

The clergy are mostly expected to follow this pattern. If there is something the minister can do, either because of a previous secular incarnation or because of particular in-service training at some stage, this skill or art is expected to be volunteered.

There has been a deliberate effort in some quarters over a decade or more to change the culture of volunteer expertise. The church is supposed to know the full cost of its expectations and needs, and to budget for this, an act that is impossible if people do not charge (even though their 'pay' back in via the weekly offering). Where this is taken seriously, the decision of when the volunteer and when to charge is very delicate. On balance, the expectation will be strongest that people who can, will and will not expect to be paid.

Volunteering is not part other people's culture. People wish to be approached, to be asked to take up a task or responsibility. This need to be recognised by ministers with a multi-cultural church.

These comments have been drawn from observation and from reports by 'incoming' ministers. This document is not a complete survey, and additional matter would be welcomed from any qualified source.



Culture Shock



When clergy come from other countries and other denominations to serve with the URC in London...



In Thames North and Southern Synods of the United Reformed Church

Culture Shock

When clergy come from other countries and other denominations to serve with the URC in London, they ought to be conscious of a culture shock. If they are not, they may make some serious errors and suffer unnecessary pain (while inflicting unseen torture).

Language/Communication

Even if your own home language is English, do not assume that you understand the British, or that they understand you. Some terminology is obviously different: the Australian beer vocabulary and the American car vocabulary are so famously different as to be unfunny clichés. But there is other usage which have to be monitored when words are held in common, but the meanings are not.

In addition, there are still English dialect words which have not been eradicated by the radio/TV narrowing of approved speech. When regional accents and Caribbean patois (common in London) are added to the dialect, confusion may reign.

Perhaps the greatest source of misapprehension has nothing to do with vocabulary, dialect or accent. Many of the British – especially many of the English – communicate by allusion and oblique reference. For these, a straightforward assertion is felt to be somehow indecent, a solecism to be avoided at all costs (do not think that this only applies to ‘delicate’ subjects – it applies to all communication). ‘A nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse’, and the listener is supposed to pick up the clues.

Many other British are direct and blunt to the point of rudeness, and nothing in the preceding paragraph applies to these.

Church Expectations

In theory, the job of a called minister is spelled out in the terms of service, approved by the District Council in consultation with the Elders and Interim Moderator. Occasionally these documents are honest and adequate. The real negotiation begins after the induction, and it is advisable to make sure that areas of responsibility and initiative are agreed during the honeymoon period.

People who attend church services for many times assume that they are members of the church. All new members should be informed about the tradition of the church in terms of membership.

Churches (and the various conciliar levels of the URC are not immune from this) tend to expect that normal cash giving will be supplemented by volunteer labour. If a room has to be painted, or an electric point re-wired, or an out-dated piece of equipment replaced, the first consideration will be whether someone knows anyone in a position to see to it. It may be suggested that a bit of something in recognition of the work be handed over if the helper is an outsider. Church members are normally expected to give professional skills without a reward.