

Appendix 2

Equipping The Saints: Changing Ministry For The Challenge Of Mission A Report From The Future Patterns Of Ministries Working Party

CONTENTS

1. Summary: What's this all about?
 2. Challenging context
 3. Meeting the challenge: from disciples to apostles
 4. Meeting the challenge: the whole church working together
 5. Meeting the challenge: set apart ministries
 6. Meeting the challenge: further implications
 7. Conclusion, recommendations and resolution: What next?
- Appendix I Background: terms of reference, working party and previous work.
- Appendix II Feedback: responses to the interim report to Assembly 2002.
- Appendix III References: details of important reference documents.

1. SUMMARY: WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?

1.1 A fast changing society provides a challenging context (section 2) for the Church. In our interim report to the 2002 Assembly, we suggested that the Church's response would need to recapture a sense of the ministry of the whole people of God (section 4), and our post-bag has supported this view. One way of viewing this key concept is to think of making people more active members of the Church focused outwards into the world – from disciples to apostles (section 3). We challenge every local church to think afresh about its support of its members when they are dispersed in their daily living (sub-section 4.4).

1.2 Fortunately our heritage provides many riches to help us understand and implement ministry that is not restricted to the clergy. We believe that the ministry of the Elders (sub-section 5.3) is central in this and, indeed, that it is a precious gift the United Reformed Church has to offer its ecumenical partners. The Church needs to be more careful and focused in the way it appoints, develops and uses Elders. It also needs to be clearer about the role of Local Church Leaders within the Eldership (sub-section 5.4).

1.3 Ministers of the Word and Sacraments (sub-section 5.7) are a valuable and scarce resource that the Church must use more effectively. As Elders become more confident in their leadership of local churches, the Church can allow itself to think differently about the deployment of Ministers. Spreading Ministers ever more thinly cannot possibly be the best mission strategy. We believe that the assumption that every congregation should have a slice of its own Minister is unsustainable, but every congregation does need effective leadership. The Church needs to be much more imaginative in its development of flexible collaborative leadership patterns (sub-section 5.8).

1.4 If the Church is to develop more diverse leadership patterns then it needs more flexible arrangements for the training, funding and deployment of Ministers and other church leaders (sub-section 5.9).

1.5 More diverse leadership patterns also make it desirable and necessary that the Church should think again about presidency at the sacraments (sub-section 5.11).

1.6 In presenting this report we know that the changes it recommends cannot happen instantly, that some of them require further work, and that they do not address other major issues for the Church (section 6). But we believe that they would contribute to Changing Ministry for the Challenge of Mission.

2. CHALLENGING CONTEXT

2.1 Background and terms of reference

2.1.1 Assembly 2002 received an interim report from the working party on Future Patterns of Ministries. It asked Ministries Committee to present a further report to Assembly 2004. This second report from the Future Patterns of Ministries working party is the response to that request. Appendix I provides more information on the terms of reference of the working party, its membership, its method of working and the previous work on which this report is built.

2.2 The changing world in which we live

2.2.1 The United Kingdom today is a place where most people have no involvement in and no real contact with organised religion. Indeed, for most people being committed members of any institution (in the traditional understanding of 'committed') is something they do not want to do or to be. Of those who are active in the practice of their faith, an increasing proportion are non-Christian. Many of those who say, when asked, that they are Christian choose not to take part in the activities and structures of the Church as an institution.

2.2.2 Even for those who are committed members of the Church, the congregation to which they belong is but one of many foci in their increasingly complex lives. This is the case, for example, for parents with young families and for people with busy and stressful jobs / roles outside the Church. When the Church should be supporting such people it is too often increasing the pressure on them by making unrealistic demands on their time and energy in support of 'in church' activities.

2.2.3 Many older church members remember when their local church was not only the centre of their life but also the main centre of the life of their community. This was the situation for a relatively short period, in historical terms. There are very few places where this is now the case. There are many more places where the local church behaves as if this is the case – continuing with activities that are not what local people now want or need; struggling to maintain work that would now be done better by others or collaboratively with others in the community; apparently unaware of the multi-cultural elements of society; hoping that people who have no real or recent experience of Church will come into their church as it is rather than looking for new ways of reaching out to those beyond its walls. It is almost a century since William Temple reminded the Church that it is the one institution that exists primarily for the benefit of its non-members.

2.2.4 Yet, surveys repeatedly tell us that people are as spiritually aware as ever. And our eyes and ears tell us that the mission imperative is as urgent today as ever it was. The cries for justice, healing and reconciliation can be heard all around us. The isolation caused by the fragmentation and individualisation of society leaves people desperate for somewhere to belong, somewhere to share their unanswerable questions, somewhere they can feel safe and loved. The local church ought to provide such a place: a worshipping community that enables people to be and to live, where people are drawn into a relationship with the transcendent; a living community that seeks to be a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's kingdom.

2.2.5 A current Government consultation is looking at the application of employment rights to office holders, including ministers of religion. Legislation may follow. There are other Government and Charity Commission initiatives which could have a significant impact on the Church, its ministers and other staff. The Church must remain alert to such developments, influence them when it can and respond to them when it must, but we do not speculate on them further in this report.

2.3 Ministry is for mission – God's unchanging mission to the world

2.3.1 Talk of the mission of the Church, whether local or universal, is shorthand that can be misleading. The Church must keep reminding itself that mission is God's activity in which it is called to participate. The context of God's mission is not only the Church but is primarily the world. Ministry in all its forms should be enabling and enacting this participation in God's mission.

2.3.2 The *Basis of Union* (paragraph 11) states that the purpose of the United Reformed Church is

to make its life a continual offering of itself and the world to God in adoration and worship through Jesus Christ;

to receive and express the renewing life of the Holy Spirit in each place and in its total fellowship, and there to declare the reconciling and saving power of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ;

to live out, in joyful and sacrificial service to all in their various physical and spiritual needs, that ministry of caring, forgiving and healing love which Jesus Christ brought to all whom he met;

and to bear witness to Christ's rule over the nations in all the variety of their organised life.

2.3.3 The five marks of mission adopted by the United Reformed Church, as well as by most of its ecumenical partners, are

to proclaim the good news of the kingdom

to teach, baptise and nurture new believers

to respond to human need by loving service

to seek to transform unjust structures of society

to strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, to sustain and renew the life of the earth.

2.3.4 Taking these two statements together, it is clear that the Church exists for mission, the whole life of God's people is for mission, and ministry is for mission, because mission is God's activity. In order to fulfil their part in this activity, the people of God are endowed with a rich variety of gifts that enable all the members of the Church to make their unique individual contributions to the common life and witness of the Church in the course of their daily living. All these gifts should be valued equally within the fellowship of the Church. It is as these gifts are used for the common good under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that the members of the Church become the whole people of God, Christ's body in the world.

2.3.5 God's mission is unchanging but the context is always changing. The *Basis of Union* and the *Growing Up* document, based on the five marks of mission, do not present a complete account of what God's mission is or how the Church is to be engaged in that mission. These are complex questions that will, to some extent, have different answers in each place and in every time.

2.4 Changes in the United Reformed Church since the Patterns of Ministry Report in 1995

2.4.1 The nature and effectiveness of ministry has always been a matter of concern, debate and development in the United Reformed Church and in its antecedent traditions. Assembly is not the only council of the Church, but its reports and resolutions give a flavour of what has been happening.

2.4.2 In 1995, Assembly received the *Patterns of Ministry* Report. That report, like this one, focussed on the need for more effective missionary engagement as the proper basis for ministerial deployment. There was agreement on many things including there being a single order of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Church, embracing stipendiary and non-stipendiary service. Proposals were not accepted for the appointment of Moderating Elders in every congregation; for the development of Local Ministers; or for the renaming of lay preachers. Further work was requested on a statement on

the *Theology of Ministry*. This was prepared by the Doctrine Prayer and Worship Committee and accepted by Mission Council in 1997 as a resource document of the Church. This statement is available on the Church's web-site.

2.4.3 In 1998, Assembly agreed on guidelines for appointing Local Church Leaders and how they might be recognised, affirmed and developed. Synods, District Councils and local churches were encouraged to experiment. The report to Assembly spoke of every church member having a ministry to exercise within the ministry of the whole people, and of how the Church is enriched as more members are enabled to use their gifts in a creative and satisfying way. There are now some very different models of Local Church Leadership operating in a number of the Synods. In other Synods, there is apparently no opportunity to offer this form of service.

2.4.4 In 1999, Assembly adopted the Growing Up document as the mission strategy of the Church, based on the five marks of mission. This strategy was to be implemented from 1999 to 2001, recognising that any plan is time limited. The effect of this document has been, rightly, to place mission at the centre of recent thinking about and planning of the life and work of the Church including, and perhaps especially, the life and work of local congregations in their communities. It follows that mission must also be at the centre of any planning for ministry.

