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Resourcing Ministry

The report of a Ministries Committee working party 2011-12

The United Reformed Church

1. The unions of 1972, 1981 and 2000 have created a church which is not merely c. 1500 local churches in a union but a wider gathering of the body of Christ which is grounded in 1500 local communities. It is the tension between whether we regard ourselves primarily as a local church or a denomination which can lead to misunderstanding, disillusionment and frustration with how we relate to one another and our interconnectedness.
2. The Ministry and Mission Fund (M&M) reveals something significant about who we believe ourselves to be and how we relate to each other. The object of M&M is to provide in partnership with local churches and Synods, the financial resources needed to train, equip and remunerate ministry, to support centralised services, and the world-wide work of the Church. Congregations share in the financial cost of the programmes agreed by the General Assembly by making an annual commitment to the fund. Underlying the fund is the belief that the whole ministry of the URC is to be made available to the whole of the Church and the financial responsibility for this ministry is to be shared throughout the whole of the Church. The Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) of the Church are deployed by synods in ways that respond to the many different mission opportunities in different places unconstrained by the availability of local finance.¹ For this to happen local churches contribute to the costs of the whole Church's ministry according to the congregation's means. Put simply, we all put into the central pot out of our riches and the resources of that pot are used to support ministry and mission where opportunities are identified.
3. This is a very different model to that of the world around us where society largely operates on a contracted service model – you get what you pay for – and where the dominant voices talk about rights and entitlements, rather than this way of giving and serving.
4. It is challenging to live in this way if we do not recognise that all we have, whether as individuals, local churches or a denomination, is a gift from God, and get caught up in the secular understanding of buying a service. Furthermore, if we are seduced by the latter understanding it is not difficult to understand the complaints of those churches that are contributing vast sums to M&M and sharing an ordained minister with one or more other congregations.
5. Our model for living is defined by Grace, Abundance and Mission.
We are who we are because of God;

¹ For the sake of coherence Ministers of Word and Sacraments will be referred to as Ministers, Church Related Community Workers as CRCWs, and minister or ministers shall refer to those exercising either ministry throughout this document.

We have what we have because of God;
We do what we do because of God.

Stipendiary Service

6. In recent months the Ministries Committee have considered the United Reformed Church's practice of paying ministers a stipend rather than a salary, and the principle that the level of that stipend is the same regardless of age or time in ministry. The committee accepted three principles presented to it by the Maintenance of the Ministry Sub-Committee:
 - a. Parity of Status
There is one order of ministry of word and sacraments without any ranking, grading or distinction between the value of work done by different ministers.
 - b. Reimbursement to all ministers
All ministers should be fully reimbursed for expenses incurred in the work of ministry.
 - c. The Stipendiary Principle
Whole-time stipendiary ministers devote their working lives to a calling dependent on the support of the Church. They are to be enabled to maintain a reasonable standard of life by the provision of regular stipend income which is intended to free them from depending on other earnings, fees, stipend supplements, compensation payments or remuneration for their ministry from any other sources.
7. In the light of this we underline the United Reformed Church's practice of providing ministers who are supported by the whole church and who are enabled to go where the church, through its councils, recognises ministry is needed.
8. However ministry is not merely, or even primarily, about ordained or commissioned ministers offering themselves in stipendiary service. The United Reformed Church is truly blessed by those who serve in ministry in a non-stipendiary capacity. There are currently over 120 ministers who operate in this way, not to mention the many ministers who although 'retired' continue in an active capacity to serve the church and its mission.

Ministry of the whole people of God

9. Even as we recognise this we are in danger of missing the fact that we sincerely believe that all God's people are engaged in ministry and that the community of the church has a role in encouraging individuals to exercise their ministry whilst supporting and resourcing that ministry.
10. Previous Ministries Committee reports to General Assembly² have encouraged synods and local pastorates to consider alternative ministries alongside Ministers and CRCWs. Although progress has been made with regard to this there is a recognition that the potential for this is limited in many places by the lack of resources.
11. Whilst some individual churches or group pastorates may have the financial resources to pay for alternative ministry and leadership on a part-time, or even full-time, basis (i.e. youth or children's worker or pastoral visitor) this is beyond the means of most churches, for whom the first call on their financial resources rightly remains the M&M fund. In

² Patterns of Ministry (1995), Equipping the Saints (2004), Challenge to the Church (2008)

some places lay people can be identified to exercise such ministries in a voluntary capacity but very often the lack of available volunteers thwarts such enterprises.

