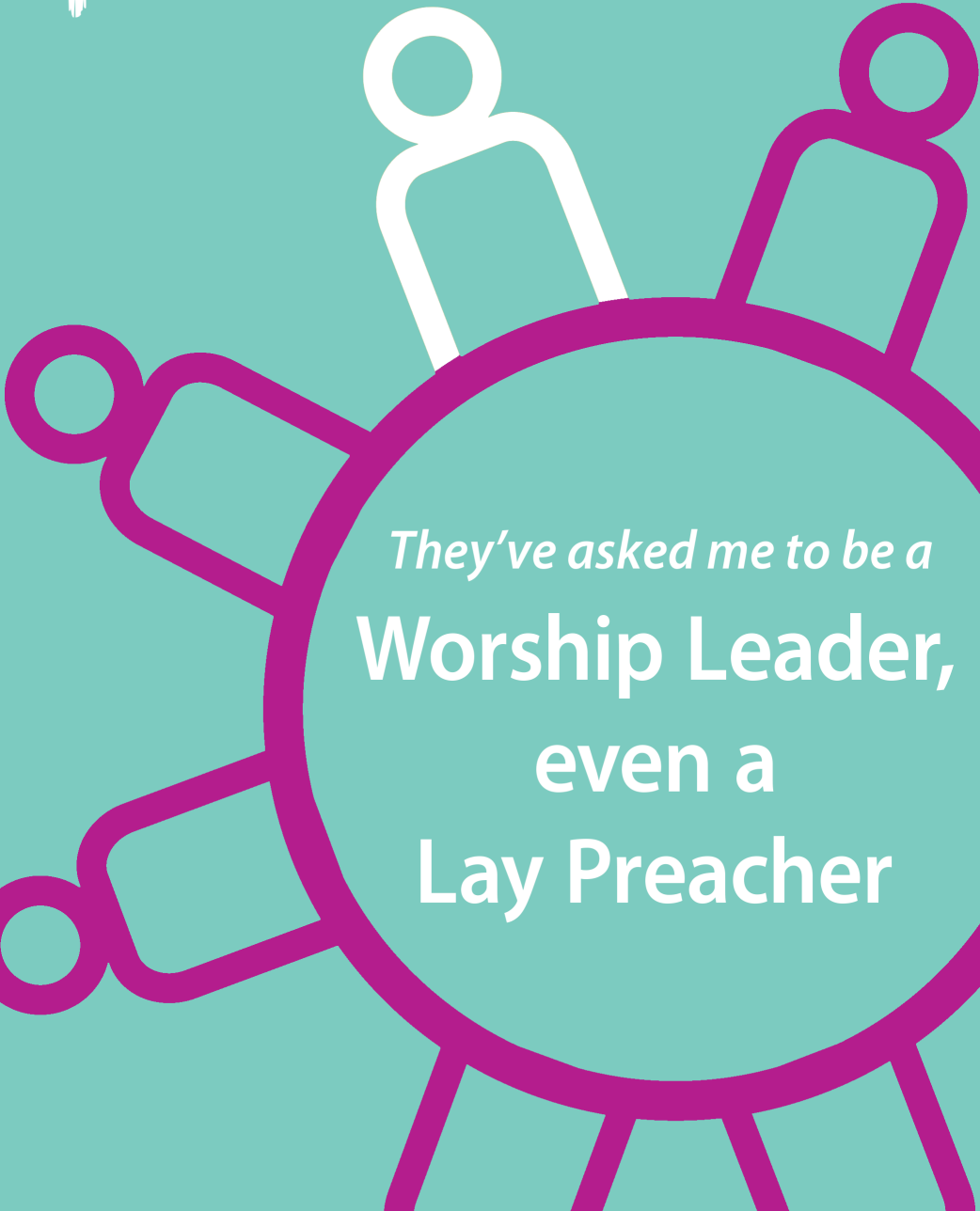




The
United
Reformed
Church



They've asked me to be a
Worship Leader,
even a
Lay Preacher

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Introduction

This booklet has been written primarily for people exploring a call to become either a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher. You may already be involved in leading worship in your local church and are interested in developing your skills and gaining formal authorisation as a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher within the United Reformed Church.