2.4.5 In 2001, Assembly passed an enabling resolution concerning the grouping of churches, which followed on from the report on this subject distributed to churches in May 2000. An increasing proportion of congregations belong to denominational or ecumenical groupings. The 2001 report defined what it meant by 'group' and 'joint pastorate', though this did not mean that all existing groups or joint pastorates were defined in this way. Various experiments have been introduced in different Synods, including 'clusters' and 'local mission partnerships'. One of the few things all these models have in common is one or more ordained Ministers often with other church leaders working together with several local churches. The precise relationship of Minister to congregation varies widely. An ever-present question about such structures is to what extent they continue to be effective: are they driven by maintenance issues or mission priorities?

2.4.6 Ministerial deployment is always a 'hot' topic and has recently been the focus of a separate working group. Throughout the life of the United Reformed Church the proportion of its members that are serving Ministers has been growing. In this sense, to talk of a current shortage of Ministers is factually inaccurate as well as unhelpful. However, whilst membership numbers have reduced substantially the number of local churches has hardly reduced at all. The United Reformed Church is mainly made up of small congregations. The real strain on ministerial deployment and on the individual Ministers is caused by expecting those people to provide effective ministry to all these congregations and the communities in which they are set. Serious questions have to be asked about whether continuing with this approach is really serving the needs of God's mission and also about what this is doing to the Ministers themselves. Ministerial recruitment is a related matter and is a real concern for the Church as it seeks to replace Ministers who are retiring or leaving the ministry

from a shrinking pool of potential candidates. The number of lay preachers is likely to reduce significantly over the medium term because of the age profile of those currently serving. It is a challenge for every member of the Church to identify people who might serve in these ways and encourage them to put themselves forward.

2.4.7 Finance is also an ever-present issue. Each year, Assembly approves a budget for the following year. However, responsibility for meeting that budget rests with the church members. Over 85% of the central budget is spent on stipendiary Ministers, Church Related Community Workers, and training. Because, over a number of years, basic stipends have been increased above inflation and the ratio of Minister numbers to membership numbers has increased, there has been a 'double whammy' on the budgets of congregations and individual church members. It can be argued that the challenge of this growing cost of ministry is one that church members should be ready to meet but there is growing evidence of their unwillingness to do so. Any strategy for future patterns of ministries must ensure that the Church makes best use of its financial as well as its human resources.

2.4.8 The policy of the United Reformed Church regarding presidency at the sacraments has changed little. There is wide diversity of practice to meet the perceived needs of local congregations and this practice is not always in line with the Church's stated policy.

2.4.9 In the autumn of 2002, Mission Council launched a thorough and radical review of the life of the United Reformed Church, now under the banner of 'Catch the Vision for God's tomorrow'. Clearly, in relation to matters of ministry our concerns overlap with those of the Review Group.

2.5 Responses received to the 2002 Future Patterns of Ministries interim report

2.5.1 We are most grateful to those who responded in writing to the questions posed at the end of the 2002 report. We have also talked with many others who have engaged with the material that was sent to them. Appendix II contains more details of the responses received from individuals, local churches, Districts and Synods.

2.5.2 The 2002 report, and the questions that were circulated for consideration and feedback, focussed mainly on the 'ministry of the whole people of God' or, more precisely, on the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ 'in and through the Church, the whole people of God' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 19). The responses indicated widespread acceptance of the concept of the ministry of the whole people of God and of the shared responsibility of all church members to make this as effective as possible. However, there was considerable variation in understanding of what this might mean in practice and of what terms like 'ministry' mean. Many respondents were concerned to emphasise the importance of Ministers and leadership, alongside their commitment to the ministry of the whole people.

2.5.3 All the feedback received has been carefully considered and has informed our subsequent work, including the contents of this report.

2.6 The challenge of language – some definitions

2.6.1 Coping with variation

It is clearly important to be as precise as possible with the language that we use. It is also necessary to acknowledge the wide variety of interpretations of many words that are in common use among us including ‘minister’, ‘ministry’, ‘ministries’, ‘vocation’ and ‘discipleship’ and that words can have different meanings in different contexts.

The two documents that we have considered most important in this context are the *Basis of Union* and *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*. Details of these documents and others are listed in Appendix III.

2.6.2 The ministry of the whole people of God

The section of the *Basis of Union* on ministry proceeds from the ministry of Jesus Christ through the ministry of the whole people of God to particular set apart ministries. It begins with (paragraph 19) ‘The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service and equipped by him for it’. It goes on to say ‘This service is given ... by obedient discipleship in the whole of daily life’. We endorse this understanding and have based our work upon it.

The first section of the chapter on ministry in *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* is headed ‘The calling of the whole people of God’. It includes (section I paragraph 5) ‘The Holy Spirit bestows on the community diverse and complementary gifts. These are for the common good of the whole people and are manifested in acts of service within the community and to the world. ... All members are called to discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and to use them for the building up of the Church and the service of the world to which the Church is sent.’

Both documents set ministry in the context of the world, the place where the people of God spend their daily lives – the ‘dispersed mode’ of being the Church described in sub-section 4.3 below.

2.6.3 Ministers and ministries

The *Basis of Union* continues with (paragraph 20) ‘For the equipment of his people for this total ministry the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church’. It then goes on to describe the ministry of the Word and Sacraments, the ministry of Church Related Community Workers and the ministry of Elders.

What distinguishes Ministers, Church Related Community Workers and Elders is not that they are more involved than anyone else in the ministry of the whole people of God but that their ministries are exercised in offices recognised by the Church.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry defines its use of the term ‘ministry’ as meaning (section II paragraph 7b) ‘in its broadest sense the service to which the whole people of God is called, whether as individuals, as a local community, or as the

universal Church. Ministry or ministries can also denote the particular institutional forms which this service may take.’ It goes on (paragraph 7c) ‘The term ordained ministry refers to persons who have received a charism [gifts bestowed by the Holy Spirit] and whom the Church appoints for service by ordination and the laying on of hands.’ In relation to the ordained ministry, it says (section II paragraph 8) ‘In order to fulfil its mission, the Church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its fundamental dependence on Jesus Christ and thereby provide a focus for its unity.’

2.6.4 Vocation and discipleship

To describe every member of the Church as having a particular ministry to exercise or as participating in the ministry of the whole people of God is not the same as saying that every member is a Minister. To do this would be to render the term ‘Minister’, which has an established and well understood meaning within and beyond the Church, completely redundant.

For this reason, some would prefer to talk about the discipleship or vocation of church members rather than the ministry of the whole people of God. This may be just a difference of terminology to describe the same thing. However, we are concerned to emphasise that the ministry of the whole people of God requires the active participation of every church member, and that it relates to every aspect of their lives not just when they are together in church. The particular ministries of individuals should be understood as being within the context of the ministry of the whole people of God, out of which they emerge.

3. MEETING THE CHALLENGE: FROM DISCIPLES TO APOSTLES

3.1 The gospels in the New Testament present a picture of a small group of people becoming disciples of Jesus – his followers – literally, one might say, as they followed in his wake as Jesus strode towards his destiny in Jerusalem. The rest of the New Testament shows us how that small group of people was transformed by the Easter/Pentecost experience. They were still disciples but now they were empowered to go, empowered to preach, teach and baptise, empowered to be witnesses. They became apostles.

3.2 A picture of the Church

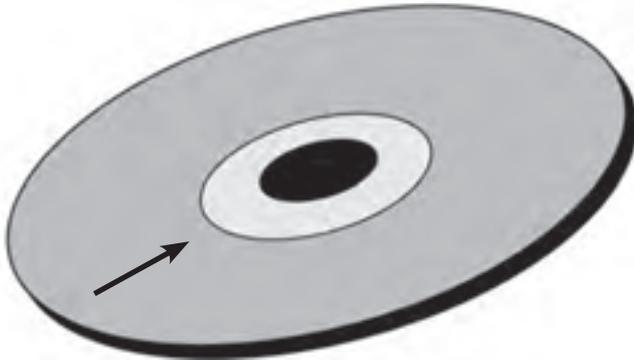
Pictures are dangerous because analogies are always imperfect, but a simple diagram has helped our thinking. A moving picture is more effective than a static diagram, as we hope to demonstrate at Assembly and on the Church’s web-site.

 The area within the outer circle represents the whole membership of the Church, all those who to some degree seek to be disciples.

 The area within the intermediate circle represents those members who are living as apostles (what some might call the apostolate), actively engaged in the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ through his Church.

The area within the inner circle represents people recognised and set apart by the Church to exercise particular ministries.