12. Some synods have been able to provide funding to support local ministry and leadership. This money has come from investments, legacies or through a synod levy on local churches in addition to their contributions to the M&M fund pledge, but it should be recognised that not all synods have been in a position to provide such funding.
13. It is believed that providing synods with funds that can be used to support lay ministries will enable such ministry to happen in settings that would otherwise be impossible and would encourage the development of multi-skill teams as envisaged in Challenge to the Church and Equipping the Saints.
14. The Ministries Committee also recognises that there is currently an imbalance in the apportioning of Special Category Ministry (SCM) and CRCW posts, and in the distribution of higher education chaplaincy and workplace ministry grants. In the case of SCM and CRCW posts the current system does appear to favour those synods with additional resources available to fund manses and meet local expenses. The situation with regard to grants seems arbitrary with the need to have access to other funding, whether synod or ecumenical, as well as someone locally being aware that such grants may be available from the United Reformed Church through the Ministries Committee.
15. Recognising that there is no extra money within the United Reformed Church budget available to resource this the Ministries Committee is convinced of the need to change the way the money used to fund stipends and associated costs is allocated across the church if resources are to be released.

How could it change?

16. At its meeting in March 2011 The Ministries Committee considered three scenarios for apportioning the funding available.
17. The first proposed no change to the current arrangements whereby there is a total number of stipends payable out of a central pot which are shared out among the 13 synods to be used for Ministers of Word and Sacraments, and used to support up to CRCW posts and SCM posts. Synods and local churches are free to employ other workers but the full cost of this must be met by the synod or local church.
18. The second suggested a ‘mixed economy’ whereby each synod would be given a number of stipends to be deployed which would be less than the current deployment target. The stipendiary posts would still only be open to those on the roll of United Reformed Church Ministers, holders of a Certificate of Eligibility or a Certificate of Limited Service. The SCM scheme would continue to run as now with an agreed maximum number for the scheme with the possibility of an agreed maximum per synod. The CRCW scheme would continue with the maximum number of 26. In all these cases the stipends would be met out of the central funds of the URC, but the provision of a manse and the local expenses would be borne by the pastorate, project, synod or other local body (e.g. a chaplaincy) or a combination of more than one of these.
In addition to the scoping the synod would be given a grant from central funds which it could use to spend on further ministry. The level of this grant will be determined by the agreed reduction in the deployment quota. The synod could choose to use this to fund further stipendiary URC ministry or use some or all of this money to pay for lay ministry as it saw appropriate, either through synod appointments or by making a grant to a local church, pastorate or project in order that they can make such an appointment.

19. The third option would be for M&M pledges from the synods to still be collected centrally but then a block grant would be made to each synod to be used to fund ministry (meaning people serving in ministry) in the way they chose.
- This money could be used to pay the stipends of ministers serving in ‘traditional’ pastorates, chaplaincies, synod roles or other areas of work that the synod deems important. This would do away with the denominational SCM scheme and place responsibility for deciding on this type of work within each synod.
- The funding could also be used to pay for others offering ministry in a variety of roles either listed by the General Assembly or at the discretion of the synods. These roles could include evangelist, youth worker, schools worker, elderly support worker, lay chaplain, local leader, community worker.
- The provision of housing and the meeting of local costs would continue to be the responsibility of the pastorate, synod or other local arrangement and denominational funds would still be used to meet church pension fund contributions, provide in-service training and pay loans and grants agreed under the Plan for Partnership for URC accredited ministers.

Working Party

20. After exploring the possibilities the Ministries Committee agreed to set up a small working party with the following terms of reference:
- To outline what an alternative scheme for resourcing ministry in the 13 synods of the United Reformed Church might look like (as suggested by Scenario 3 of Paper B1b considered at the Ministries Committee meeting 28th Feb - 1st Mar 2011). (The third option described above.)
 - To consider in detail the implications of such a scheme on United Reformed Church identity, ministerial accountability and movement, ecumenical engagement and any other areas of the church’s life that would be affected by such a change.
 - To recommend to the Ministries Committee whether such a scheme should be presented to the General Assembly for adoption or not.
21. The working party comprising Revd Ruth Whitehead, Revd Adrian Bulley, Ms Catherine Lewis-Smith and Revd Craig Bowman first met on 27th September 2011 and on three subsequent occasions.
22. As part of the working party’s consideration of the matter the original paper outlining the three scenarios was shared with Mission Council in November 2011 and the council members invited to comment on what they found to be a positive in each of the scenarios, what was a negative and what was ‘interesting’ (i.e. noteworthy but not necessarily clearly negative or positive). In this they were undertaking the same exercise that the Ministries Committee had carried out in early 2011.
23. Reflecting on the responses and having heard the strong feelings expressed at that first Ministries Committee meeting the working party are convinced that a shift from a scheme which gives a total number of deployed posts to each synod to one that deploys financial resources to each synod which can be used for the ministry identified by that synod, is a move that would be widely welcomed.

