

Paper X2

West Midlands Synod
Stipendiary Ministry Numbers

United Church 2017
Reformed Church 2017
Church 2017

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Basic Information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Steve Faber moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk
Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Mission Council asks the finance and ministries committees to examine the implications of releasing sufficient money from reserves in order to maintain stipendiary ministry at the 2017 levels for the next five years and the next ten years in order to promote growth, and to bring proposals to the November 2017 meeting of Mission Council

Summary of Content

Subject and aim(s)	To ask the relevant Assembly committees to carry out work on the implications of drawing down monies from Reserves in order to maintain stipendiary ministry levels for a limited period, and bring specific proposals to the next Mission Council meeting.
Main points	We will need skilled leadership to implement and embed the cultural change under "Walking the Way". We recognize the current policy is to track stipendiary ministry numbers with M&M Fund income. Assuming that there will not be a significant increase in giving to M&M, we ask that serious consideration be given to releasing monies held on reserves to enable the current level of stipendiary ministers to be deployed in our churches.
Previous relevant documents	Various reports to General Assembly – most recently "Walking the Way" (2016) and ministries committee report on stipendiary minister numbers and deployment (2016)
Consultation has taken place with...	General Secretary.

Summary of Impact

Financial	None at this stage, then to be determined by ministries and finance committees: potentially significant reduction in reserves
External (e.g. ecumenical)	No direct immediate impact

Stipendiary Ministry Numbers

1. At the Spring 2017 meeting of the West Midlands Synod, we received a resolution from Baxter URC, Kidderminster asking that denominational reserves be released in order to maintain the Stipendiary Ministry at 2017 levels for a period of five years.
2. After discussion under Consensus Decision Making procedures, the following resolution was passed recognizing disagreement (two people remained blue card-holders, so full consensus was not reached, but both were content that they had been properly heard without the need to register dissent.)

“The West Midlands Synod requests Mission Council to ask the finance and ministries committees to examine the implications of releasing sufficient money from reserves in order to maintain Stipendiary Ministry at the 2017 levels for the next five years and the next ten years in order to promote growth, and to bring proposals to the November 2017 meeting of Mission Council.”

3. The Synod recognizes and supports the current policy of tracking the number of stipendiary ministers with the giving to the Ministry & Mission Fund. It is good stewardship that we should only commit to paying stipends that we can afford.
4. However, it has been well said that, ‘there is no point in “saving for a rainy day” when it is pouring outside.’ The denomination continues to lose members at an alarming rate, with a consequent drop in giving to the M&M Fund, and therefore the number of ministers that we can afford.
5. We believe that Walking the Way, living the life of Jesus today, is an opportunity to turn around the denomination and recapture the essence of what the Church of Jesus Christ should always have been – full of growing disciples who are in turn making new disciples. Sadly, we believe that the URC needs a significant cultural change to embed this renewed theology of church, and it will need skilled leadership to enable this. At such a time as this, it would be negligent to focus on managing decline. Rather, it is time to invest in trying faithfully to turn the Church around.
6. On the current projections for deployment, all Synods are facing incredibly difficult choices about how and where to commit ministers. In some areas, the choices are so hard as to be impossible. Within the West Midlands we face a single stipendiary serving a whole county (Herefordshire), no stipendiary ministry at all in the Forest of Dean, and in other areas we simply have not been able to identify workable solutions that will enable us to meet the targets set before us. These struggles are by no means a feature of this synod alone.
7. Walking the Way seeks to equip the saints to do the work of mission. Stipendiary ministers will be key in this early phase, although of course not the only resource. Our non-stipendiaries, local lay leaders, Elders and others will do their part and do it well, and increasingly so. But the time that our stipendiaries are free to give will be of particular importance.
8. We will need our stipendiaries to build up capacity for local leadership. This is a repeated challenge that has been put before the denomination for over two decades. We have so far failed to respond to that challenge. We are all but out of time. As Walking the Way produces growing disciples, we will need to work hard and fast to

develop our lay leaders. As General Assembly has previously affirmed, we believe that each local church deserves dedicated leadership. In the long term we accept that this cannot come from stipendiaries. But whilst we have them, we must focus on using them well to develop the next phase of leadership.

9. Quite separately from the number of ministers that we can afford to pay through M&M, we are aware that the number of retirements, along with others coming out of stipendiary ministry, exceed the number answering vocations and being formed for this form of service. We anticipate that both Certificates of Eligibility and Certificates of Limited Service will be needed to overcome the “natural” decline in the number of available ministers. We invite ministries to guide us as to the best way in which to maintain numbers available for deployment in our local churches, and we ask those charged with managing the Church’s finances to advise what impact it will have both on reserves and on future revenue if investment income is reduced as a result of decreased capital held in reserves.
10. We are clear that simply bringing in Ministers from other denominations and cultures to serve URC congregations isn’t a simple solution. We need any ministers brought into the URC to be those who can “hit the ground running.” They will need to be high-calibre individuals, ready to lead God’s people into the new reality of our greatly reduced circumstances. They need to be encouragers, enablers, and change agents. They need to help us regain confidence in the Gospel and in our God-given talents. We are not asking for a supply of private chaplains to our congregations, who will merely help them serve their time until the last funeral is taken. This could offer an opportunity for the URC to continue to serve God and continue to work towards the full vision of God’s kingdom on earth, and do so in a new and re-energised way.
11. We ask that this investigation is carried out urgently and that the results, along with specific proposals, are brought to the next meeting of Mission Council. This is work that cannot wait.