The URC has two kinds of formally authorised ministry for leading worship: Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. The second part of this booklet details

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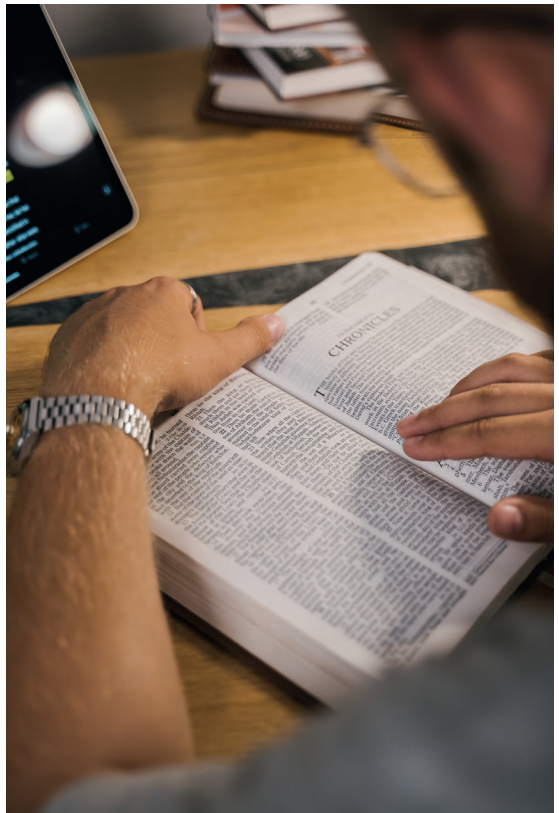
the training and development of both these ministries. It also gives an overview of the expected role and characteristics of Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers.

Discerning a call

You may be surprised to be considering training to be a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher; perhaps someone has asked you to consider it, or you have become aware that God has been prompting you to explore it. Whatever your initial response (which could include pride, joy and/or fear), we suggest you take your time to discern if it feels like a

call to you – or definitely does not. Don't feel pressurised into making a quick decision – think and pray about it and, if possible, seek the counsel of someone whose judgement you trust. We'd also recommend speaking with someone experienced in worship leading, such as an experienced Lay Preacher, for more information. If you don't know any Lay Preachers, speak to your Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner or Synod Training Officer – they'll be able to help you.

As part of your discernment process we strongly recommend you get as much information as possible about the realities of serving as either a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher: read this booklet, talk to others; ask if you could shadow a Worship Leader or Lay Preacher, or both, and get a good understanding of what the differences are in what they do. Perhaps you could dip your toe in the water and talk to the Elders, Minister/Interim Moderator of the church you attend to offer to lead worship there to see how it feels. You should soon get a sense of whether this is something to which God is calling you. And if it isn't, don't be afraid to withdraw, even during training. It isn't to anyone's benefit for services to be led by someone whose heart isn't really in it.



What do Locally Recognised Worship Leaders do?

Worship Leaders are people who offer themselves to lead prayers, to preach, and to lead services in their own church community. They lead worship in their own local context where they are a member, individually or as part of a team.

What do Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers do?

Lay Preachers lead services of worship (including preaching) in United Reformed churches and in churches where the URC is in partnership with other denominations. They are a resource to the wider synod. Some serve in just one or two churches near to where they live; others will venture further afield, coming to enjoy the experience of sharing in worship with different congregations. Churches in the URC come in many shapes and sizes, with varied approaches to worship. You will undoubtedly have a preferred style of worship and preaching – your training will increase your skill set and prepare you in the use of a range of worship styles.



Expected characteristics of a Locally Recognised Worship Leader

A Worship Leader needs to have a real sense of wanting to explore leading worship, a willingness to share with others in the journey of faith and a desire to grow in understanding of the Christian faith. Effective worship leaders take opportunities to continue to learn and grow in the attitudes, skills and knowledge relevant to the role of worship leader.

Expected characteristics of an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher

A Lay Preacher needs to have a mature knowledge and understanding of the Bible and must be a good communicator.

