

Support in Ministry

Ministry in today's world can seem to be a lonely experience. Not only are ministers likely to have fewer colleagues than might be the case in other forms of work and may have been true in ministry even 10 years ago, but the changing nature of ministry means there is less clarity regarding the expectations and realities of a minister's role.

Newly ordained ministers are provided with a pastoral advisor during their period of Education for Ministry Phase 2 (EM2) and this may continue informally when a minister enters Education for Ministry Phase 3 (EM3).

The value of an ongoing personal supportive relationship in which issues to do with their ministry, usually on a one to one basis, in complete confidence, has been recognised by many ministers. This document is intended to draw attention to where opportunities exist for ministers to find support in ministry, particularly people or places that can help ministers to reflect healthily on their current ministry and their vocation. It is not a definitive list nor is any one model emphasised over another, nor does the involvement in one model preclude accessing another.

Ministerial Accompanied Self-appraisal

All ministers are encouraged to regularly reflect on their ministry. To this end the United Reformed Church developed a scheme of accompanied self-appraisal, the basis of which is the 'Taking Stock' booklet. The responsibility for delivering the scheme belongs to the synod and some synods have developed the materials or produced their own for local use.

The purpose of the self-appraisal scheme is to reflect helpfully within pastoral ministry which has few obvious successes and failures. Ministry is about planting seeds, often in secret, without knowing what the nature or timing of the harvest is to be. That is often not in our hands. The goal of this scheme is to find a way of echoing the Lord's praise for all that is good in ministry, and to help people address whatever can be improved.

Continuing Ministerial Development

Every minister is entitled to take up to two week's study leave per year for formal and informal learning and refreshment opportunities. This can include retreats and other means of spiritual nourishment, as well as other forms of study. After each every ten years of service a three months sabbatical can be taken.

Ministers' Meetings

It is not unusual for United Reformed Church ministers in a particular locality to gather on a regular basis for fellowship and sometimes deal with matters of business. Ecumenical gatherings of ministers in towns and cities are common and can be places where mutual support for those in leadership positions can be experienced, whilst recognising that churches are structured differently and responsibilities vary.

Support Groups

Structured Support groups are particularly appropriate for those in roles other than traditional local pastorates; indeed Church Related Community Workers (CRCW) and those appointed to Special Category Ministry posts (SCM) are likely to have a formal support group established at the time of their appointment. However a support group may be an appropriate arrangement in other roles, including those in denominational roles and in chaplaincy.

Usually the minister concerned takes the initiative and brings together a group of perhaps four or five people to whom they feel close and whom they trust to help them reflect confidentially on the work they are undertaking. The meetings would probably be four to six times a year, and would offer encouragement and challenge, advice and vision-seeking.

Peer Supervision

“Supervision” is common in many professions – meaning in this context not line management, but the provision of a sounding board, someone with whom issues in work can be discussed in confidence and commonly with anonymity as to the actual people involved. It enables a practitioner to check out, for example, whether they have seen all the angles, whether they have remained objective and how something has affected them personally.

Peer supervision involves two ministers, who have acquired basic supervision skills, covenanting to meet together every six to eight weeks for an agreed time. Each in turn presents work and acts as a supervisor to his/her colleague.

Individual Supervision

A more formal arrangement than peer supervision, a supervisor regularly meets the supervisee and discusses their work. The supervisor will often be a trained counsellor and almost always a professional fee will be payable.

The Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators (APSE) www.pastoralsupervision.org.uk was launched in June 2009 to promote good practice in supervision in a wide range of ministry contexts. It aims to provide training for and accreditation of those who offer supervision. The Churches Ministerial Counselling Service (CMCS) has joined with the Association of Pastoral Supervisors and Educators to offer training for those already working as counselling supervisors to transfer their skills to offer supervision to ministers.

Reflective Practice Groups

These are groups led by a trained facilitator, who meet regularly over a period of two years, where the participants agree to a statement of commitments concerning attendance, confidentiality and active participation. This model is more common in Anglican dioceses but the model could be used in other denominations or ecumenical groups.

Spiritual Direction

A spiritual director (sometimes called “soul friend”) helps a person reflect on their walk with God, the director being a companion on the journey. As well as conversation on a regular basis, the Director will often suggest reading and spiritual exercises that are designed to help the recipient to deepen their relationship with God. Spiritual Directors can be found in Retreat Houses, Religious Orders, and may be listed in Synod resources.

Spiritual Communities and places

The **St Cuthbert’s Centre**, along with its warden, is a United Reformed Church presence found at the heart of the Holy Island village in Northumbria. The building has been redeveloped in a way that honours the heritage of the past, whilst providing versatile facilities to meet the needs of many different visitors. www.holyisland-stcuthbert.org

The **United Reformed Church Retreat Group** seeks to draw together and nurture people in the United Reformed Church who are interested in silent or contemplative prayer, retreats, quiet days and spiritual direction. It encourages people’s explorations both in Reformed and ecumenical contexts. www.urc-retreat-group.org.uk

The **Windermere Centre** is a Resource Centre for Learning (RCL) which exists to ‘resource the United Reformed Church through hospitality and theological adventure’. It offers a range of

courses providing challenging content alongside considered pastoral care, invigorating new ideas alongside space for reflection and retreat, and fun and fellowship alongside learning and sharing. It is also possible, subject to availability, to stay on a bed and breakfast basis, as an individual seeking a place of rest and refreshment. www.windermere.urc.org.uk

The **Society of Mary and Martha** was set up specifically to provide care and support for people in Christian ministry and/or their spouses at times of stress, crisis, burnout or breakdown. Their 12,000 mile service weeks for people in ministry seek to help with unwinding and rediscovering creative vision. www.sheldon.uk.com

The **Iona Community** is a dispersed Christian ecumenical community that counts United Reformed Church ministers amongst its members. The commitments of membership may not be what every minister is looking for but the resources they produce and the programme offered on the island and elsewhere are available to all. www.iona.org.uk

Churches Ministerial Counselling Service

The Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service (CMCS) is a network of professional counsellors operating in England, Scotland and Wales offering subsidised support to ministers and their households. It is sponsored by the United Reformed Church along with the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, the Salvation Army, the Diocese of Southwark and the Free Churches' Group (acting on behalf of other Free Church denominations). www.cmincs.net

For further information or help in accessing any of the opportunities above please contact your synod EM2/3 officer. In some synods this will be the Training and Development Officer but other synods may use different titles.