

# Paper B/D/M 1

## Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers and the Newbigin Pioneering Hub

Ministries, Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Mission Committees

### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision.
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>5. General Assembly agrees to use the Newbigin Pioneering HUB to train and support its lay pioneer ministers.</b></li><li><b>6. General Assembly recognises the ministry of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers as a ministry of the United Reformed Church and instructs the Ministries Committee to bring 'Marks of Ministry of a Lay Pioneer' to the Assembly Executive for adoption.</b></li></ol>

### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	To recognise a new ministry of Assembly accredited Lay Pioneers and to train them through the URC Newbigin Pioneering HUB.
<b>Main points</b>	There is an opportunity to work with CMS and seedbeds in establishing a newly accredited ministry of lay pioneers which a) builds on work already begun in Mission Committee through the Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Task Group b) to support and train lay pioneers through the Newbigin HUB c) and, as both denominations celebrate 50 years, to work in cooperation with the Congregational Federation.
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	Patterns of Ministry (1995) Equipping the Saints (2004) A Challenge to the Church (2008) What is the Spirit saying to the churches?: the future of the United Reformed Church (2015) Fresh Expressions Enabling Group Report Mission Council June 2019.
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	Ministries, Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning and Mission Committees, Congregational Federation.

## Summary of impact

<b>Financial</b>	To be funded from existing Ministries budget.
<b>External (e.g. ecumenical)</b>	Planning involvement of, and possible partnership with, the Congregational Federation as the first Free Church HUB which will open the HUB up to other denominations.

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 *All are called. All are called to discipleship; all are called to ministry; all are called to mission... not all are called to the same expression of discipleship, the same form of ministry, the same field of mission*<sup>1</sup>. In an age of decline, the challenge to the church in responding to God's call is to open eyes, hearts and wills to the gifts of ministry that God gives his people, and to release and nurture those gifts.
- 1.2 Since 1972, we've adopted many programmes and initiatives to equip people to be actively focused outwards into the world. Now we are ably Walking the Way, rediscovering where we believe God is calling the United Reformed Church.
- 1.3 We are, of course, richly blessed that our reformed heritage doesn't restrict ministry simply to that of ordained clergy. While we still believe wholeheartedly that Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs have a place within our denomination, but we also rejoice that we value the place of the whole people of God – such is the inclusivity and diversity of servant leadership within our church.
- 1.4 If we are truly looking to be inclusive in our church life, it will mean reshaping already existing church life to include a wider variety and understanding of 'church' and not the reshaping new members to fit into our existing church life.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.5 The 2021 General Assembly Moderators' Report – Wisdom for liminal times challenged:
- The balance between the pastoral and the missional is difficult to strike. In the past, the church has almost definitely focused too much on the pastoral and been more inward-looking. However, there remains a place for the more traditional pastoral model of church, typically associated with a building, alongside a pioneering missional approach. If this could be linked with release of funds for new pioneer ministries / CRCW work in the area, that might be an encouragement.*
- 1.6 If all are called, but not to the same form of ministry, then we need to be creative in crafting newly accredited ministries where there is need. This is not about plugging gaps, but genuinely and intentionally trying to find out what God is calling the Church to be and do.
- 1.7 As Lesslie Newbigin said '*The role of the church is to be a sign, an instrument and foretaste of God's coming reign in the place for which it has responsibility*'. Our action comes from a readiness for responsibility.<sup>3</sup>
- 1.8 In our 50th year, perhaps it is no coincidence, some might even say it is God-given, that an exciting opportunity has opened up to partner with the Church Mission Society in creating a new accredited ministry, which meets the framework already affirmed by

<sup>1</sup> 'Incarnation Ministry being with the church' Samuel Wells page 114

<sup>2</sup> Mission Council Appendix five Report from the 20-40 task group from GA2018 Book of Reports page 29

<sup>3</sup> Action springs not from thought, but a readiness for responsibility D. Bonhoeffer

Mission Council through the work of the church's Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Enabling Group.

## 2. The background

2.1 Ministries Committee, in collaboration with the Fresh Expressions and Pioneering Steering Group (Mission Committee), has been considering ways to facilitate the ministry of the whole people of God within the United Reformed Church, in accordance with its remit.

2.2 Previous Ministries Committee reports<sup>4</sup> to General Assembly have encouraged Synods and local pastorates to consider alternative ministries alongside Ministers of Word and Sacraments and CRCWs. Although progress has been made with regard to this, there is still a recognition that opportunity is limited in many places by the lack of resources.

2.3 In 2015, 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?: the future of the United Reformed Church' challenged the URC:

*The affirmation the Faith and Order Committee feels led to make is that the future of the United Reformed Church is not about dying, but about living more fruitfully, prophetically and adventurously, being re-energised by the power of the Holy Spirit in faithfulness to Jesus Christ... An invitation went out on the United Reformed Church website and through the synods to contribute papers... 30 papers were received covering a range of fruitful areas... including an interesting proposal that the United Reformed Church should become a pioneer missional movement or a Reformed order within another church.<sup>5</sup>*

2.4 In November 2017, Mission Council agreed to fund additional ministries. While some individual churches or group pastorates may have the funds to pay for alternative ministry and leadership on a part-time, or even full-time, basis, this is beyond the reach of most churches, for whom the first call on their financial resources rightly remains the M&M fund. Yet in some places lay people can be identified to exercise such ministries in a voluntary capacity, but very often the lack of available volunteers thwarts such enterprises.