'worship can play a part in positive change in the life of a congregation'

Effective Lay Preachers take opportunities to continue to learn and grow in the attitudes, skills and knowledge relevant to the role of a Lay Preacher to ensure they assist the congregation in drawing close to God. To enable this to happen it's important to be able to establish a worshipful relationship with the congregation and to be open to go where the Spirit leads.

Both Worship Leaders and Lay Preachers need to understand how worship can play a part in positive change in the life of a congregation.

Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and safeguarding

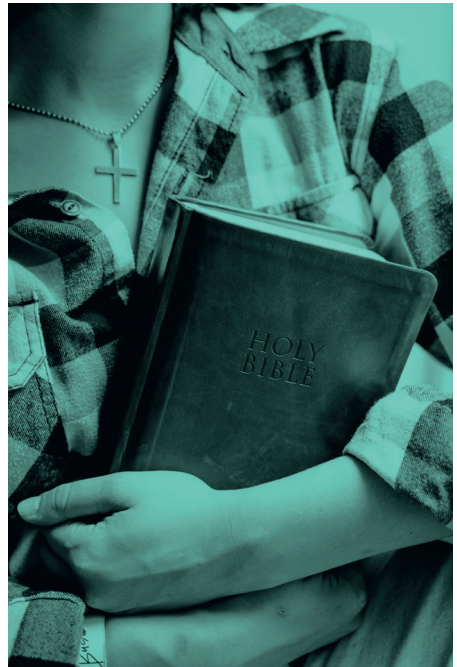
Both Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers are required to undertake a free of charge Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (England and Wales) or, if in Scotland, a Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) scheme check. These checks are arranged by the Ministries office at Church House for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers and by the Synod for those who are Locally-Recognised.

What is the time commitment?

All church ministry has some costs – and becoming a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher is no exception. To be effective you will need to commit time and energy to the role, along with a sharing and giving of self. Local churches vary tremendously in what they ask of Worship Leaders or Lay Preachers – and of course the personal circumstances of individuals have a huge impact on how much time they are able to dedicate to the role. One of the satisfactions for those leading worship is that their own learning continues as they prepare services. Some will begin thinking about a service several weeks before; others find a looming deadline focusses the mind better. (But don't leave it until Saturday evening!). Six to eight hours of preparation time might not be unreasonable for a full service; slightly less if you are preparing part of a service or preparing as a team.

Before making your decision, ask yourself:

- Are there things I'll need to give up or let go of in order to take up this new ministry?
- Am I willing to make training and serving as a Local Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher a priority for my time and energy?
- And for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers, am I prepared to be frequently absent from my own local church fellowship in order to serve in the wider Church?



If, having read this far, you are still sure that you have been called to this ministry, then read on for information on the training and development routes for both Locally Recognised Worship Leaders and Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers.

How long are Worship Leaders or Lay Preachers appointed for?

There is no set term of appointment for a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or an Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher – once trained and serving you may continue in the role for as long as you wish, individual preachers deciding when it's time for them to stop. Likewise, each preacher will decide how many services they can commit to. Pulpit secretaries (the people who book preachers for churches) usually plan some months ahead, so do give several months' notice of your decision to stop!

Becoming a Worship Leader in the URC

There are two routes into becoming a Locally Recognised Worship Leader: Stepwise or a synod-developed course (if your synod has a comparable course). Stepwise streams offer the exploration of worship leading and reflection on this learning, providing opportunities to practise skills developed and to apply learning. This process would normally be synod-based and accredited, and participants would become Locally Recognised Worship Leaders. Study can be done as part of a group or by joining other individuals to create a study group from different church contexts.

