

Paper H

Resourcing our Elders
Ministries Committee



Paper H

Ministries Committee: Resourcing our Elders

Basic Information

Contact name and email address	Revd Craig Bowman ministries@urc.org.uk
Action required	For discussion
Draft resolution(s)	None
Alternative options to consider, if any	

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	Resourcing Our Elders
Main points	A brief introduction and an example of the revised Eldership Training materials
Previous relevant documents	A Course for Elders
Consultation has taken place with...	Education and Learning Committee, Ministries Committee, training and development officers

Summary of Impact

Financial	
External (e.g. ecumenical)	A renewed attention to the role of elders within the United Reformed Church may challenge those ecumenical partnerships which do not have elders but will also provide resources for equipping local leadership regardless of the exact pattern found in each place

Resourcing Our Elders

Introduction

There is much to say about elders and eldership. This is an attempt to put together some resources to help elders or prospective elders to think about some of the important issues. The areas of learning can be taken in any order, used in whole or in part and be used with either a local church eldership or a synod or in a more localised training event. The idea is to provide a range of resources which people can dip into.

The areas are:

1. **Exploring eldership:** the role of elders in the URC, shadowing and mentoring, what it means to be called and ordained, how things might work in ecumenical contexts.
2. **God calls elders:** the historical and biblical examples of eldership, what we mean by spiritual leadership, the gifts and graces elders need.
3. **A team of elders:** working as a team, building a team of elders, diversity, confidence and humility.
4. **The work of elders in mission:** what is the local church? what are the vision2020 mission priorities?
5. **Pastoral care:** the elder as pastor, pastoral teams and oversight, Good Practice.
6. **Prayer and spirituality:** nurturing your faith, praying with others, supporting the church's worship. Praying as an eldership.
7. **Next steps:** becoming a supporting elder (this would be a replacement term for non serving elder), further learning, legal and other support from the synod (including trustee issues).

We would like to thank all those who have been part of putting this resource together, specifically the synods and synod training officers (or equivalents) and Westminster College

Ruth Whitehead, Peter Ball
On behalf of Education and Learning and Ministries Committees, 2013

Resourcing our elders

Area 6. Prayer and Spirituality

A Bible Study on 1 Timothy 3: 1-7

“It is true that anyone who desires to be a church official wants to be something worthwhile. That’s why officials must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage. They must be self-controlled, sensible, well-behaved, friendly to strangers, and able to teach. They must not be heavy drinkers or troublemakers. Instead, they must be kind and gentle and not love money. Church officials must be in control of their own families, and they must see that their children are obedient and always respectful. If they don’t know how to control their own families, how can they look after God’s people?”

“They must not be new followers of the Lord. If they are, they might become proud and be doomed along with the devil. Finally, they must be well-respected by people who are not followers. Then they won’t be trapped and disgraced by the devil.”

(Contemporary English Version)

It is interesting that when Paul states who should be a church official (overseer, elder, pastor) it seems to depend not so much on qualifications, gifts and abilities, but on character. An elder should command the respect of others, in the church, in the family and in the wider world. He or she should also be a person who is in control of themselves, whilst being a servant of the church and of the gospel.

Question 1: How does this list of demands on the character of an elder strike you?

The United Reformed Church has produced this document, *Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for elders*

1. Introduction

This paper sets down expectations of elders in relation to Ministers of Word and Sacraments and church related community workers (CRCWs) within the United Reformed Church. Parallel papers about the expectations of ministers and CRCWs are to be read alongside this document.

2. Basis of Union

The foundation for the conduct of ministers is in the Basis of Union, summarised in Schedule E paragraph 2, “Ministers must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church and the affirmation made by ministers at ordination and induction (Schedule C) and the Statement concerning the nature, faith and order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which ministers undertake to exercise their ministry.”

The relevant promises in Schedule C are:

- a) “to live a holy life and to maintain the truth of the Gospel whatever trouble or persecution may arise”,
- b) “to fulfil the duties of your charge faithfully, to lead the church in worship, to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, to take your part in the councils of the Church, and to give leadership to the Church in its mission to the world, and;
- c) as a minister of the United Reformed Church “to seek its well-being, purity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”.