2.5 As a result, in 2019 Ministries Committee set aside £75K for three years to fund such ministries, and set out the criteria for Synods to make 'bids' for the finance. However, by 2021 it was clear that all the pilot ministries had faltered or ceased because of the pandemic. Ministries took the decision that it would be virtually impossible to evaluate the scheme and a line was drawn under it.

2.6 At the same time, in 2018, Mission Committee reported that the Fresh Expressions future strategy would focus on three areas for future work:

- Training: more training of lay people to engage in fresh expressions; development of a pioneer pathway in ordination training; integration of fresh expressions thinking in the training elements of Walking the Way, such as Stepwise
- Supporting the fresh expressions the URC has and encouraging the development of new ones
- Setting targets in consultation with Synods.

It was noted at the time that it is essential that any strategy evolves organically, and that it is more about creating a culture of permission giving, storytelling, recognising 'Kingdom stuff', and releasing resources. As a result of the above, the Gathering was established in 2020 but, again, because of the pandemic, activities had to be reframed.

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<sup>4</sup> Patterns of Ministry (1995), Equipping the Saints (2004), Challenge to the Church (2008)

<sup>5</sup> 'What is the Spirit saying to the Churches?: the future of the United Reformed Church' challenged the URC pages 9-10

- 2.7 However, in discussions in the FX Enabling Group, it became apparent that lay ministries were moving in a new direction with pioneering at the forefront. While new ministries of NSM Model 4 (ordained) and NS CRCW (commissioned) had been established with a module on pioneering available at one of the RCLs, there was still the gap of supporting and training lay ministries in this ministry.
- 2.8 In May 2021, the FX Enabling Group collaborated with Jonny Baker from the Church Mission Society (CMS), which already partners with a few dioceses to run Hubs offering their Certificate in Pioneering, with a view to establishing a pioneering Hub which would create a space to encourage the pioneer gift in different missional contexts, nurture innovative mission on the ground, and grow a network of people re-imagining and transforming the UK with the Gospel story.
- 2.9 There are currently no Hubs that serve the Free Churches.
- 2.10 The following proposals builds on the work already brought to Mission Council by the Mission Committee, in line with the agreed framework for Fresh Expressions work, and are a collaboration between Children's and Youth, Education and Learning, Ministries and Mission.
- 2.11 The cost for running the course and the HUB will be £43k per annum, which will come from the existing Ministries budget for lay ministries. It is anticipated there will be additional income from external users. A verbal report will be given at General Assembly as to the commitment of the Congregational Federation who have yet to take this proposal to their General Assembly.

### **3. Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneering Ministry**

#### **Proposal 1. To recognise a ministry for lay pioneers (Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers) which is accredited by and accountable to the URC.**

- 3.1.1 Pioneering is about firsts.
- Being the first to lead ministry into new places for and with others. Pioneers must be able to see a new future, and have the skills and gifts needed to make it a reality now.
  - Pioneers connect with people outside of Church, creating new ways of doing Church together in their community.
  - Pioneers are leaders of innovation, with a gift for seeing what God is doing and responding creatively to it.
- 3.2 Pioneering is a big part of the church's mission to be a growing church for all people in all places for the sake of God's Kingdom.
- 3.3 Those who complete the training would be accredited to this new ministry in the same, or similar, way that Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers are accredited to their ministry, with opportunities of ongoing support and accountable to the denomination.
- 3.4 There is a critical opportunity to grasp here that builds on work already agreed by Mission Council and General Assembly to train more lay people to engage in fresh expressions and pioneering. We are already aware that many, including our 20-40s, may not fit easily into the ministries that others have already prepared.
- 3.5 CMS delivers a proven training programme, but if the URC can recruit, recognise and release a new generation of pioneers, then a fresh lease of life is possible in the local communities we are called by God to serve. The HUB will also serve as a mechanism for recognising those in existing pioneer ministries.

- 3.6 The Ministries Committee has prepared a safer recruitment policy for Lay Pioneers and Guidelines on the Conduct and Behaviour of Lay Pioneers (who will be subject to the Disciplinary Policy for Office Holders). These are modelled on existing policies for Assembly Accredited Lay Preachers. If Assembly adopts the proposal, the Ministries Committee will bring to Assembly Executive a paper for adoption on the 'Marks of Lay Pioneer Ministry'. If anyone would wish to see these policies, they are available from the Ministries Office at Church House.

