



Training in Equal Opportunities to help Interim Moderators work with local churches in vacancy

Offering people equal opportunities means making decisions about them based primarily on relevant criteria, not on incidental details, like their gender, ethnic origin, age or marital status.

To hold irrelevant details against a person is to discriminate. In our society, increasingly, forms of discrimination are unlawful and in the Church they are also unethical.

Anti-discrimination legislation includes gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, marital status and disability.

Equal Opportunities applies to Ministers, Church Related Community Workers and any other employees of the local church such as cleaners, youth workers, secretaries etc.

Why does it matter?

1. Because the URC is committed to equal opportunities. See page 3 Equal Opportunities Policy (Appendix 8 in The Movement of Ministers)
2. Because discrimination does happen. In 2001 there was some research into the URC which showed that while about 30% of the church membership was male, 43% of the eldership was male, that 32% of our congregations include black and minority ethnic people who are underrepresented in leadership positions and that while 72% of churches had wheelchair access to their buildings only 52% had accessible toilets.
3. There has not been any research into the movement of ministers, but anecdotal evidence suggests that black and minority ethnic people and women have more difficulty moving than white men. Of course some women have no difficulty and some men have a lot of difficulty.
4. Though discrimination is difficult to eradicate, people can be helped to consider their prejudices in the light of the gospel. As churches prepare to meet potential new ministers, Interim Moderators are well-placed to promote the URC Equal Opportunities policy and have a responsibility to do so.

What can Interim Moderators do?

You can reflect on your own position. What is your attitude to equal opportunities? Are you ever prejudiced or patronising? Do you make excuses for your behaviour? It is likely that God is calling you to transcend your weaknesses and, as an Interim Moderator, the Church is asking you to do so.

In the Church, people are rarely blatant about their prejudices and often do not recognise when they discriminate. So they may not acknowledge their prejudice as wrong and, if they do, may keep this attitude to themselves, wishing to avoid confrontation. Although this does not excuse unjust behaviour, it is important to be sensitive in encouraging people to reflect upon their attitudes; otherwise their prejudices will be buried and continue to have an unexamined influence upon their decision-making.

An Interim Moderator can be proactive about discrimination before actual cases arise by running a training session with the church meeting (see the Training Session below), and by challenging people to recognise their own prejudices whenever these appear by being attentive for the assumptions that people are making about their next minister. For example watch out for male language when referring to the next minister. Always say 'he or she'. And remind others to do so too. Try asking the question, 'you have decided that you want this particular kind of leadership - how will you know if a woman is exercising it or if a man is exercising it or if a person with a disability is exercising it?' If you do not wish to run the training session yourself, contact your Synod Training and Development Officer.

Give all church members a copy of the URC statement – page 5. But note that it is important to ensure that the discussion at the training session includes the whole range of possible discrimination and does not spend most of the time discussing sexuality.

Running a Training Session

Discussions about the kind of minister that a church might seek in principle are best conducted at a Church Meeting so that as many people as possible are present and no-one is excluded.

It is natural for people to want the sort of minister who they could imagine fitting in well with their social groupings, but the Pastorate Profile should give indications of the type of leadership that is sought; the draft Minister's Role Description will do this in some detail. Focussing upon leadership gifts and tasks will promote objectivity and put into a proper context thoughts about the sort of person the church hopes for.

Similar objectivity can then be applied to a discussion of hypothetical candidates using sample cases. These help people to move away from loose generalities, to think positively about a variety of possible ministers, and therefore to be more open to the leading of the Spirit.

Make sure you have set enough time for the training session – at least 2 hours. Don't try to add it on after the business of a church meeting.

Training Session

Opening Worship

Use the Introduction and the Statement of intent (para's 1 & 2) from the Equal Opportunities Policy to create opening worship which sets the scene for the session.

Exercise 1 – Thinking about our church

The Equality Opportunity and Diversity statement says that the URC will endeavour to:

Build inclusive communities where all will be treated with dignity and respect and have equality of opportunity to contribute their gifts to the common life;

Who are the “all” that are welcome?