Observations

24. In support of this we believe such a system has the following advantages.
25. It promotes flexibility:
- Pastorates can articulate specific ministry needs to be met within their scoping. e.g. 15% youth worker, 50% Minister of Word and Sacraments or 20% elderly peoples' worker, 30% Minister of Word and Sacraments.
 - Where synods identify a role that does not specifically call for the gifts and skills of a Minister or CRCW they will be able to resource someone other than a minister to do it.
 - Synods would not need to mould work into work for an ordained minister if it really wasn't, thereby promoting honesty.
 - The formation of self-sustaining Fresh Expressions often requires a nurturing of lay leadership. Deployment of sessional lay workers may be appropriate in some such contexts.
 - The ability to create posts which meet mission and need and which may not resemble traditional patterns of ministry may release more fully the talents and creativity of some Ministers of Word and Sacraments.
26. It encourages accountability:
- Synods would be given greater responsibility in relation to Special Category Ministry projects since they would need to consider the value of that work compared with the other priorities of the synod. Current arrangements, whereby SCM posts are accredited through a sub-committee of the Ministries Committee and the stipend is counted against a denominational total, do not have an effect on the rest of a synod's mission and can therefore be seen as a bonus. However this is a bonus that can favour those synods with access to other resources to meet expenses and housing costs whilst not assisting those synods without such resources.
 - The Ministries Committee would cease to have a grant-making responsibility and transfer the responsibility to synods who will have to weigh the value of such work against other mission priorities. The current arrangements can encourage the perception that there is a large pot of other money to be tapped into.
 - Moving accountability for the use of all resources to the synod means all decisions regarding the use of those resources are made closer to the location of mission (i.e. local churches). This should encourage more active participation in the decision making processes at synod level rather than it being viewed, at least in part, as others remote from the local context funding their pet projects. The principal of mission decisions being made as close as reasonably possible to their context is one we would want to encourage.
 - If there was greater flexibility as to where and when synods fund ministry then churches would expect greater clarity as to what criteria are being used for making these decisions so promoting fairness.
 - Unused resources in one synod (for example from having no SCM posts) would still be available for use in that area in a different way.

Constraints

27. As stated above we believe the intention should be to move to a system where the decisions regarding the support of ministry should be made at synod level. However the more we explored how to release resources for other ministry we continually found ourselves confronted by other large consequential issues which tended to fall into three areas.

28. Ministers:

Whilst we understand the primary purpose of the United Reformed Church is not to look after ministers but to be active in mission, we cannot ignore the effect such changes may have on our ministers.

- What if a significant number of synods decide CRCW is not a priority for them, or even the Ministry of Word and Sacraments?
 - What do we do with those competent ministers who can't be used due to lack of posts or those who for family reasons are stuck in an area where there are no suitable posts?
 - What happens when a minister cannot find 'employment'?
 - Will this require planned redundancy spending each year and transitional support?
- Does the URC have a moral commitment to those who have responded to the call to stipendiary service but who are now not offered 'employment'?
- Ministers not exercising ministry cannot be contributing members of the URC Ministers Pension Fund.
- If there are more part-time ministers does this mean more manses will be needed?
- What are the tax implications for part-time ministers serving less than 50% and living in a manse?
- Will such changes increase fear and disillusionment in ministers?

29. Ecumenical:

- Many Local Ecumenical Partnerships have an alternating ministry: what will this mean if in the URC's turn it feels alternative ministry (not Ministry of Word and Sacraments) is more appropriate?
- Churches together groupings can find it difficult to relate to a church that doesn't have ordained leadership and an increase in such models may complicate local relationships.

30. The synod:

- A move to a more devolved pattern will mean more responsibility for the synod and the need for people to operate such a system in the synods. There is a real concern that the smaller synods (with fewer people and less resources) may not have the capacity to run such a system.
- Will moving to such a pattern lead to a further imbalance as those synods with less resources find they need to pay people out of this devolved funding to enable the system to work?
- Where are these decisions going to be made in a synod?
- Who has the imagination/strategic vision?
- Is there a need for denominational guidance or a scheme or do we need to trust the synods?
- This could strengthen the perception that we do things in 13 different ways – reducing mobility amongst ministers as people stick with what they know.

