



The
United
Reformed
Church

They've asked me to be an

Interim Moderator

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Introduction

This booklet has been written for those who have been asked to become an Interim Moderator (IM) for the first time. It seeks to give an overview of the role, core responsibilities and necessary skills and abilities of post holders. Be aware that the processes and practices do vary from Synod to Synod so, if you do accept the invitation to become an IM ensure that you have all the relevant information from your Synod office. New IMs will receive training so do ask the Synod training officer about this.

Who has asked you?

In most cases, you will have been approached by the convenor of the Synod pastoral group, one of the pastoral consultants, or the Synod Moderator. If you say 'yes', the local church will be asked if they are happy that you be appointed as their IM – the local church has a right to decline an IM nomination, or to make their own suggestion.

Why me?

Those responsible for arranging the appointment of Interim Moderators will have looked at the suitability of the people available to take on the task. As you read through this booklet, especially if you start to find the requirements of the role onerous, do remember that you have been asked because you are considered to have the necessary skills and experience to fulfil the role well.

Should I consult anyone before making a decision?

If you are a minister, it is both courteous and sensible for you to consult your Elders' meeting in order to seek agreement and support. If you are a lay person you may find that a discussion with your minister and/or the Synod Moderator will be helpful. Lay people are likely to find that a discussion with their minister and/or the Synod Moderator will be helpful.

What do Interim Moderators do?

Interim Moderators have just one core function – to steer the pastorate through a ministerial vacancy – or, as one IM described it, ‘to give momentum to the vacancy process’. At its most straightforward this involves overseeing the vacancy process, chairing the meetings of the ‘call group’ and facilitating the introduction of a candidate to its conclusion whether or not to issue a call.

Some IMs choose to do more, for example, attending all Church meetings, and offering pastoral care in some situations, generally the more challenging/critical ones. Leading worship is not a core function of Interim Moderators although many do lead worship, including communion services (if a Minister of Word and Sacraments or given permission to do so by the Synod). If you feel leading worship is something you want to offer it will be up to you and the vacant pastorate to agree on how often you do so. Please be clear that taking on additional duties is always the choice of each IM, and not an obligation.

The list of duties below is fairly extensive. Outside of those things that are essential to the call process how much of it is done by the IM is for them and the vacant pastorate to negotiate.

Essential

- Advising the church at each stage of the vacancy process
- Guiding the church through the preparation required before calling a minister
- Working with the call group on the preparation of the pastorate profile and Terms of Settlement
- Chairing those Elders’ and Church meetings specifically involving the calling of a minister
- Being the link person between the Synod, Synod Moderator, and any ministerial candidates
- Ensuring the candidate’s visits run smoothly
- Organising the induction/ordination introduction of the minister.

Negotiable

- Interim Moderators are not required to chair all of the Elders’ meetings and Church meetings in a vacancy. How many you chair will be up to

you and the pastorate to agree. You may wish to make yourself available to any of these Church/Elders' meetings you are not chairing to respond to any queries about the vacancy process

- Presiding at the ordination and induction of Elders
- Preaching and leading worship.

The vacancy process

Below is an outline of the core components of the process – it may vary slightly from Synod to Synod but you will get detailed training from the Synod as to the exact process in your Synod.

- 1. Meet with the 'call group'** and talk them through the pastorate profile process. A ministerial vacancy and the preparation of the pastorate profile provide an excellent opportunity for churches to reflect on and review their activities, vision and purpose. These initial meetings with the call group could involve encouraging them to think through the pastorate's vision and purpose – short courses such as 'Mission Shaped Introduction' or 'Healthy Church' are often useful here.

Be aware that this opportunity to review the life of the church life may result in the IM helping the church manage change as roles and relationships are reconfigured and the congregation has to work out how to respond to new possibilities.

- 2. Oversee the preparation and writing of the pastorate profile.** While the pastorate profile is not the sole responsibility of the IM, the IM does need to ensure that it's fit for purpose – one IM described their role here as 'advising and tweaking'.

The profile should:

- Provide an accurate and full picture of the life of the church to a prospective minister
- Reflect the views of a wide variety of people involved in the life of the church – members and adherents as well as leaders and representatives of other organisations – not only the call group and Elders.
- Be readable, comprehensive and well presented

- Include information on the church's vision and suggestions on its future life and work; this will help prospective ministers determine whether his/her gifts, experience and passions are suitable matches for the pastorate's vision.
- 3. Oversee the preparation of the Terms of Settlement.** The Terms of Settlement are not part of the pastorate profile but need to be prepared and ready to include in the information that's sent to prospective ministers. Draft Terms of Settlement are often included in pastorate profile. The Synod Office will provide a template to work with, and once completed the Synod will check and sign-off on them. The Terms of Settlement will also be in accord with the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration (www.urch.org.uk/the-plan-for-partnership). Ensuring the Manse is up to the required standard, including agreeing and organising any necessary work to the property, is also part of the Terms of Settlement. The Synod will be able to advise on its Manse Policy.