Elders “share with ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the elders’ meeting for the whole church and having severally groups of members particularly entrusted to their pastoral care. They are ‘associated with ministers in all the councils of the church’. Elders promise at their ordination to ‘accept the office of elder of the United Reformed Church’ and promise ‘to perform its duties faithfully”.

Elders and members receive ministers at their induction or CRCWs at their commissioning “as from God” to serve among them and with them in the world. They promise to pray for the minister/CRCW, to seek together the will of God and “give due honour, consideration and encouragement, building one another up in faith, hope and love.”

Members promise, “in dependence on God’s grace, to be faithful in private and public worship, to live in the fellowship of the Church and to share in its work”, and to give and serve, as God enables them, “for the advancement of his kingdom throughout the world”. They also promise “by that same grace, to follow Christ and to seek to do and to bear his will” all the days of their life.

3. Standards of Christian Behaviour

3a *Personal integrity and health*

- To live a Christian life as persons of prayer and integrity.
- To be committed to growing in faith and discipleship and developing the gifts each has been given.
- To be aware of the need of ministers, elders and members to have appropriate boundaries that safeguard personal and spiritual health and welfare, to promote healthy relationships with others and not to do anything to undermine the spiritual health of another.
- To recognise the need for ministers, elders and members to have a healthy lifestyle and to balance demands on ministers’/CRCWs’ availability and accessibility with respect for ministers’/CRCWs’ time for family and friends, personal renewal and rest and spiritual growth.
- To maintain strict confidentiality of all matters shared in confidence, except when required by law to do otherwise, e.g. with regard to the safety of children, and to respect ministers’ needs to maintain that same confidentiality.
- To exercise care and sensitivity when seeking counsel from others and in discussion about pastoral concerns, in order that the identity of any person shall not be revealed unless permission has been granted.
- To refrain from using privilege or power for personal advantage or gain, whether financial, emotional, sexual or material.

3b *Relationships with ministers*

- To work collaboratively with ministers/CRCWs and elders and members in all aspects of the life of the pastorate.
- To support the ministers/CRCWs, through prayer, encouragement and partnership, including honouring the terms of settlement with regard to holidays, financial benefits and continuing training.
- To regard all persons with equal respect and concern and not discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender, race, age, disability or sexual orientation, including ministers/CRCWs.
- To honour the ministers/CRCWs currently called to serve and not invite or encourage other ministers to be involved in the life of the church or to offer pastoral care without the ministers’/CRCWs’ consent.
- To refrain from raising pastoral issues with a previous minister/CRCW.

- To respect the work of previous ministers/CRCWs and deal honourably with their record.
- To welcome retired ministers/CRCWs as members and worshippers in the pastorate.

3c Relationship with elders, members and others

- To regard all persons with equal love and concern.
- To uphold values of faithfulness, trust and respect.
- To share leadership and pastoral care with others called to these purposes.
- To work collaboratively and safeguard the contribution of the whole church in decision-making processes.
- To seek advice from others if in doubt about one's competence to deal with any issue or situation.
- To consider very carefully taking any position of responsibility and to support the direction of church life initiated through the ministers/CRCWs, elders and church meetings.
- Not to enter a sexual relationship with anyone in their care.
- Not to be alone with a child or children or young people in a place quite separate from others.

3d Relationship with Councils of the church

- To recognise that the pastorate is part of the wider United Reformed Church and that the ministers/CRCWs are committed to play their part in the wider councils of the Church and in ecumenical relationships.
- To engage positively with all the councils of the church.
- To participate in Synod's consultation and review of the pastorate as appropriate.

Question 2: Do you see any relationship between St Paul's list and the *Guidelines for the conduct of elders*?

St Paul believes that the character he describes is not produced by force of will, but by "growing up into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). There is a link between our characters and the respect others have for us, and our life of prayer and openness to the Spirit. Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit in terms of character traits or behaviour (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control) and concludes: "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the spirit" (Galatians 5: 25).

Question 3: Can you think of ways in which your own character has been shaped by your discipleship as you have 'grown up into Christ'?

Question 4: What has been most helpful to you in your spiritual growth?

Question 5: What most challenges you in this passage?

Question 6: Does the whole group feel the same way?

Question 7: Are there ways in which you think Christians can strengthen and encourage one another in their lives of prayer and spirituality? Confidentiality?