Maintenance

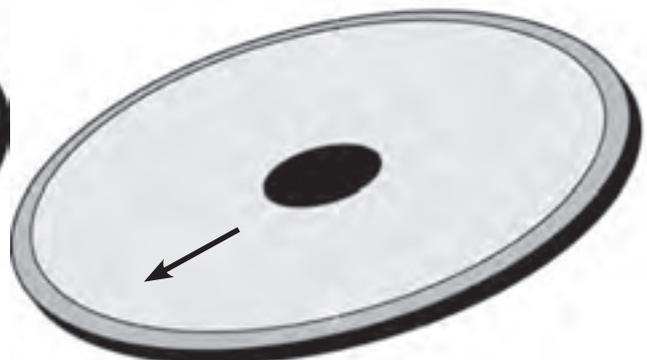


3.3 There is a danger that congregations can become increasingly passive groups of people looking more and more to their Ministers and / or the Elders to do the work of the Church. Then, the intermediate circle shrinks. This can happen in congregations of any size and circumstance. The reasons for it are complex and not always the same. It might be that a congregation has become over-dependent on a few people making it vulnerable to changes in their availability or involvement; or that its commendable faithfulness leads to misplaced determination to preserve activities and buildings that have outlived their usefulness rather than to an openness to the needs of God's mission today. Whatever the reasons, the effect is that the congregation becomes inward focused. In the diagram, the intermediate circle becomes hardly larger than the inner circle and ministry becomes largely what the Ministers and a small number of others do.

3.4 The challenge is to expand the intermediate circle as more people grow in their understanding of discipleship into a commitment to be witnesses in word and action. The work of ministry is then more fully shared by the whole Church. Those in set apart ministries are not left to shoulder impossible expectations and workloads. There is time and energy for the Church to address more challenges than just the challenge to survive.

3.5 If the Church remembers that it is part of the world and it is that world, beyond the outer circle, that is the main place of God's mission then the Church's eyes will be automatically focussed outwards rather than inwards. The Church's recognised ministries will become the means by which all the gifts of all the people are engaged in the ministry of the whole people of God. The intermediate circle will not just expand towards the outer circle but the energy will overflow beyond it into the world. We see this as a central objective for the Church and for every one of its congregations.

Mission



4. MEETING THE CHALLENGE: THE CHURCH – THE WHOLE PEOPLE OF GOD IN MINISTRY TOGETHER

4.1 Corporate not personal

4.1.1 It is our understanding of ministry that it is a corporate activity of the Church, the whole people of God. However, this does not mean that it is just about what the people do when they are together. It does mean that all legitimate ministry should be of the people of God, specifically of a worshipping Christian community, owned, affirmed and supported by them, even when it is exercised by an individual on their behalf.

4.2 'Laos' means everybody

4.2.1 In the New Testament, 'laos' means people and the 'laos of God' are the people of God, the Church, with different and complementary gifts and ministries but sharing one common vocation to be the people of God's new creation. In law and medicine it is customary to use the term 'lay' to describe people who are not professionally qualified. In some parts of the Church this usage is adopted and those who are not ministers or priests are described as 'lay' or 'the laity'. This can easily lead to a view of these 'lay' people not only as untrained but also as amateurish in their discipleship with the Ministers seen not only as learned but also as a higher grade of Christian. Although the Churches of the Reformed tradition largely rejected this usage within the Church, it is sadly not wholly absent in thought or practice. The ministry of the whole people of God should mean the ministry in which every member is called to be engaged in every aspect of their lives, including those called to ministries set apart by the Church.

4.3 Gathered and dispersed

4.3.1 The United Reformed Church believes in the priesthood of all believers. The emphasis is on the 'all', the community of the baptised. Appendix B of the *Patterns of Ministry* report quoted the following from *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (commentary on section II paragraph 17). 'The priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the baptised have in their respective ways the function of sacrifice and intercession. As Christ has offered himself, Christians offer their whole being "as a living sacrifice". As Christ intercedes before the Father, Christians intercede for the Church and the salvation of the world. Nevertheless the differences between these two kinds of priesthood cannot be overlooked. Whilst Christ offered himself as a unique sacrifice once for all for the salvation of the world, believers need to continually receive as a gift of God that which Christ has done for them.'

4.3.2 It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the life and witness of the gathered Christian community. However, it has been said already (paragraph 2.2.2) that even for those who are committed members of local churches the life and work of the gathered community is one commitment among many, and most of their time is spent elsewhere. More importantly, most encounters of church members with other people do not take place inside church buildings doing churchy things. Most of the opportunities to work for God's justice, healing and reconciliation are not to be found inside the Church. The context of God's mission is not only the Church but primarily the world.

4.3.3 The emphasis of the life and witness of each congregation ought to be much more on when its members are dispersed and less on when they are gathered, even if this means giving up some of its in-church activities. If a congregation is to be a Christian community that is truly a sign, foretaste and instrument of God's Kingdom then its life as a community must embrace what its members do when they are apart at least as much as it embraces what they do when they are together. These are both aspects of what it means to be 'church in community'.

4.3.4 It is vital that this embracing of the life of the individual in the life of the whole, and of the ministry of the individual in the ministry of the whole, includes every person whatever their age or circumstances.

4.4 Challenged, recognised and affirmed

4.4.1 Some people are set apart by the Church to exercise ministries in dispersed mode. This includes Church Related Community Workers and Chaplains. However, there is a great deal of ministry exercised by others in dispersed mode, i.e. in their daily lives, that currently goes unrecognised and unsupported by the Church. This is the fault of the Church and not of those engaged in these dispersed ministries. The Church needs to put this right.

4.4.2 It may be, also, that there are others in local churches who need to be challenged to recognise the opportunities for ministry in the places where they spend their time. They also need to be encouraged and supported in these ministries.

4.4.3 The enabling and equipping of this dispersed ministry of the whole people should be a major priority for Ministers and Elders.

Recommendation 1: Every local church should be challenged to review its life at all levels with the specific aim of being more supportive and enabling of the dispersed ministry of its members even if this means doing less 'in church' activities. Local churches should look for ways, within the context of worship and otherwise, of affirming the ministries of their members outside the church. This needs to be an inclusive activity from which no one is left out.

4.5 Diversity and experiment

4.5.1 In order to achieve this major shift in emphasis (at least for some) towards the world as the main focus for the ministry of God's people, congregations should be encouraged to experiment with new ways of being church. This might mean stopping some 'good work' in order to create space for new work that is even more relevant to their understanding of God's mission today. It might, for instance, include new ways of gathering Christians together ecumenically at different times and in different places – going to where people are rather than expecting them to come into existing church buildings or services.

4.5.2 There are good stories of such experiments around the Church. These include congregations that have moved out of their long cherished buildings to worship elsewhere, releasing the buildings to be used in new ways to meet local needs, bringing new life to both congregations and communities. We need to share these stories more so that we can learn together.

Recommendation 2: Every local church should be encouraged to explore new ways of gathering at different times and places – the Church going to meet people where they are rather than the Church expecting people to come to where it is.

5 MEETING THE CHALLENGE: SET APART MINISTRIES

5.1 Being thankful for what we've got

5.1.1 Any consideration of future patterns of ministries must start from where we are today and must begin by affirming with great thankfulness the quality and quantity of sacrificial service that is offered within and on behalf of the United Reformed Church. This includes, but is not limited to, those serving in the various set apart ministries formally recognised by the Church.

5.1.2 The main focus of our 2002 report was on seeking a common understanding of the phrase 'the ministry of the whole people of God'. We were disappointed by the reaction of a small number of people who thought that this emphasis implied a devaluing of the contribution of those serving as Ministers of the Church. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

5.2 Summary of current situation regarding set apart ministries

5.2.1 'Ministry' may be defined simply as service and set apart ministries might then be understood as various forms of servant leadership based on the model of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is an extensive and varied range of recognised ministries within the United Reformed Church. Some of the most common of these are considered below but there are others including pastoral visitors, Junior Church leaders, training officers, synod moderators and various other Assembly appointments. Some of these are recognised locally and others by the whole Church, some are restricted to Ministers and others are not. They are all in some sense set apart ministries.

5.2.2. The United Reformed Church ordains those who are called to be Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and those who are called to be Elders. Ordination is, in each case, to a particular form of ministry. The United Reformed Church is not the only Church that ordains people to ministries that do not include presidency. For example, the Roman Catholic Church ordains its deacons and these people are not authorised to preside at the sacraments. Ordination is important because it represents a life time commitment or, in the words of the *Basis of Union* (paragraph 20), a commitment to serve for 'so long as God wills'. Although ordination continues to be a somewhat controversial matter, we are content with the statement on ordination included in the 1995 *Patterns of Ministry* report and do not repeat its arguments further here.