You will be required to take the following 'streams' or modules:

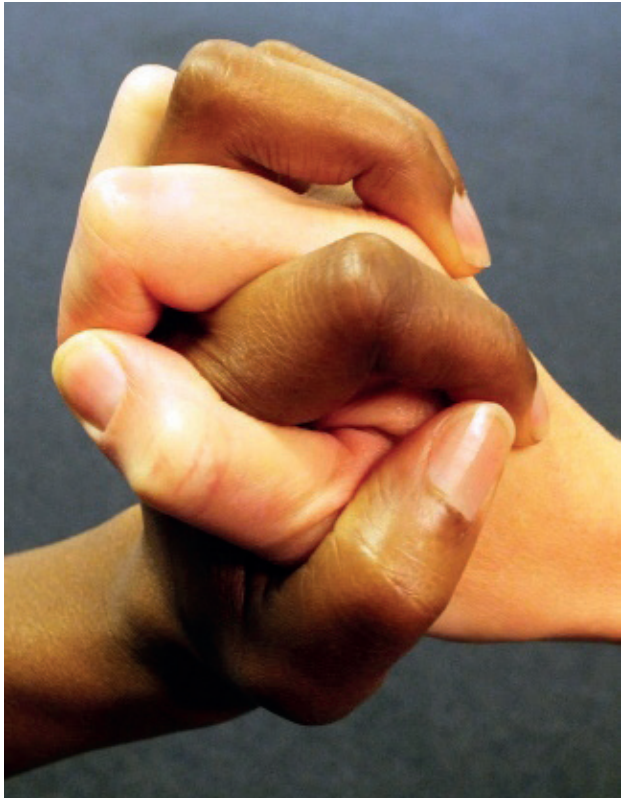
- Stepwise Faith-Filled Life
- Stepwise Faith-Filled Worship

You will be asked to create a portfolio as an ongoing part of study (a collection of reflections, journaling, resources, worship material and other evidence using a variety of media, as preferred) and there will be a final presentation (using technology, art or other format) or 1,000-word essay. At the end of the course you will be asked to do an assessed service at which the Synod Lay Preaching Commissioner (or their deputy) will be present.

After you have completed your training there will normally be a commissioning service for you.

The whole course should take approximately 18 months to two years, allowing time for growth and development. For further information contact the Secretary for Ministries ministries@urc.org.uk

For synod courses please speak with your Synod Training Officer (or equivalent).



Becoming a Lay Preacher in the URC

'Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher' remains the more formally recognised ministry within the URC. This ministry is for those who feel a call to wider service in the synod by offering themselves as a more itinerant preaching resource and one that is more widely recognised and transferable if a person moves within the synod and across synod boundaries.

'This ministry is for those who feel a call to wider service in the synod'

Training would take place through the Resource Centres for Learning (RCLS), at present at Northern College, Manchester, and takes account of prior learning and individual needs.

This suggested programme covers: personal development; crafting worship, including the sermon; the Bible in worship; the theology of the United Reformed Church (including attendance at 'You're Welcome' – an introduction to the ethos and history of the United Reformed Church); contextualising worship and preaching (including taking account of different learning styles and personality types); safe boundaries in pastoral care; equality and diversity; and intergenerational worship.

Learning will be by mixed mode, with some sessions by Zoom and some pre-recorded presentations, and work to be done in between sessions. Attendance at two weekends a year for community-building and for personal assessment purposes by the RCL is a requirement.

Your synod will assign you a mentor, normally an experienced LP, to meet regularly with you to reflect with you on your course, to be present when you lead worship or parts of worship, and to give constructive feedback. They will reflect on extracts from journal with you to help you develop as a reflective practitioner. You will meet with your mentor every two months and with a RCL tutor once a term.

You will be invited to an annual assessment of your portfolio with your mentor and tutor. Once you have completed the course and been given Assembly accreditation by the URC Ministries Committee you will be given recognition within your home church and synod through a Commissioning Service led by the Lay Preaching Commissioner.

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For further information contact the Secretary for Ministries
ministries@urc.org.uk

The last word

As you start your journey towards becoming a Locally Recognised Worship Leader or Assembly Accredited Lay Preacher, particularly as you start to lead worship and preach, you may well feel apprehensive or even overwhelmed.

One experienced Lay Preacher has these words of wisdom for you: 'If you feel a sense of inadequacy, that's good, because it means you'll seek God's strength! And always remember that, in the URC, it's local churches that decide who to invite to preach; you will be affirmed when you are invited back a second time!'

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

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



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