

Paper H1

Ministries committee

Further thinking on call

United Church 2017
Church 2017
Reformed Church 2017
Church 2017



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Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle moderator@urceastern.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Mission Council supports the suggestion of a wider calling group and concurrence to specific spheres of responsibility as normal practice, noting that in some cases ministerial responsibilities will be reviewed and may be varied by mutual agreement and so with a fresh concurrence, while in others the same responsibilities will be held for the duration of the ministry. Mission Council instructs the Ministries Committee to consult widely, and to prepare proposals with regard to the required changes to the Basis of Union and to the Structure. Mission Council instructs Ministries Committee to do further work on the practicalities of a change in the locus of call and concurrence, in particular with reference to manse provision and the vacancy candidating process.

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To continue the thinking on call and concurrence emerging from the October 2016 Mission Council, recognising that it is both helpful and important to receive contributions to the discussion from Mission Council as we move to consider possible changes.
Main points	This paper explores questions of call and concurrence and seeks to clearly identify issues that need to be addressed. It recognises the need for further work.
Previous documents	Paper H2 Mission Council October 2016
Consultation with...	

Summary of Impact

Financial	No impact on the budget
External	No direct immediate impact

Thinking Further About Call

1. At its October 2016 meeting Mission Council passed by consensus a resolution stating:
Mission Council asks the Ministries Committee to bring proposals for a reworked practice of call with the aim of:
Ministers being called to service by synods;
Synods and local churches together discerning opportunities for the best use of ministers reflecting the aspirations of God's people and the needs of the local congregations;
Synods having the flexibility to move ministers as appropriate in response to the discernment of new opportunities;
Synods engaging local congregations in a process of learning, support and encouragement to enable widespread understanding and acceptance of this understanding and working out of call.
2. This paper and its accompanying resolutions seek to take thinking on this matter forward, though recognising that significant work remains to be done.
3. In terms of ministry and discipleship, a call is something that God initiates. We often ask questions such as, 'What is God calling you to?' Responding to call is of major importance and should not be minimised. However, the question of a response should not be allowed to block or blur the role of God as the one who initiates a call.
4. God's calling is not restricted to those whom we tend to describe as ministers. All are called, and so the range of roles that the church requires are filled. Together we are all the Body of Christ, each a part. We need to see questions about specific calls and ways of calling in the light of the broader context of the range of tasks in which Jesus' disciples get involved.
5. The Bible portrays a range of ways in which a call may be experienced. For example, as for Samuel, it may come through a dream (1 Samuel 3:3-4), as for David, it may come through a selection process (1 Samuel 16:12), as for Isaiah, it may come through a dramatic religious experience (Isaiah 6:8), as for Simon and Andrew, it may come through a personal challenge (Mark 1:16-18), as for Matthias, it may come through a process of nomination and casting lots (Acts 1:23-26), and, as for Saul, it may come through an overwhelmingly dramatic experience (Acts 9:3-6).
6. Looking for further Biblical indicators as to the process of call and appointment, especially within the early church, would suggest that the first church leaders, the apostles and their successors, such as Timothy and Titus, were far more concerned about the qualifications and giftings of candidates than they were with establishing appointment procedures. Mostly, the leaders seem to have taken the prime role in selecting candidates and the churches testified as to the character of candidates. The important thing is that the whole church was involved. Any changes to our processes need to retain that breadth of involvement.
7. As Mission Council has previously noted: "URC practice with respect to the call to ministry fits this pattern. There are normally four partners in any call, these being God, the individual being called, and two conciliar confirmations. Most often the individual is called by the Church Meeting (or Meetings) and that is confirmed by the

concurrence of the Synod (often delegated to a pastoral, or equivalent, committee.) However, there are several variations which are recognised as entirely appropriate and valid. Any who occupy those Assembly posts that must be held by a minister – Synod Moderators, Secretary for Ministries, General Secretary – are ‘called’ via an appointing group and an Assembly resolution (sometimes delegated). Appointments in some Special Category Ministry (SCM) posts, chaplaincies etc are made by an appointment group and this is then concurred by synod. Non-stipendiary (NSM) post-holders are appointed by the synod though, in practice, in those situations where an NSM is being appointed to a pastorate the synod will often encourage the local congregation to go through a calling process. That effectively amounts to the synod issuing the call and seeking concurrence from the local Church Meeting – though that language will not normally be used.”¹

