assignments to be completed.

Having successfully conducted an assessed service the applicant will usually be recognised by the synod and listed in their year book as a lay preacher. Someone recognised in their own synod as a lay preacher is not automatically recognised as such if they move to a different synod. The financial support for ongoing development of synod-recognised Lay Preachers varies between synods.

*Assembly-accredited Lay Preachers* pursue a programme known as *Transitional TLS* which takes three years and is overseen by both their synod and the education and learning committee of the General Assembly, the URC's ruling body. The first year requires completion of four of the five LITE courses designated for synod-recognised lay preachers, with a different and more stretching set of assignments.

The second year consists of the 'Gateways into Worship' course, completed over an academic year (September to June). This is tutored within the synod and includes a residential weekend in each of three terms; a supervised placement with a local church other than the student's own; and completion of a number of assignments marked centrally.

The third year of mentored reflective practice is designed to give the potential preacher a wide experience of shaping and leading different kinds of worship with the support of an experienced mentor. **[www.urc.org.uk/tls-page](http://www.urc.org.uk/tls-page)**

There are assessed services at two points – at the end of 'Gateways into Worship' (to give feedback on progress) and at the end of the year of mentored reflective practice (to decide if the required standard for Assembly-accreditation has been met).

Assembly-accreditation is transferable to wherever the preacher finds themselves in the United Reformed Church, and it is also recognised by ecumenical partners. Assembly-accredited Lay Preachers are eligible to apply for up to £200 per year towards their ongoing development. Information on this can be found **at [www.urc.org.uk/assembly-accredited-lay-preachers](http://www.urc.org.uk/assembly-accredited-lay-preachers)**