5.2.3. The United Reformed Church is deliberately diverse as it seeks to respond to God's call to mission in different places and times. We welcome this diversity and look for increased flexibility to enable the Church to become even more effective. Nevertheless, we also recognise the need to be concerned for the good order of the Church and aware of the sensitivities of its ecumenical partners.

5.3 Elders

5.3.1 The *Basis of Union* says (paragraph 22) that Elders are called to 'share with Ministers in the pastoral oversight and leadership of local churches'. Later, it lists the functions of the Elders' meeting. We consider that the *Basis of Union* says all that is necessary about the ministry of Elders. The challenge for the Church is to take what it says more seriously.

5.3.2 Eldership was not invented by the United Reformed Church. Elders were introduced by Reformed Churches after the Reformation in order to provide a group of 'lay' people to share responsibility with the Minister for the ruling of the parish or congregation. It was believed that various references in the New Testament Epistles showed that this was the practice of the early Church. Some writers believed that Elders were equivalent to New Testament Presbyters (Ministers), with a distinction made between ruling and teaching Elders, but this was never a universal view. Later, Elders were given a pastoral role which complemented their responsibility for church governance. Elders were ordained to recognise their commitment to ministry. This was not a case of people taking their turn at doing a job for a period. Elders worked alongside Ministers in all the councils of the Church. This was, in summary, the understanding of Eldership that the Presbyterian Church of England brought into the United Reformed Church.

5.3.3 It is our view that the ministry of the Elders is at the heart of what it means to be the United Reformed Church, both in its function and in its operation. The ministry of the Elders is of the local church, it is locally focussed and it is collaborative in style. The pastoral oversight and leadership of each local congregation is primarily the responsibility of its Elders' meeting supported by its Minister(s), rather than the other way round (which is how many see it). There is considerable evidence that a congregation is more likely to be effective when its members have a shared vision. The Elders' meeting in each congregation needs to foster a vision of what it means to be a community of God's people in that place. Where Ministers are present they are part of the Elders' meeting, with one of their key tasks being to ensure that every Elder and the Elders as a team are properly prepared for and supported in their roles.

See Recommendation 6 following paragraph 5.7.12

5.3.4 The representative ministry of each local congregation in its local community and among its local ecumenical partners should be the responsibility of its Elders, even though these duties may be carried out by a Minister or a Local Church Leader (see sub-section 5.4 below).

5.3.5 The effectiveness of the ministry of Elders is impeded in some congregations because the Elders' meeting acquires a whole range of tasks which, however important, do not need to be performed by the Elders. This can, in turn, lead to an increase in the number of serving Elders beyond what is necessary. It is our view that Elders' meetings will be most effective where they are relatively small and focussed on their core responsibilities of providing pastoral oversight and leadership. Some local churches have benefited greatly from the appointment of councils or committees to assist with some of the pastoral, practical and administrative tasks. Non-serving Elders can have an important role here.

5.3.6 We consider that best practice in the appointment of Elders normally involves the following sequence of events: 1: Election; 2: Preparation; 3: Ordination; and 4: Development. Election is the discernment by the church meeting of those among them called to be Elders, and the process used should reflect the importance of this task. Preparation confirms the call for the individual and for the congregation. Ordination is the setting apart of people for this particular form of ministry. Development includes ongoing support and appropriate training where specific skills need to be developed. This development will hopefully encourage some Elders to offer other forms of service, including those discussed in sub-sections 5.4 to 5.7 below. Synods and Areas / Districts should ensure that resources are available to support and facilitate such best practice in all local churches.

5.3.7 Eldership is a ministry of the local church and authority for the election and ordination of Elders rests with the congregation in church meeting. However, ordination is a representative act carried out by the local church on behalf of the whole Church. It is therefore appropriate that District Councils should formally acknowledge the call of Elders by local churches and, where possible, be represented at their ordination and, if they are transferring from another District, their induction.

Recommendation 3: The appointment and ordination of Elders should involve a commitment to continuing development, including appropriate local training. Synods should facilitate this training, working with local Ministers and making full use of available resources. District Councils should formally acknowledge the call of Elders by local churches and be represented at their ordination and, if they are transferring from another District, their induction.

5.4 Local Church Leaders

5.4.1 Since the concept of Local Church Leaders was approved by Assembly in 1998, a number of Synods have introduced their own models. Others have apparently done nothing. Although there is considerable variation, the models may be summarised as either roles or functions. In some Synods, the Local Church Leader has a role in the local church and Elders' meeting not unlike the 'Moderating Elder' proposal that was rejected by Assembly in 1995. In other Synods, each Local Church Leader is appointed to carry out one or more particular tasks or projects but he or she does not have any overall responsibility. Although these developments are to be warmly welcomed, the inconsistent opportunities for service, practice and training between different Synods can cause problems.

5.4.2 It is crucial that local church leadership remains rooted in the Elders' meeting of the particular congregation and that it is seen as part of the corporate ministry of the Elders. We do not believe, therefore, that the Local Church Leader should become a separate order or category of ministry.

5.4.3 Our understanding is that the concept of Local Church Leader approved by Assembly in 1998 was of a role rather than a set of tasks. We support this emphasis and are attracted to the term 'Pastor' to describe this role. It is also our view that Assembly needs to come to a mind about the nature of Local Church Leaders, the scope of their role and to adopt an overall framework. Such a framework for this form of local leadership would help define this role to ecumenical partners. It would not invalidate other patterns of leadership but it would make clear that they are different. However, it will be important not to be over prescriptive. Some Elders' meetings will recognise the value of appointing one (or more) of their number to this sort of role. Others will prefer to carry this responsibility collectively. The Church should not act as if one model is better than another. Support and training need to be offered to every Elders' meeting, whatever model they adopt for their leadership. What matters is the effectiveness of the leadership provided to each local church by its Elders, not precisely how this is done.

Recommendation 4: Whilst welcoming the current Local Church Leaders as successful experiments and effective forms of local leadership, the Church should build on this experience to create a flexible framework for the introduction of Pastors of local congregations, a role working from within the Elders' meeting. All Synods could then be encouraged to make use of this as one optional form of leadership available to local churches.

5.5 Accredited Lay Preachers

5.5.1 Worship is at the heart of the life of the United Reformed Church and each of its congregations. To maintain worship of the highest possible standard that is challenging, exciting and inclusive requires people to lead it who are properly trained and equipped for and supported in this role. This does not mean that every worship leader needs or should receive the same training. It does mean that initial and continuing training is important for all those who regularly lead worship on the Church's behalf.

5.5.2 The Church is greatly indebted to all those who regularly lead its worship, not least its Ministers but also those who have committed the time and energy to become Nationally Accredited Lay Preachers and who offer this demanding service, often with too little appreciation. We should also acknowledge that there are other lay preachers who are recognised / accredited by their District Councils and others of all ages who help to lead the worship of local churches.

5.5.3 The training of lay preachers is best used in the leading of worship, teaching and Bible study. If lay preachers are locally based then their work can be more fully integrated into the collaborative ministry in that place, with Ministers, Elders and others. We welcome this local focus. However, this does not take anything away from the important contribution of those lay preachers whose ministry is exercised through the leading of worship of congregations over a wide geographical area. To emphasise the importance of the relationship with local churches and to avoid inappropriate associations with the word 'lay', we would prefer that the title of this form of service was changed from 'lay preacher' to 'local preacher'. Such a proposal was narrowly rejected by Assembly in 1995. The commitment to seek a joint pastoral strategy with the Methodist Church would be helped by the removal of differences in terminology that are not significant.

Recommendation 5: The United Reformed Church should adopt the title 'local preacher' in place of 'lay preacher'.

5.6 Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs)

5.6.1 CRCWs have become an important recognised ministry of the United Reformed Church. However, it is important to acknowledge that church related community work in this Church did not begin with the appointment of the first CRCW. For example, there are many Ministers today who are engaged in similar work for at least part of their time.

5.6.2 In some branches of the Church, there is a separate order of ministry called a Diaconate. If diaconal ministry is understood to be about building bridges between church and society then, clearly, the work of CRCWs is one important expression of the Church's diaconal ministry. We welcome the present policy of growing this ministry.

5.6.3 Following the *Patterns of Ministry* report in 1995, Mission Council initiated some work on Diaconal Ministry and the possibility of establishing a Diaconate within the United Reformed Church. A paper was presented to Mission Council

in 2001. No action was taken but the paper is available on the website. Diaconal ministry is being exercised on behalf of the Church by many people including but by no means limited to CRCWs. It is our view that this diaconal ministry needs to be encouraged and developed but that this would not be helped by the creation of a Diaconate.

5.7 Ministers of the Word and Sacraments (Ministers)

5.7.1 The *Basis of Union* says (paragraph 21) 'Some are called to the ministry of the Word and Sacraments'. It goes on to say 'They are commissioned to conduct public worship, to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, and to give leadership to the Church in its mission to the world'.