Do this as a whole group and put up the answers on a flip chart so that you can refer back to them throughout.

What does it mean to be or to build an inclusive community? – depending on the size of the group do this all together or in groups.

Exercise 2 – Thinking about ourselves

Get people into groups to discuss the following

“What are the experiences of discrimination that you know of (personal or wider) from employment/community/church?”

Exercise 3 – Thinking about our Ministers

In groups discuss the following range of ministers. Get each group to begin with illustration 1. You may find that people do not feel they need to do anything to enable the ministry of 1, but that minister also needs to be enabled. Then move each group to a different illustration. Allow 30 mins for this exercise and ensure that all the illustrations are considered by at least one group.

What are the advantages and disadvantages for calling each of these ministers? What can the church do to enable their ministry?

1. A skilled, experienced and able white man of 35 with three small children and a wife who is committed and active in the church.
2. A skilled, experienced and able white woman of 35 with three small children whose husband is not a Christian nor engaged in the church in any way.
3. A bright, lively and energetic single black woman of 28.
4. A wise and caring white man of 61 who had a heart attack followed by a bypass operation four years ago.
5. An experienced and caring white woman who has twice in the past needed time off work for depression.

6. A black Caribbean man of 35 with one successful ministry behind him; with a wife and two children aged 6 and 8.
7. A white woman with walking difficulties – cannot do stairs, needs accessible toilet facilities, but drives and is very able.

A white man with visual difficulties – cannot drive, needs large print to read. He has a warm and caring personality.

8. A married man of Indian origin aged 58, with nine years of good ministry behind him.
9. A lesbian woman who has been together with her partner for 20 years and is now in a civil partnership. Has been in ministry for 30 years and is much loved by her present congregation.
10. A gay man who has been together with his partner for 20 years and is now in a civil partnership. Has been in ministry for 30 years (aged 59) and is much loved by his present congregation.
11. A recently divorced man of 60 who has been out of ministry for the last two years and is looking to be in a different area of the country.
12. A minister for whom English is a second language. e.g. someone coming to the UK from Korea, with good ministerial experience, good English skills but an accent which is not always easy to understand.

(This list is not exhaustive so feel free to add to it.)

Get the groups to come back together and share their findings.

Exercise 4 – Ending Positively

Look at the Policy Statement and ask the whole group.

What positive actions can we take to reinforce this policy? Come back to the flip chart from exercise 1.

Closing Prayers

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Equal Opportunities Policy

Introduction

The United Reformed Church believes that all people are created in God's image and are loved by God. In his ministry Jesus showed God's love by his openness to all people, including those who were marginalised in his day.

Statement of intent

The United Reformed Church affirms its commitment to show the same openness to all people in today's world. It intends in spirit and in deed to promote equality of opportunity and diversity in all spheres of its activity and is committed to behaving as an equal opportunity organisation. It acknowledges that people are called to be diverse and lively, inclusive and flexible through the sharing of the gospel.

Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy Statement

Exclusion and discrimination can occur on many grounds including those recognised in law, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, colour, ethnic or national origin, age, marital status and disability. The United Reformed Church seeks to eradicate less favourable treatment in these areas by endeavouring to:

- Build inclusive communities where all will be treated with dignity and respect and have equality of opportunity to contribute their gifts to the common life;
- Identify and remove barriers to participation in employment, training, promotion, leadership and representation on church committees and in the attitudes and actions of every congregation;
- Take positive action to counter attitudes and practices contrary to this statement of intent;
- Define within the law when being of a particular religion or belief is or is not a requirement for any post within the church.
- Develop detailed policies to give effect to these requirements; and monitor and report on progress in fulfilling these requirements.

This policy is the overarching equality and diversity direction of the United Reformed Church and should be read in conjunction with The United Reformed Church's declaration that it is a multicultural church and its equality policies on employment, church activities, membership, committees and councils.

Adopted by Mission Council 2006 and reported to General Assembly 2008