Not all of the above will apply to a non-stipendiary minister, but nonetheless a contract will need to be drawn up and care should be taken to ensure all the relevant areas are covered.

4. Calling a ministerial candidate

Please note: Churches, and in turn the members of the call group, must be aware that, under the policies of the URC, they are only able to consider one candidate at a time. The Moderators' meeting may allow a pastorate to consider two, or even three, profiles simultaneously, but they are only permitted to progress the call process with one candidate at a time.

- Receiving the profile: when the Synod Moderator has a name – or names – to suggest to the pastorate, you will be sent the profile(s) via the Synod office and will need to help the call group work through it/them and compare it/them with the pastorate profile. If there seems to be enough commonality, and the call group is interested in meeting a particular candidate, then both that candidate and the Synod Moderator need to be told as soon as possible. If the introduction halts at this stage, then the IM needs to inform both the candidate and the Synod Moderator giving reasons why the introduction is not being taken further.
- Organising the candidate's visit: The IM should agree a date for a meeting between the candidate and the call group; in most cases this will be

combined with giving the candidate an opportunity to look around the area, have a tour of the church(es) premises and view the manse. The arrangements for this visit are not the sole responsibility of the IM but you do need to meet and greet the candidate and ensure that the church is offering hospitality and looking after the candidate and perhaps their family.

- Following the meeting with the candidate, the call group must decide whether or not to extend an invitation to 'preach with a view'. The IM must then communicate the decision to the candidate and the Synod Moderator. If the call group decides not to extend this invitation, or the candidate decides not to proceed with the call, then the vacancy will return to the Moderators' meeting.
- If, after the preach with a view weekend, the Church meeting decides not to issue a call to the candidate, it is the IM's responsibility to let the candidate know that the pastorate is not proceeding with the call. When a candidate is not called then the vacancy will return to the Moderators' meeting and the process will be repeated when another candidate's profile is received.
- If the Church meeting decides to issue a call, the final part of the IM's role is to ensure, on behalf of the Synod, that all the necessary arrangements are made for the Ordination/Induction service – this will usually involve taking an active part in the service and introducing the candidate to the congregation. The Synod office will provide guidelines on preparing an induction service when needed, and the draft service will then need to be submitted to the Synod Moderator for approval.

A note for multi-church pastorates: there is generally one IM per pastorate, but this can vary locally and some multi-church pastorates do appoint one IM per church. Whether you are working with other IMs or not, working as IM in a multi-church pastorate will require you to be in frequent and close contact with the other church(es) in the pastorate throughout the vacancy process.

How long will I be expected to be Interim Moderator?

The average vacancy lasts for between 18 months and two years and you should be prepared to serve for the length of the vacancy. It is hoped that all prospective IMs will be prepared to serve until a new minister is inducted although, if your circumstances change during this time, please speak with

your Synod Moderator. Although the vacancy can span two years, the actual hours involved can be surprisingly small. One IM estimated that, across the two years of his time as IM, he spent around 40-60 hours on core IM business. There are obviously critical periods of time where there is much to do, but week-by-week, the time commitment should not be onerous.

How can I best help the church during the vacancy?

1. By understanding the effect that losing a minister can have on a church. The loss of a much-loved minister may leave a church feeling bereaved. On the other hand, there are times when a minister leaves who has not lived up to a church's expectations and when they leave the church may feel relieved and/or angry. In both situations the IM will need resources of sympathy, patience and gentleness to help the congregation through the healing process.
2. By helping maintain church life. Whether the church has been dependent on the minister for leadership or not, the elders and members need to be encouraged to recognise that responsibility for worship, pastoral care and outreach now rests with them. As Interim Moderator you must resist any attempts to pass these responsibilities to you! This may require you to challenge unwise practices and seek to guide the church's thinking.
3. By helping the church to reflect on its future. A vacancy provides an ideal time for a church to reflect on its life and plan for the future. Interim Moderators are in an ideal position to help the church look objectively at its life and prepare a realistic and visionary profile.

The last word ...

The hope is that the contents of this booklet have both enlightened and encouraged you about the role and function of the IM; but if you have any further questions the best place to seek answers is the Synod office.

Whether you think the role is for you, or not, if, having read this, you can think of others (whether in your Synod or another) who have the attributes needed to fulfil the IM role do pass their name on. The words of one IM come to mind: 'I came to this role with much trepidation ... asking myself: "why me? This is not what I do!" But if I was asked to do it again, I'd do it ... I found it such an enriching experience.'

This is one in a series of booklets designed to give information to those who have been asked to consider taking on a role in the United Reformed Church.

The booklets can be read and downloaded at www.urc.org.uk/ask



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