5.7.2 The title 'Minister of the Word and Sacraments' is not entirely satisfactory in that Ministers are required to do many things in addition to preaching and presiding and much preaching and presiding is done by others. However, the title does emphasise the centrality of worship in the life of the Church and the important contribution that Ministers make to that worship. The Church looks to its Ministers to act, not exclusively but principally, as the guardians of its faith and witness, helping 'keep the community faithful to the teaching and practice of apostolic Christianity' (David Bosch). In this quotation 'apostolic' means being sent; it is not a reference to the first century Church. The question is how should this be done in the context of today's Church and world. As the Church adapts to meet the challenge of God's mission today, so must its use of Ministers adapt to keep the Church effective as well as faithful.

5.7.3 The United Reformed Church, like any human community, needs leadership – locally and as a whole. The effectiveness of the Church is directly dependent on the quality and appropriateness of its leadership. Ministers play a crucial role in the leadership of the Church. The contribution of Ministers to the ministry of the whole Church will, in our view, always be vitally important. The primary model for leadership in the Church is the servanthood of Jesus Christ.

5.7.4 The United Reformed Church, within the Reformed tradition, has a high view of the role of its Ministers. Ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments (and also to the Ministry of the Elders) is once for all and not repeated. The *Basis of Union* says (paragraph 20) 'those who enter on such ministries do so for so long as God wills'. Ordination recognises that this calling is a commitment to a way of being as well as to a way of doing. The most important qualities of people called to this service are the depth of their faith, their commitment to journeying with others, and their willingness to proclaim the gospel within and outside the Church, in words and actions. The demands made on these people make it essential that they are thoroughly prepared and then continually supported and developed in order to sustain them and to keep them effective.

5.7.5 If the membership numbers in the Church continue to decline then there will be further human constraints on the number who offer to serve as Ministers and financial constraints on the number of stipends that can be paid. Ministers will be, as they have always been in our traditions, a scarce as well as a valuable resource. It is the duty of the

whole Church to ensure that these people who are God's gift to the Church are properly cared for and that, as far as possible, their gifts are deployed effectively and realistically. In many cases, we are currently doing neither of these things.

5.7.6 If the vocation of the Church is to participate in God's mission in the world then the main purpose of Ministers must be to equip, empower and lead the members of the Church, the whole people of God, for their ministry in the world in response to God's call. PT Forsyth wrote that Ministers 'act on the church so the church can act on the world'. The Church's expectations of its Ministers must be refocused if they are to be enabled to do this more effectively. It has been said already that the United Reformed Church is mainly made up of small congregations. It is likely to remain so unless the Church takes strategic decisions to withdraw from many of those places where it is currently present but not numerically strong. Although some hard decisions are undoubtedly necessary, they must be taken according to mission priorities not congregation sizes.

5.7.7 The *Basis of Union* says (paragraph 24) that the Church 'shall take steps to ensure that so far as possible ordained ministers ... are readily available to every local church'. The practical meaning of 'so far as possible' has changed significantly over the lifetime of the United Reformed Church. It is unavoidable that the interpretation of 'readily available' must also change. This phrase cannot now mean, if it ever meant, that every congregation can assume a right to be served directly by a slice of 'their own' Minister. For example, a rigid allocation of Sunday services and an assumption that a particular Minister will be available for all hospital visits and funerals may not be practicable. We are convinced that the practice of spreading Ministers ever more thinly, without fundamentally changing the expectations of what the Ministers can and should do, is not the best mission strategy. Expectations that are unachievable and inappropriate, whether held by church members or by the Ministers themselves, need to be challenged and changed. We believe that a major shift is now essential in the way most District and Area Councils approach deployment

5.7.8 As stated above, we believe that the Elders of each local church must be the ones primarily responsible for the development and continuation of its ministry. Ministers can then be deployed in far more varied and imaginative ways than have previously been possible. We would hope for a much better match, in future, of the gifts of particular Ministers with the tasks the Church asks them to undertake.

5.7.9 Central to the role of Ministers as a whole and the roles of most Ministers in practice, working particularly through clusters / groups or Area / District Councils, should be the development and support of the leadership of local congregations. The emphasis in this work with local churches must be on developing more effective collaborative ministry, dealt with further in sub-section 5.8 below.

5.7.10 Ministers, alongside the Elders in each place, also have a key representative role, interpreting the world to the Church and the Church to the world, and representing the wider Church (United Reformed and ecumenical) to the local church. For some, this role will be embodied in work as Chaplains and other work set in the world. This representative role of Ministers has implications for their

ongoing training in relation not only to developments in theology, doctrine and worship but also to their appreciation of changes in community and culture.

5.7.11 A Minister is a member of a local church. Whatever the Minister's particular role, his / her ministry is part of the ministry of the whole people of God. It will continue to be necessary, where the Minister is the best equipped or where other resources are not available, to ask a Minister to do work that is not, exclusively, his / hers on behalf of the Church. This might be locally to initiate or support church programmes or community development work, or it might be administrative work in support of the Church's structures. For each individual Minister this part of his / her work must be properly defined so that the scoping of the overall workload is realistic. For the Church as a whole there needs to be a mechanism within the deployment process for assessing how much of this work its Ministers can collectively support before it is counter productive, however useful in itself. It is our view that neither of these objectives is currently being met satisfactorily.

5.7.12 The United Reformed Church employs a number of its Ministers in Assembly, Synod and District appointments. The justification of these posts is not within the remit of this report, though we do readily acknowledge that a great deal of vital work is being done in this way. The Church has procedures in place for reviewing these posts and, in particular, all Assembly appointments will be considered as part of the 'Catch the Vision' review of the structures of the Church. Whether these posts should be filled by Ministers is a separate matter that needs to be considered in relation to each post and also in relation to the Church's overall deployment of its Ministers.

Recommendation 6: The United Reformed Church should re-commit itself to the development of appropriate and effective leadership in every local congregation, whilst recognising that this does not mean that every congregation will have a Minister directly providing their day-to-day leadership. The deployment of Ministers should be determined by the need to make the best use of this scarce resource in equipping, empowering and leading the Church in its participation in God's mission.

5.8 Collaborative and complementary leadership

5.8.1 The United Reformed Church is a conciliar Church with a collaborative style of leadership. This has already been referred to several times in this report. The Elders' meeting of each local congregation is at the heart of this collaborative leadership. The purpose of this approach is to make the best use of the particular people available in each place for the good of the whole people of God and the effectiveness of its ministry in the world. Some would question whether the Church has been good at putting this collaborative style into practice. We hope that as Elders' meetings become more confident in their leadership of local congregations so Ministers will be released into developing new ways of working that are more creative, supportive and purposeful.

5.8.2 The Church's structures and policies are deliberately flexible. There are very few tasks that are the responsibility of one particular office within the Church. This flexibility creates enormous potential for a high quality, richly diverse and complementary style of leadership to be offered to the Church locally and nationally.

5.8.3 In a situation where leadership resources are scarce, it is vital that the Church orders its life in a way to make best use of the gifts and service that are offered. The opportunities for mutual support and personal development available to the members of ministerial teams are of great benefit to the Church as a whole as well as to the individuals. We would encourage the further development of local groupings or clusters of churches, described by some as local mission partnerships, served by teams of leaders including Ministers, Elders, Local Church Leaders, Lay Preachers and others. In some cases, the Area / District Council will be the natural 'cluster'.

5.8.4 With the focus on mission, there will be many places where the most effective 'cluster' will be a local ecumenical grouping embracing churches serving the same community, rather than a denominational one linking United Reformed Churches serving very different communities, perhaps far apart.

5.8.5 It will still be appropriate, in some circumstances, for a Minister to be scoped to work full-time with a single congregation but this ministry should still be collaborative in style. Where this happens it should reflect agreed mission priorities and should not be driven by history or size of congregation.

Recommendation 7: Churches should be encouraged to work in groups or clusters, wherever possible ecumenically, with Ministers, Elders, Local Church Leaders, Lay Preachers and others offering them collaborative leadership.

5.9 Classification, training and remuneration of Ministers and other ministries

5.9.1 The United Reformed Church has stipendiary and non-stipendiary Ministers, but Assembly made clear in 1995 that there is a single order of Minister of the Word and Sacraments comprising both stipendiary and non-stipendiary service. The *Manual* (section K) sets out 'Patterns of Stipendiary Ministry' based on a document produced by Ministries Department (as it then was) in 1988 and 'Models for Non-stipendiary Ministry' approved by Assembly in 1995. The actual situation is more complex than this. There are stipendiary Ministers who do not work full-time for the Church and others who are full time but do not take any stipend. There are non-stipendiary Ministers who are working full-time for the Church in an exactly comparable way to their full-time stipendiary colleagues.

