

# Paper X1

West Midlands Synod  
Non-stipendiary ministry  
age limit

Church 2014  
**United**  
Church **Reformed**  
**Church** Church 2014

# Paper X1



## West Midlands Synod: Non-stipendiary ministry age limit

### Basic Information

<b>Contact name and email address</b>	Roy Lowes <a href="mailto:moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk">moderator@urcwestmidlands.org.uk</a>
<b>Action required</b>	
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Recognising that people are working longer in many occupations and that UK legislation has changed in recent years to enable people to work without fear of age discrimination, Mission Council acting on behalf of the General Assembly resolves to remove the age related entry qualifications with regard to non-stipendiary ministry.</b>
<b>Alternative options to consider, if any</b>	

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	
<b>Main points</b>	
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	General Assembly 1997 (resolution 34) set an age limit of 55 for candidates applying for non-stipendiary ministry.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	None

### Summary of Impact

<b>Financial</b>	Additional candidates for non-stipendiary ministry would hopefully come forward for training.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	None

# Non-stipendiary ministry age limit

1. The West Midlands Synod has come to the view that the time has come to remove the age limits on church members candidating to be non-stipendiary ministers (NSM).

2. In establishing an age limit for candidates for ministry, the United Reformed Church wanted to ensure that the Church received an appropriate return in length of service for its investment in education and learning (and stipend for stipendiary ministers). The synod believes that factors now are such that for non-stipendiary ministers this age restraint should be lifted. These factors include:

2.1 The denomination does not pay a stipend to these ministers and invests a smaller amount in their education for ministry phase 1 learning period (pre-ordination) than for people preparing full-time for stipendiary service. The amount estimated is, we understand, about £10,000 for four years' part-time training, including academic fees and re-imbursment of expenses.

2.2 Resolution 28, brought to Assembly 2004, emphasised that if candidates had prior experience and qualifications, this might shorten their training. Of course, whenever that is the case and learning programmes are foreshortened, the financial investment of the Church is less than the estimate above.

2.3 Whilst ministers are officer holders and even stipendiary ministers are therefore not employees, we feel we should be sensitive to those aspects of law and context in our society which might suggest we ourselves are contravening issues of justice and equal opportunities which we purport to hold dear. We think our current rules could be viewed as age discriminatory and that we would need very good reasons to continue operating them.

2.4 In the main people are living longer. As Tony Benn said in a letter to his grandchildren: 'The concept of old age has changed dramatically since even my parents' generation. The 60-year-old pensioner is the new middle aged...' so it is absurd '...to think of retirement now at 60 or 65 as a process of winding down until the curtain falls shortly thereafter'. A small number of ministers in West Midlands are now ministering at age 70 and beyond – one at 75. We suspect that this is not just the West Midlands' air but part of a wider trend.

2.5 We do recognise that ordination means setting someone aside for future ministry, but we feel that the potential for this should be considered on a case-by-case basis and not by use of a universal age limit. The risk of someone serving a short period of time after the relatively minor investment the Church makes in training is small.

2.6 Further we believe that the denomination is in sore need of people to offer for ministry, and especially for NSM, a calling which has seen a reduction in those coming forward. This potentially vital ministry, local in context, remains a valuable asset to the denomination and restricting its flow for reasons of age and finance is no longer justified.

2.7 If we are seeing reduced numbers of candidates for NSM ministry, one factor might be that the availability of people taking early retirement and thus being available for NSM in their mid-50s is reducing. An article in *The Guardian* in January indicated: 'The days of early retirement seem to be over, if a survey by Aviva is to be believed. It claims 55% of 55

to 64-year-olds were earning a wage in December 2012 – up from 41% in February 2010.’  
( <http://www.theguardian.com/money/blog/2013/jan/04/early-retirement-over> )  
Therefore we need to make it possible for people to serve as ministers of Word and sacraments closer to their potential retirement ages.

3. The synod has been provoked to raise this point and make this plea by the case of an elder in the synod who:
  - has undertaken Training for Learning and Serving to degree level at their own expense
  - has been recognised as an Assembly-accredited lay preacher
  - has become a local leader in their own church
  - has offered much appreciated ministry in another church in the synod
  - has been given, from time-to-time authorisation by the synod to preside at the sacraments at the church where they are a local leader
  - is effectively offering an appreciated ministry of Word and sacrament – yet at 61 has been for some years frustrated in having their desire to have a call to ministry of Word and sacrament tested by the church purely on grounds of age.
4. The synod thus believes that there are good reasons to remove the non-stipendiary age restriction.