## 4. The Newbigin Pioneering HUB<sup>6</sup>

### **Proposal 2. General Assembly recognises the ministry of Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneers as a ministry of the United Reformed Church and instructs the Ministries Committee to bring 'Marks of Ministry of a Lay Pioneer' to the Assembly Executive for adoption.**

- 4.1 Hubs create a space to encourage the pioneer gift in different missional contexts, nurture innovative mission on the ground and grow a network of people re-imagining and transforming the UK with the Gospel story.
- 4.2 At an away day in February, representatives from Ministries, Children's and Youth Work, Education and Learning, Mission, the Congregational Federation and the West Midlands Synod met to look at the how the HUB might train and support lay pioneers. We determined the purpose of the HUB would be:

*'To discover, nurture, empower and release a new Community of Pioneers, able to see God's love and shalom flourish in their local communities.'*

- 4.3 When we were looking to set up the Hub, we were aware from our conversations with CMS that they already had a good track record of being a catalyst for mission offering training opportunities for lay Pioneers, using a model already established, and working in varying geographical settings. It seemed sensible to use their expertise and knowledge to enable the URC to step out and locate the HUB in a pioneering context with them. They have a track record of creating relationships, possibilities and opportunities with people and churches. This enables the HUB to be rooted, connected, and agile. Such a setting can bring people together and grow Pioneers, but also support and resource them for their futures.
- 4.4 It is therefore proposed that the HUB be situated at Lodge Road URC, Birmingham, with the assistance of the Revd Ashley Barker, a URC NSM, who has a wealth of experience in pioneering and running accredited training courses. Ms Linda Rayner, URC Coordinator for Fresh Expressions, will be a key link person for the denomination. The Hub would be a URC 50th anniversary project investing in the future mission of God.
- 4.5 It is envisaged that the Newbigin Pioneering HUB will become a training space for lay people, and develop a supportive network of pioneers. The hub will enable the URC to:
- Identify and train pioneers – 20 per year target
  - Nurture and support a community of pioneers
  - Connect to wider networks – through CMS and beyond
  - Share stories of hope.
- 4.6. The Hub would offer the CMS Certificate in Lay Pioneering to a new accredited ministry of lay pioneering (Assembly Accredited Lay Pioneer). The training pulls people together, and creates a place of learning, resourcing and action; then the network, longer term,

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<sup>6</sup> Permission has been sought from the family of the Revd Dr Lesslie Newbigin to use the Newbigin name and has been granted.

provides ongoing encouragement, connection, support and communication. Training brings a level of accountability, denominational recognition, and access to wider resourcing.

4.7 The cost of the course for six modules will total £600, or £300 for URC approved participants. It is anticipated that the CMS Certificate course will be open to lay persons of other Free Churches, creating a potential income stream to support the community.

4.8. The curriculum will consist of:

- What is Pioneering mission?
- Mission spirituality
- Reading the Bible for context
- Missional community engagement
- Church in mission
- Missional entrepreneurship.

Other modules are available, such as:

- Missional leadership
- Rural pioneer ministry
- Justice and reconciliation
- Doing theology
- Reflective practice.

4.9 Delivery of the course will be in hybrid form

- Three residential weekends at Greenhouse, near Bromsgrove
- Three Saturdays – in person at Lodge Road or online access (hybrid)
- Six evenings – in person at Lodge Road or online access (hybrid)
- Plus online small groups / learning circles and one-to-one mentoring
- This equates to 14 hours teaching per module (weekend or day, plus two evenings)
- Presentation to panel and graduation day at the end of the course.

4.10 It is envisaged that the first cohort will begin training in September 2022. The process has already begin to recruit, with an online Enquirers' Day in April, and an in person Taster Day at Lodge Road URC in May.

4.11. CMS will provide the teaching, assessment and module course support for the first cohort, while training up Ash Barker and a team of suitable people from within the URC and beyond to take on the training and assessment over the subsequent two years. Ash will coordinate the course recruitment and delivery, recruiting small group leaders and mentors from among those already exercising a pioneering ministry, who will also be invited to join the pioneering network.

4.12. Application and selection will follow the same process for safer recruitment as other accredited ministries.

4.13. Once training has been successfully completed, the Church will determine an individual's appropriateness to commission as an Assembly Accredited Pioneer. If Assembly agrees to the adoption of this new ministry, the Ministries Committee will prepare the necessary suite of policies to support it. These will include 'Marks of Ministry' (as we have for Ministers, Lay Preachers and others), criteria for accreditation and mechanisms for appropriate deployment, support and oversight of the ministry. Lay Pioneers will be subject to the same disciplinary policy as other comparable Office Holders within the life of the church.

- 4.14 We perhaps need to remind ourselves that, given the Church at best is relational, it can only flourish by relating deeply to the variety of people within and around it. Church at best is flexible, and patterns of church life that have worked in the past may not serve the future.<sup>7</sup> It is our hope that a newly accredited ministry of lay pioneering will enable others to flourish in God's love and shalom.

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<sup>7</sup> Mission Council Appendix five Report from the 20-40 task group from GA2018 Book of Reports page 22