5.9.2 Increasingly frequently, the Church receives requests from individual Ministers who want to switch from stipendiary to non-stipendiary service or vice versa or to change from full-time to part-time service or vice versa. This may be in response to changed personal or family circumstances or to perceived changes in the needs of the Church. The Church is not consistent in the way it responds to such requests and the further training it requires of such people.

5.9.3 The Church needs to be much more flexible in its recruitment and deployment of Ministers and others and to reduce the obstacles that are perhaps inadvertently put in people's way in order to make more effective use of the service being offered. In particular, the Church needs to be more successful in attracting people to serve as non-stipendiary Ministers. To facilitate this the Church needs to

uncouple ordination, training and remuneration from one another so that it can be more flexible in relation to each of them. It is our view that ordination (or commissioning) should be about setting a person apart for a particular ministry on behalf of the Church; training should be about equipping a particular person for a particular role (it should therefore be tailored and continuing); and payment should be a practical matter dependent on the circumstances of the individual and the resources of the Church. What is said here about Ministers should logically also apply to Church Related Community Workers and we welcome the current work towards the introduction of non-stipendiary Church Related Community Workers.

5.9.4 The Church needs to develop new ways of classifying its Ministers and CRCWs that are more useful to the Church and the individuals. This should be based on the service they are able to offer and might include the available time (e.g. half-time or full-time); whether they are geographically restricted (as are most non-stipendiary and many stipendiary Ministers); and what particular skills or experience they have. Such a change would clearly have implications for the way that the deployment of Ministers, CRCWs and others is understood and operated.

Recommendation 8: The Church should develop a new way of classifying its Ministers according to the service being offered that can supersede the existing stipendiary 'Patterns' and non-stipendiary 'Models'.

5.9.5 We welcome the decision of Mission Council to ask for a development policy for Ministers and Church Related Community Workers, including a review of methods of appraisal and accountability. The Church needs a more flexible approach to initial and continuing training that is more responsive to the varied needs and changing circumstances of students and those appointed to these ministries.

Recommendation 9: The Church should continue to develop the flexibility of the initial and continuing training of its Ministers and Church Related Community Workers to meet more effectively their varied circumstances and their fast changing contexts and to enable them to more easily transfer between different forms of service.

5.9.6. The payment of a stipend is meant to allow a person set apart by the Church as a Minister or CRCW to fulfil his / her vocation. The level of the stipend should be adequate to free the person and his / her dependents from financial anxiety and to enable him / her to participate in society. It would be wholly wrong if any financial constraints on the Church persuaded it to pay less than adequate stipends. The 'right' level of the stipend will always be a controversial matter that will need to be handled sensitively. We believe that the concept of the stipend in relation to Ministers and CRCWs is still more appropriate than the payment of a salary.

5.9.7. The logic of this argument suggests that there ought to be much greater variation in the amount offered to Ministers and CRCWs, up to an agreed maximum stipend plus allowances, reflecting the significant variations in their circumstances including income from other sources inside and outside the Church. It also implies that it might be necessary and just to offer at least a part stipend or other benefits to some of those serving as Ministers and currently

classified as non-stipendiary where they are not receiving adequate income from elsewhere. This increased flexibility might also affect the policy of the Church regarding the retirement of Ministers and CRCWs and careful consideration would also need to be given to the proper provision of housing and pensions. Some Ministers choose not to take all the stipend and allowances which the Church offers them. This is and should remain entirely their personal decision.

5.9.8 We envisage a significant change over the next, say, twenty years in the balance between stipendiary and non-stipendiary service with many more people offering part-time service to the Church whilst working and earning income elsewhere. If this were to happen it would enable the Church to have Ministers and CRCWs serving in more locations (albeit in part time service) without increasing the Church's costs.

Recommendation 10: Work should be done on the implications and mechanics of making the remuneration package of all Ministers and Church Related Community Workers more flexible according to their circumstances, such as dependent relatives, within the maximum figures approved each year by Assembly.

5.10 Finance – flexible resources to support flexible leadership patterns

5.10.1 The central budget of the Church receives income from various sources. However, most of the income comes from local churches through the Ministry and Mission Fund and this broadly equates to the total costs of training, paying and supporting Ministers and Church Related Community Workers. Given the diversity of ministries within the Church and the varying needs of local churches, it would make sense to broaden the use of the Ministry and Mission Fund from a 'payments to Ministers' fund to a fund that supports the Church's rich variety of leadership patterns. This should include existing national grants to support local non-standard ministries and be able to support more than just the work of Ministers and Church Related Community Workers. It follows that the Church might decide in the future to spend more of its available resources on other forms of leadership and, by implication, less of those resources on Ministers. Such decisions could affect only future actions and it is vital that those people already paid out of the Ministry and Mission Fund continue to be properly looked after. We envisage that all congregations would continue to contribute to the Ministry and Mission fund whether or not a Minister was involved directly in their local leadership and all local churches would be eligible to benefit from the Fund to support their mission. Local churches would deserve much more and clearer information about how their money was being spent through this Fund.

5.10.2 The proposals in sub-sections 5.9 and 5.10 could not be considered properly without taking account a number of other issues, for example the relationship between the central Ministry and Mission Fund and the financial resources held elsewhere in the Church.

Recommendation 11: Detailed consideration should be given to broadening the terms of the Ministry and Mission Fund so that it could be used not just to pay for Ministers and Church Related Community Workers but also to support other forms of leadership within

the Church. An attractive annual report on how the Ministry and Mission Fund is spent should be made available to local churches.

5.11 Presidency at the Sacraments

5.11.1 Given the changing relationship between Ministers and congregations, and the developing ministry of Elders that we call for in sub-section 5.3 above, we believe that the issue of presidency needs to be re-examined. There is very significant variation of practice around the Church and it is not all in line with what is said in the *Basis of Union*. The Church needs a policy that preserves order but allows for variety of both circumstance and practice. We begin by summarising in paragraphs 5.11.2 to 5.11.7 what we understand to be the current stated position of the Church.

5.11.2 The *Basis of Union* says (paragraph 24) that the United Reformed Church shall 'make provision through District Councils, in full consultation with the local churches concerned, for the recognition of certain members of the Church, normally deaconesses, elders or accredited lay preachers, who may be invited by local churches to preside at baptismal and communion services where pastoral necessity so requires ... only such recognised persons may be invited.'

5.11.3 A statement on the then situation concerning presidency at the sacraments was accepted by Assembly in 1991 and is included in the current *Manual* (section F). This statement sets out the background, describes the variety of practice and sets out three alternative views concerning presidency – in summary, restrict it to Ministers; extend it to include lay preachers; or extend it further to include presidency by 'local lay leaders'. However, the statement did not propose any revision of the *Guidelines on Presidency at the Lord's Supper*. These Guidelines date from 1975 and were re-affirmed by Assembly in 1980. They are available on the Church's web-site.

5.11.4 The *Manual* also includes (section F) the Statement on Presidency at the Sacraments from the *Patterns of Ministry* report which was accepted by the 1995 Assembly as expressing the mind of the Church 'at this present time'. This Statement suggests the following pattern of presidency:

- a) a Minister should preside when available;
- b) in situations of pastoral necessity where no Minister is available, the District Council should make provision for lay presidency; Moderating Elders and Lay Preachers should be considered first;
- c) authorisation for lay presidency, normally from within the congregation concerned, should not cover a period longer than a year without consultation and review of the needs of the congregation concerned.

[This is the wording that was accepted by the 1995 Assembly even though it separately rejected the proposal to establish 'Moderating Elders']

5.11.5 This 1995 Statement clearly acknowledges that it is possible for District Councils to authorise lay presidents for a longer term than for particular dates and times. It draws attention to the sentence in the *Basis of Union* (paragraph 24) that says 'the pastoral needs of each situation shall be reviewed periodically by the district or area council in consultation with the local church'. This is not a reference to

the regular quinquennial visits by Area / District Councils to congregations but a separate requirement of those Councils to review regularly the pastoral needs of congregations where special arrangements have been made. It is important to emphasise that it is for each local church to decide how often it wishes to celebrate the sacraments. For example, the 1995 statement recognises that some congregations wish to celebrate communion every Sunday and this is part of the pastoral needs of these congregations to which their Area / District Councils must attend.

