

Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for accredited lay preachers

1. Introduction

This paper sets down expectations of accredited lay preachers in relation to ministers of word and sacraments, church related community workers (CRCWs) and elders within the United Reformed Church. Parallel papers about the expectations of ministers, CRCWs and elders are to be read alongside this document.

Whilst lay preachers are not mentioned in the Basis of Union, they exercise an essential and valued role in leading worship in United Reformed Churches. Accredited lay preachers are trained, accredited and commissioned by the United Reformed Church. Lay preachers share with ministers of word and sacraments in the leadership of worship in local churches. In their role of leading worship there may be times when a lay preacher is called upon to exercise a pastoral role when a minister of word and sacraments is not available and they need to adopt similar standards of integrity in their lives and relationships. Lay preachers, in addition to their promises as members of a United Reformed Church, at their commissioning service reaffirm their faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and undertake to exercise their ministry in accordance with the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church.

2. Standards of Christian Behaviour

2a Personal integrity and health

- To live a Christian life as persons of prayer and integrity.
- To be committed to growing in faith and discipleship and developing the gifts each has been given.
- To be aware of the need of ministers, lay preachers, elders and members to have appropriate boundaries that safeguard personal and spiritual health and welfare, to promote healthy relationships with others and not to do anything to undermine the spiritual health of another.
- To recognise the need for ministers, lay preachers, elders and members to have a healthy lifestyle and to balance demands on ministers/CRCWs' availability and accessibility with respect for ministers'/CRCWs' time for family and friends, personal renewal and rest and spiritual growth.

- To maintain strict confidentiality of all matters shared in confidence, except when required by law to do otherwise, e.g. with regard to the safety of children, and to respect ministers and elders needs to maintain that same confidentiality.
- To exercise care and sensitivity when seeking counsel from others and in discussion about pastoral concerns, in order that the identity of any person shall not be revealed unless permission has been granted.
- To refrain from using privilege or power for personal advantage or gain, whether financial, emotional, sexual or material.

2b Relationships with ministers

- To work collaboratively with ministers/CRCWs, elders, members and other lay preachers where appropriate.
- To regard all persons with equal respect and concern and not discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender, race, age, disability or sexual orientation, including ministers/CRCWs.
- To honour the ministers/CRCWs currently called to serve and not invite or encourage other ministers to be involved in the life of the church or to offer pastoral care without the ministers'/CRCWs' consent.
- To refrain from raising pastoral issues with a previous minister/CRCW.
To respect the work of previous ministers/CRCWs and deal honourably with their record.
To welcome retired ministers/CRCWs as members and worshippers in the pastorate.

2c Relationship with elders, members and others

- To regard all persons with equal love and concern.
- To uphold values of faithfulness, trust and respect.
- To share leadership and pastoral care with others called to these purposes where appropriate.
- To seek advice from others if in doubt about one's competence to deal with any issue or situation.
- To consider very carefully taking any position of responsibility, particularly in any church where the lay preacher is a not member, and to support the direction of church life initiated through the ministers/CRCWs, elders and church meetings.
- Not to enter a sexual relationship with anyone in their care.
- Not to be alone with a child or children or young people in a place quite separate from others.

2d Relationship with councils of the Church

- To recognise that local URC churches are part of the wider United Reformed Church and that the ministers/CRCWs are committed to play their part in the wider councils of the Church and in ecumenical relationships.
- To engage positively with all the councils of the church.
- To participate in synod's consultation and review of a pastorate if appropriate.

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