8. That “normal” practice accords with the Structure of the United Reformed Church which states that function (vii) of the Church Meeting is “to call a Minister or Church Related Community Worker (CRCW) with the concurrence of the Synod(s)” and that function (vii) of the Synod is “to give (or, where deep pastoral concern for the church requires it, to withhold) concurrence in calls to Ministers or Church Related Community Workers.”
9. However, as already noted, there is a variety of practice. Presumably those appointed in ways at some variance from the detailed instruction of the Structure are seen as being properly appointed and as exercising a valid ministry?
10. Having good ways of appointing ministers and of confirming those appointments is vital. Part of maintaining good practice demands some consideration as to whether current methods continue to be relevant and working well.
11. The idea that, in the past, most pastorates were single congregations is simply not so. However, pastorates are becoming more complex and a more flexible approach may be needed to take the denomination towards, and past, the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century. Ministers are often called to a group of churches, and it is becoming increasingly common for that to be a shared (team) ministry with one or more colleagues. It is common, and part of terms of settlement, that ministers may be asked to vary their responsibility during the tenure of a particular post. Most often, though not always, this entails taking an additional congregation. It is increasingly rare, though not unknown, to be the minister of a single congregation. Different forms of lay ministry are also increasing and so there is a jigsaw to be pieced together of growing complexity.
12. We should then consider whether amending our practice of call and concurrence would offer a better reflection of reality and allow greater scope for varying ministerial responsibilities in answer to the changing needs of congregations and communities and the challenges provided by variance in the provision and availability of ministers. Any change must also aim to enable ministers to minister more effectively, bringing their gifts in the best way to the challenges of the twenty-first century church.
13. As one specific example, it is awkward when, as now happens frequently, we “persuade” ministers that they may be “called” to an additional congregation, and then ask that congregation to offer a “call”, always saying that they can decline, but sometimes saying, and sometimes failing to say, that any alternative suggestion is unlikely to be forthcoming.

¹ Paragraph 8 of Paper H2, Mission Council October 2016.

14. The Statement of the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church affirms “our right and readiness, if the need arises, to change the Basis of Union.”
15. As practice is already frequently at variance with the statements contained within the structure as to call and concurrence, we could simply continue along the line of actual variance and determine that no change was needed or helpful. However, it would seem desirable for what we actually do to be in line with our structure.
16. We would therefore propose that each synod (or an intermediate body or committee to which the synod chooses to delegate this) is the calling group for ministers to particular areas and that ministers are appointed to specific congregations/pieces of work for agreed periods, concurrence being given by the relevant congregations or other relevant bodies. Where relevant, every effort should be made to include representation from the churches, or other organisations, likely to be served amongst the persons serving on a call group. When a ministry is reviewed, it may be extended, varied or amended. We further propose that concurrence, rather than being an important procedural confirmation, becomes a specific affirmation of call to a particular role, in some cases for a particular period.
17. The normal process established by paragraph 16 does not prevent a synod from using a pastorate, which may on occasion be a single congregation, as a calling group. However, it is necessary for two councils, whether by delegation (eg to a Synod Pastoral Committee) or by acting in a parallel fashion (eg. two or more Church Meetings, meeting together or separately), to be participants in any call, together with the minister concerned and the recognising and discerning of God’s call, whether it is an initial call or at a point of review. It also does not prevent an actual time limit being the duration of the ministry.
18. Good calls happen in a range of ways, and it is important to continue to recognise that. This suggested change develops what is already happening in a number of places. As an example we cite some stories from Eastern Synod. For some years, in the Norwich area the seven (now six) churches have joined to call ministers to the whole group and it is only after the call process (and formerly after the start of the ministry) that the minister’s exact responsibilities have been defined. In West Suffolk a group of nine churches formed an Area Partnership. One was an LEP, and the other eight shared two ministers, each taking responsibility for four congregations. When one of the ministers retired, the remaining minister changed responsibilities so that she remained with one of her former congregations, but changed her other three to assume responsibility for three that had previously been in the other part of the pastorate. Later, the new ‘other’ minister changed responsibilities ‘swapping’ one church for another, which involved a reorganisation that crossed two separate ‘then’ Area Partnership boundaries. These are the realities of being God’s URC today that we seek to address.