5.11.6 The *Basis of Union* refers (paragraph 24) to lay presidency by accredited lay preachers and one of the functions of Area / District Councils is to accredit lay preachers (*The Manual* section B paragraph 2 (3) A (vii)). In 1979, Assembly resolved to establish a Register of Nationally Accredited Lay Preachers and expressed the hope that District Councils, in accrediting lay preachers, would apply the national standards. In 2002, Assembly accepted a Lay Preaching Strategy which acknowledged that District Recognition of lay preachers exists alongside National Accreditation. It is our view that the word 'accredited' in the *Basis of Union* refers to all those accredited by District Councils and not only those on the Register of Nationally Accredited Lay Preachers. Therefore, the *Basis of Union* permits District Recognised Lay Preachers to be invited to preside at baptismal and communion services.

5.11.7 In 1998, Assembly approved an amendment to the *Basis of Union* to provide for presidency at the sacraments in local churches in emergency situations.

5.11.8 It is our view that the *Basis of Union* provides sufficient flexibility to allow for the appropriate authorisation for presidency at the sacraments of every local church.

5.11.9 Presidency at the sacraments in the United Reformed Church is in two senses a representative act. The president represents the congregation in what s/he does and represents the wholeness of the wider church in the local congregation. Presidency by a visiting Minister, for example a Synod Moderator, can be an important expression of the wider church in the local congregation. However, because of the importance of the representation of the congregation in the presidency, we consider that the person who presides should normally be someone who is in an ongoing close relationship with that congregation. The implication of the wording in the *Basis of Union* and of the 1995 Statement is that a Minister in such a close relationship will normally be available to preside and that 'situations of pastoral necessity' will be the exception. In fact, the availability of such a Minister is less and less common. The result is that the celebration of the sacraments in a local church is increasingly frequently presided over either by a Minister who is not well known to the congregation or by a Lay Preacher or one of the Elders who are authorised by their District Council on a semi-permanent basis. The current wording is, therefore, not entirely satisfactory.

5.11.10 The change in the pattern of local church presidency suggests that it may be time for the Church to re-state its policy on this matter in a form not only that is consistent with its understanding of the nature of presidency and the distinct ministries of Ministers and Elders but also that caters for most circumstances in most congregations.

5.11.11 In the context of what is said in sub-section 5.3 above, the question arises as to whether some or all of the Elders of each local congregation should be permanently appointed or ordained to preside at the sacraments. To appoint or ordain only some of the Elders to preside would divide the Eldership into two categories that would be confusing within the United Reformed Church and would create difficulties in its ecumenical relationships. To appoint or ordain all Elders to preside would seriously blur the distinction between the ministries of Ministers and Elders and would, again, cause ecumenical difficulties. We therefore conclude, perhaps reluctantly, that the existing provisions are preferable to any alternative currently available.

5.11.12 As stated above, we consider that the person presiding in a local church should normally be someone who is well known to that congregation. We believe that the current provisions of the *Basis of Union* for Area / District Councils to authorise particular Elders or Lay Preachers to preside for defined periods are adequate. We hope that Area / District Councils will take their responsibilities seriously in recognising when 'pastoral necessity' arises in each local church, what the best response should be, and in keeping such situations under review.

5.11.13 Presidency at the sacraments is a matter on which particular sensitivity is required regarding the Church's relationships with its ecumenical partners. However, some have argued that it is the varied practice within the United Reformed Church, rather than its policy, which causes most concern in some of the other Churches.

Recommendation 12: Area / District Councils should recognise and use the flexibility provided by the *Basis of Union* with regard to presidency at the sacraments to ensure that the needs of each local church are properly met. Where 'situations of pastoral necessity' occur, the Councils should take great care to keep them fully and regularly under review, out of respect to the congregations concerned and to the Church's ecumenical partners.

6. MEETING THE CHALLENGE: FURTHER IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Ecumenical relationships

6.1.1 An increasing number of United Reformed Church congregations are involved in local ecumenical projects or partnerships. The Church's future patterns of ministries need to take this fact into account, allowing these congregations maximum local flexibility and minimising the burden placed on them by Church structures.

6.1.2 All the major Churches in the United Kingdom are, in one form or another, reviewing their future patterns of ministries. It is vital that the United Reformed Church continues to pay attention to what its ecumenical partners are thinking and doing and that any proposed changes to the United Reformed Church's patterns of ministries are shared with its partners before those changes are introduced.

6.1.3 In particular, the United Reformed Church is committed to developing a national pastoral strategy with the Methodist Church, with which it already has several

hundred united congregations. This commitment needs to be put into practice by arranging an early opportunity to discuss these proposals with Methodist representatives and to be ready to amend them if appropriate.

Recommendation 13: Formal discussions about the recommendations in this report should be arranged with representatives of the Methodist Church and other ecumenical partners.

6.2 Internal structures

6.2.1 This report has referred in several places to the burden that the internal structures of the United Reformed Church place on local churches and, in particular, on Ministers. This is an important and urgent matter that impacts on the effectiveness of the ministry of the Church and its Ministers. It is not within the remit of this report to consider these structures. However, it has been made clear that they will be considered by the 'Catch the Vision' Review Group.

6.3 Buildings

6.3.1 While this subject is beyond the remit of this report, we have been very aware that a number of our 'challenges' in relation to ministry are caused or exacerbated by the number of buildings from which the Church currently chooses to operate. An enormous challenge is presented to the Church both locally and nationally by its buildings. There are too many buildings that are either no longer needed where they are or that are no longer fit for purpose. This is another important and urgent matter that needs to be addressed for the sake of the ministry of the whole Church and in particular for the sake of those who are currently struggling to maintain these premises and to support the people who use them.

7. CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATION AND RESOLUTION: WHAT NEXT?

7.1 Conclusion

7.1.1 Many of our recommendations describe what is already happening in some parts of the Church. There is much good work being done and effective, sacrificial service being offered in the Church and in the world on the Church's behalf. We need to keep learning from each other as we respond locally to God's call to mission.

7.1.2 The use of 'changing ministry' in the title of this report is deliberately ambiguous. The ministry of the Church is always changing or adapting to meet new challenges. It is also part of the purpose of that ministry to facilitate change in the Church and the world, but this is not change for the sake of change. We do not propose the creation of any new orders of ministry or any new offices in the United Reformed Church. We do believe that our recommendations demand a radical transformation of the Church's existing patterns of ministries, particularly the way in which it uses Elders and Ministers. The purpose of this transformation is to re-focus the Church on its participation in God's mission to the world and to equip all the members of the Church, the whole people of God, to play a fuller part in the continuing ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

7.1.3 Since we began our work, Mission Council has launched a thorough and radical review of the life of the United Reformed Church, now described as 'Catch the Vision for God's tomorrow'. This review is expected to make recommendations about the structure of the Church as well as about its ministry. The recommendations in this report are based on the structure as it is. It may disappoint some that this is, in a sense, another interim report. The wording of the recommendations and of the single resolution reflects the need to co-ordinate the work of the two groups and to provide an opportunity for feedback on our recommendations before substantive resolutions are brought to Assembly. Your feedback on these recommendations will be very important. We recognise that we are asking you to respond very quickly in order to meet the timetable for Assembly 2005.

7.2 Recommendations

1. (after paragraph 4.4.3) Every local church should be challenged to review its life at all levels with the specific aim of being more supportive and enabling of the dispersed ministry of its members even if this means doing less 'in church' activities. Local churches should look for ways, within the context of worship and otherwise, of affirming the ministries of their members outside the church. This needs to be an inclusive activity from which no one is left out.
2. (after paragraph 4.5.2) Every local church should be encouraged to explore new ways of gathering at different times and places – the Church going to meet people where they are rather than the Church expecting people to come to where it is.
3. (after paragraph 5.3.7) The appointment and ordination of Elders should involve a commitment to continuing development, including appropriate local training. Synods should facilitate this training, working with local Ministers and making full use of available resources. District Councils should formally acknowledge the call of Elders by local churches and be represented at their ordination and, if they are transferring from another District, their induction.
4. (after paragraph 5.4.3) Whilst welcoming the current Local Church Leaders as successful experiments and effective forms of local leadership, the Church should build on this experience to create a flexible framework for the introduction of Pastors of local congregations, a role working from within the Elders' meeting. All Synods could then be encouraged to make use of this as one optional form of leadership available to local churches.
5. (after paragraph 5.5.3) The United Reformed Church should adopt the title 'local preacher' in place of 'lay preacher'.
6. (after paragraph 5.7.12) The United Reformed Church should re-commit itself to the development of appropriate and effective leadership in every local congregation, whilst recognising that this does not mean that every congregation will have a Minister directly providing their day-to-day leadership. The deployment of Ministers should be determined by the need to make the best use of this scarce resource in equipping, empowering and leading the Church in its participation in God's mission.
7. (after paragraph 5.8.5) Churches should be encouraged to work in groups or clusters, wherever possible ecumenically, with Ministers, Elders, Local Church Leaders, Lay Preachers and others offering them collaborative leadership.
8. (after paragraph 5.9.4) The Church should develop a new way of classifying its Ministers according to the service being offered that can supersede the existing stipendiary 'Patterns' and non-stipendiary 'Models'.
9. (after paragraph 5.9.5) The Church should continue to develop the flexibility of the initial and continuing training of its Ministers and Church Related Community Workers to meet more effectively their varied circumstances and their fast changing contexts and to enable them to more easily transfer between different forms of service.
10. (after paragraph 5.9.8) Work should be done on the implications and mechanics of making the remuneration package of all Ministers and Church Related Community Workers more flexible according to their circumstances, such as dependent relatives, within the maximum figures approved each year by Assembly.
11. (after paragraph 5.10.2) Detailed consideration should be given to broadening the terms of the Ministry and Mission Fund so that it could be used not just to pay for Ministers and Church Related Community Workers but also to support other forms of leadership within the Church. An attractive annual report on how the Ministry and Mission Fund is spent should be made available to local churches.
12. **(after paragraph 5.11.13) Area / District Councils should recognise and use the flexibility provided by the Basis of Union with regard to presidency at the sacraments to ensure that the needs of each local church are properly met. Where 'situations of pastoral necessity' occur, the Councils should take great care to keep them fully and regularly under review, out of respect to the congregations concerned and to the Church's ecumenical partners.**
13. (after paragraph 6.1.3) Formal discussions about the recommendations in this report should be arranged with representatives of the Methodist Church and other ecumenical partners.