31. In changing to a block grant system the practical question arises of why not simply move to a system where each synod retains the money it raises for the M&M apart from sending a proportion on to Church House to meet the non-ministry central costs?

32. Here we return to the point we made at the beginning. The Ministry and Mission Fund is not simply a means of the local church buying ministry (whether ordained, commissioned or lay) but a sharing of the riches God has given to us, as individuals and congregations, to support the work of the church. Committing our resources into a central pot that is then shared out in response to the demands of mission, rather than resourcing mission out of our own local pots, affirms that we are a people in covenant with one another, offering

out of the riches we have been given for the work of the body of Christ of which we are a part.

Proposal

33. The Ministries Committee wants to explore the possibilities of the block grant arrangement but, in light of concerns regarding the effect on the movement of ministers, ecumenical engagement, synod capacity, ministerial morale and other matters recorded above, believes this needs to be a two stage process.
34. General Assembly 2012 will be asked to agree the allocation to the synods of the resources previously used to support the Special Category Ministry programme and to end the practice of grants being available to support higher education chaplaincy or workplace ministry from the Ministries Committee. This will enable each synod to receive a modest 'block grant' for some ministry in addition to the present deployment figure. The present scheme of centrally accredited Special Category Ministry posts would be wound down.
35. A period of monitoring will follow at the end of which the Ministries Committee will consider whether it is now practical and desirable to move to a complete block grant scheme, and advise Mission Council accordingly, in order that a proposal for change could be brought to General Assembly when it meets in 2016.
36. The following timetable is planned
 - March 2012 The outline of the scheme is presented to Mission Council.
 - July 2012 General Assembly is asked to support the changes identified above.
 - January 2013 Implementation begins of the change of responsibility for SCM posts and the availability of funding for other ministry.
 - January 2015 Ministries Committee reviews the progress so far made.
 - November 2015 Mission Council discusses moving to a total block grant system.
 - July 2016 General Assembly considers any proposal from the Ministries Committee and Mission Council.
37. There is the question of how the interim funding would be allocated to the synods. Would it be divided equally between the 13 synods or rationed out according to the number of members, the number of churches and the population as is used to determine deployment targets? We believe that in this first stage it should be an universal allocation to each synod, not pro-rata. To do otherwise would mean that the potential ministerial numbers for the smaller synods is effectively reduced immediately.
38. There remains the crucial question of how much funding would be available through this first change. That is a matter where further discussion is needed with the Finance Committee, not least in the light of the proposal agreed at Mission Council in November 2011 to produce a scheme which ties ministerial numbers to the cost of ministry, not merely to the changing membership of the United Reformed Church. However it seems to us that considering the current number of SCM posts a sensible level of funding to make available in this way would be the central church costs of 2.5 SCM posts.

Transitional arrangements

39. Naturally such a change could have an effect on existing SCM posts. If the 2.5 figure is accepted then any synod that has more than that number of posts will not be eligible for extra funding until they have dropped below that level. A deadline needs to be agreed at

which point any SCM posts above the 2.5 figure will be considered to be coming out of a synod's deployment figure. (This may lead to an increase in some synod's already 'over deployment'.) Setting this deadline at 2 years after implementation seems reasonable.

40. Discussions will need to take place with the Accreditation Sub-Committee and with those synods where there is currently approval for more than 2.5 SCM posts to determine how many of those posts are already planned to end during the transitional period. Currently 8 synods could be affected by this but only 1 synod actually has more than 2.5 SCM posts filled.
41. In this matter the 3 SCM evangelist posts would be regarded in the same way as any other SCM post.

Monitoring

42. In order to ascertain the value of this process and to consider more fully the effect a change to a full block grant may have the two years from January 2013 would be seen as a monitoring period.
43. Besides the evidence that will naturally be gathered through the processes of the Ministries Committee and office (e.g. any increase in the number of requests for Certificates of Limited Service) specific information will be requested from synods, including:
 - Of the amount of money available how much has been used to support local pastorate ministry, synod ministry, special ministries, chaplaincy, lay ministry, etc?
 - Has this process enabled resources to be used to meet the focus of Equipping the Saints and Challenge to the Church?
 - Have local churches felt closer to decision making through this process?
 - How have synods managed the process? (Helping to identify capacity and organisational issues)
 - How prepared does each synod feel for the move to the extension of the scheme and what help would they need to move forward?
 - Of those synods that are still over deployed at that stage what plans are being made for change as the scheme is extended?
 - What impact has been noted that would have implications for the extension of the scheme?