7.3 Resolution

RESOLUTION

General Assembly:

- (i) welcomes the report *Equipping the Saints*;
- (ii) challenges every congregation to respond locally to recommendations 1 and 2;
- (iii) invites comments on recommendations 3 to 13 from churches, Area / District Councils and Synods to be sent to Ministries Committee by 31 December 2004;
- (iv) requests further work to be done by Ministries Committee in co-operation with the Catch the Vision Review Group and others so that formal proposals can be brought to the 2005 meeting of General Assembly.

Appendix I: Background: Terms of reference, working party membership and method of working, previous work

1. Terms of reference

1.1 Assembly 2000 received a report following a review into non-stipendiary ministry. Assembly agreed to the convictions and concerns expressed in that report in the following resolution:

General Assembly instructs the Ministries Committee, in consultation with others, to continue the discussion of present and future patterns of ministries, building on ecumenical insights and designed to enable the church to respond more effectively to the challenge of the mission strategy outlined in *Growing Up*.

1.2 In response to this resolution, Ministries Committee set up a working party to further explore these matters with others inside and outside the United Reformed Church. The working party presented an interim report to Assembly 2002. This report ended with five questions, the responses to which were intended to provide the working party with a better appreciation of the understanding within the wider church of the ministry of the whole people of God. Assembly passed the following resolution:

General Assembly

- 1 welcomes the interim report of the Future Patterns of Ministries Working Party of Ministries Committee
- 2 remits it to local churches, districts and synods for consideration and response by the end of April 2003
- 3 requests Ministries Committee to present a further report to General Assembly in 2004 in the light of the responses received and the additional work to be done on outstanding issues.

2. Working party membership and method of working

2.1 A workbook was prepared to help churches consider and respond to the 2002 report. It was based on the report but contained additional material including some appropriate Bible studies. This workbook was distributed with the 2002 Assembly Record. The working party has received the responses to the 2002 report and has, with some changes of personnel, continued its work. This work has included ongoing consultation with others within and outside the Church. This report is the result of that work and is offered to Assembly and the wider church for consideration, decision and action. The report is presented in a form that can be read on its own but it obviously builds on all the previous work.

2.2	Membership of the working party	from	to
	Revd Christine Craven – executive secretary	2000	2004
	Revd Dr Peter Cruchley-Jones	2000	2002
	Mr John Ellis – convener	2002	2004
	Mrs Wilma Frew	2000	2004
	Revd Graham Long – convener	2000	2002
	Revd John Piper	2000	2004
	Revd Rachel Poolman	2000	2002
	Revd Bill Sewell	2000	2004
	Revd Dr David Thompson	2002	2004
	Revd Kirsty Thorpe – theological reflector	2000	2002
	Revd Dr Sandy McDonald		
	– Church of Scotland	2000	2002
	Revd Bill Snelson		
	– Churches Together in England	2000	2002

Appendix II: Feedback: Responses to the Future Patterns of Ministries Report to Assembly 2002

1. The Questions

1.1 Running through the interim report of the Future Patterns of Ministries working party to Assembly 2002 was the conviction that a fuller understanding and development of the ministry of the whole people of God was of primary importance if the United Reformed Church was to become more effective in mission. In order to test the mind of the Church on this matter, the report asked for feedback on the following five questions:

1.2 Assuming you agree that the 90,000 members of the United Reformed Church should all be engaged in its ministry, what key messages do you have on sections 2 to 7 of this report?

In your experience to what extent are the existing ministries of ministers and elders geared to equip your members to exercise their ministry? In what ways do they hold them back?

What are the main changes to your activities and structures which you believe will develop and support your members' ministries in their daily lives?

From your local experience, describe any innovations in leadership patterns which you feel should be considered for adoption more widely?

As you look at your needs, what would be the most useful changes that could be made to the United Reformed Church as a whole?

2. The Responses

2.1 Written responses were received from 8 individuals, just over 100 churches, 12 Districts and 7 Synods. Oral feedback was received from many others. Members of the working party were involved in discussions of the 2002 report and its questions in churches, Districts, and Synods.

2.2 Some generally shared understandings were:

Every church member should be actively involved in the ministry of the Church, the whole people of God.

Every local congregation needs effective leadership.

Ministers and others need to be trained in collaborative leadership.

Ministers and Elders need to be enablers and encourages as well as 'doers' – bringing out the gifts in others (rather than deskilling them by pretending to be omni-competent).

The representative role of Ministers is important.

Local mission should be the main focus and should preferably be ecumenical.

2.3 Some common questions were:

What does the 'ministry of the whole people of God' mean in practice?

What does 'ministry' mean? How do we re-think and re-work the ministry of each local congregation, making best use of the available resources?

We are generally good at welcoming people in our churches but how do we make ourselves better at 'going out' into the world with the Good News?

How do we stop the feelings that Ministers are being 'spread too thin' and that the Church 'does not have enough Ministers'?

How should we interpret the Basis of Union today when it says that a Minister of the Word and Sacraments should be 'readily available to every local church'?

How do we make the Church structures more enabling of local mission and less of a burden?

2.4 The working party is most grateful to those who responded in writing to the questions posed at the end of the 2002 report. We were greatly encouraged by these contributions. The points listed above are inevitably an inadequate summary of the responses received. These were all carefully considered and they have had a significant impact on our subsequent work including the contents of this report.

Appendix III: References: Details of important reference documents

1. Foundational documents

1.1 The following documents are those that we consider to be foundational in any discussion of ministry within the United Reformed Church. We have deliberately chosen not to repeat their arguments at any length in this report.

The *Basis of Union* of the United Reformed Church.

The section on Ministry in the *Manual* of the United Reformed Church.

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry published by the World Council of Churches in 1982. ISBN: 2-8254-0709-7. Copies can still be obtained via the United Reformed Church bookshop.

The *Patterns of Ministry* report to Assembly 1995 available from the United Reformed Church.

The statement on the *Theology of Ministry* presented to Mission Council in October 1997 and accepted by it as a resource of the Church. Available on the United Reformed Church web-site.

The Diaconal Ministry and the Diaconate presented to Mission Council in January 2001 and accepted by it as a resource of the Church. Available on the United Reformed Church web-site.

The *Guidelines on Presidency at the Lord's Supper* which were re-affirmed by Assembly in 1980. Available on the United Reformed Church web-site.

2. Other important references

2.1 A bibliography was provided to accompany the interim report of the Future Patterns of Ministries working party to Assembly 2002. These references are also relevant to this report but are not repeated here. In addition, the following publications have been particularly helpful to the working party:

The Elders, seniority within earliest Christianity by RA Campbell published by T & T Clark, Edinburgh in 1994. ISBN: 0 567 09702 1.

Ministry for Mission by David Peel published by Northern College, Manchester in 2003.

Stating the Gospel by David Thompson published by T & T Clark, Edinburgh in 1990. ISBN (hardback): 0 567 09508 8.

2.2 Many of the Churches in the United Kingdom have been involved in similar reviews of the future of their ministry. In addition to those referred to in our 2002 bibliography, we note in particular:

Presence and prophecy produced by the Board of Mission for the Archbishops' Council. Published by Church House Publishing and Churches Together in Britain and Ireland in 2002. ISBN: 0-7151-5548-2.

Mission-Shaped Church Report to General Synod of Church of England February 2004. Published by Church House Publishing. ISBN: 0-7151-4013-2.