

Paper B1

Recognition of children's, youth and family ministry

Children's and Youth Work Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Paul Robinson paul@pjr-robinson.co.uk Sam Richards sam.richards@urc.org.uk
Action required	
Draft resolution(s)	<p>Resolution 11</p> <p>1. General Assembly recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry, and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.</p> <p>Resolution 12</p> <p>2. General Assembly acknowledges the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Leaders in local churches and invites Synods to work with the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Ministries Committee to develop appropriate schemes to offer accreditation and recognition of these roles.</p> <p>Resolution 13</p> <p>3. General Assembly believes there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.</p>

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	Celebrating and recognising the ministry of many people across church who work with and alongside our children and young people.
Main points	Recognition of the importance of ministry among children, young people and families, and consideration of how to acknowledge, encourage and equip those who undertake this within the URC.
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Jenny Mills, Secretary for Education and Learning Nicola Furley-Smith, Secretary for Ministries Steve Summers, Development Worker (Church Related Community Work and Special Category Ministry) Jamie Kissack, Moderator of Yorkshire Synod.

Summary of impact

Financial	The third resolution would result in future proposals coming to General Assembly or Assembly Executive that would require careful consideration of financial resources.
External (eg ecumenical)	Some reflection is detailed on the approaches and context of other denominations within the paper.

Introduction

- 1.1 What age were you when you were first introduced to church, to faith, to Jesus? Some people, wonderfully, become part of a church family as adults, but research shows that the majority of people who will be considering these resolutions at General Assembly would have done so as children or young adults.
- 1.2 Research carried out by the Church of England in 2017 showed that 40% of practising Christians came to faith before the age of 5; 56% before the age of 11; 75% before the age of 19; and 83% before the age of 25. This shows what we all might perceive in church life – that childhood and youth are key periods in life for faith formation.¹
- 1.3 *Talking Jesus* research identifies that growing up in a Christian family is the most significant factor in encouraging children and young people to engage with church and beginning a journey of faith. Other significant factors include a church's children and youth work, attending a regular time of worship, or a special service (a wedding or christening, for example).²

¹ 2017 ComRes research for CofE interviewed 8,150 GB adults aged 18+ online – of whom 4,190 identified as Christians. <http://www.comresglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Church-of-England-Church-Mapping-Survey-Data-Tables.pdf>

² *Talking Jesus: perceptions of Jesus, Christians and evangelism*, research conducted in 2015 on behalf of the Church of England, Evangelical Alliance and HOPE.

Talking Jesus: perceptions of Jesus, Christians and evangelism amongst 11-18 year olds, research commissioned in 2016 by the HOPE Revolution partnership: HOPE, Church of England, Soul Survivor, Urban Saints, Tearfund, Message Trust, Limitless, Youth for Christ and PAIS movement.

- 1.4 All of that tells us that work among children, young people and families is to be highly treasured as one of the key ways in which God's Spirit moves to draw people to faith in Christ.
- 1.5 The United Reformed Church has recognised the place of Children and Young People in the life of the church through its continued commitment to URC Youth (all those aged 11–25 inclusive), and, last year, through the launch of URC Children (for those aged 0–12 inclusive).
- 1.6 The 2022 Annual Church Returns reported that in the year ending December 2021 more than 1,000 children were baptised or dedicated in our churches; about 6,000 children and 3,000 young people are part of our worshipping community, making up over 8% of the average congregation. A further 17,200 children and 7,000 young people are associated with the life of the church.
- 1.7 These numbers show the importance, energy, and resources that local churches place upon ministry among children and young people. However, this also reflects a drop of just over two-thirds in children and young people associated with the church and almost half in the number attending worship since the end of 2007, the past 14 years. Over the same timeframe, both the average congregation and membership has roughly halved across our churches, and the number of URC churches has reduced by 345, almost 22%.
- 1.8 Other mainline denominations are facing similar decline – and responding by setting targets for growth in the number of young disciples (for example, the Church of England seeks to double the number of young disciples by 2030, identifying a chronic undervaluing and lack of investment in vocation and training for children's and youth work, and looking to spend £1.1 billion over the next ten years).
- 1.9 It is in this context that this paper and the attached resolutions invite the church to consider how we acknowledge, encourage and equip those who offer ministry among children, young people and families as treasured, valued and important servants in Christ's church.

The people involved

- 2.1 The annual returns from local churches suggest that there are around 6,200 individuals involved in delivering support and work through our local churches to children, young people and their families.
- 2.2 Most of those involved in that work will be volunteer leaders and helpers, some of whom will be young people themselves. There are others who stand alongside these dedicated people in this work locally – Elders of local churches (particularly one identified as a link to 'children and young people'), Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, and employed children, youth and family workers. These people are all supported in their Synods by Children and Youth Development Officers (or equivalents) and by the denominational Children's and Youth Work staff team.
- 2.3 This represents a huge range of different roles, with people offering different gifts to support our ministry to children, young people and their families. Perhaps you can see the way in which this reflects some of the images Paul offers

(1 Corinthians and Romans) of many parts working within a single body for the mission and purpose of the church.

- 2.4 With so many different people involved in work that often overlaps, it is not easy to identify specific roles to celebrate, cherish and equip. However, this paper seeks to identify two broad groups, and invites the church to consider whether a third should be considered.

Celebrating and cherishing local church volunteer roles

- 3.1 In any local church engaging in ministry with children and young people, there will be volunteers leading, working, participating and giving to that ministry. That may include Sunday school leaders and helpers, mid-week group leaders, Pilots Captains and leaders, leaders of uniformed organisations, creche carers, squash makers, biscuit providers, inspired craft preparers, runners of games, musicians, action song leaders, risk assessors, safeguarding overseers, story-tellers, tidy-uppers, active pray-ers, money-givers, and many more besides.
- 3.2 If you are part of the 83% who came to be part of a church family before the age of 25, you will, no doubt, be able to identify some of the people who you knew and that worked with you and led you to faith and welcomed you into the church family. If your church has active children, youth and family ministry at the moment, there will be some volunteers in your local church doing this work - you might like to pause reading this paper now, and in prayer give thanks to God for them.
- 3.3 Every local church volunteer working with children, young people and their families should be encouraged, celebrated, honoured and cherished by the Church. The work, time and energy they give and offer is a vital and crucial ministry in the life of the church. The first resolution attached to this paper, invites the United Reformed Church to recognise the ministry offered by these people.
- 3.4 We warmly encourage local churches to acknowledge this ministry too. One way local churches can do that is by commissioning people at time of appointment to a particular role (following safer recruitment) and setting aside time to rededicate people in continuing roles. The Children and Youth Work team have prepared some example commissioning and re-dedication promises and an example service for local churches to adapt, which you can view here:
www.bit.ly/CYW_dedication_service

There is also a booklet available for churches to give to people working with children and young people (especially as they begin a new role). You can find that here: **www.urc.org.uk/your-church/taking-a-role-in-your-church/working-with-children-and-young-people/**

Resolution 11

The United Reformed Church recognises the work of many people in local churches among children, young people and families as ministry and celebrates the gifts, time and energy that are shared to introduce and journey with children and young people in faith in Jesus. Local churches are warmly encouraged to commission these people to these key ministry roles.

Children's, Youth and Family Leaders

- 4.1 Some churches in the United Reformed Church, as a result of strategic thinking and prayer, have recognised a need to employ individuals to help them fulfil their ministry to children, young people and their families. Often with professional children and youth work qualifications, a formal contracted role, and receiving support from a local church, these people partner with volunteers, and strategically lead and develop a local church's children's, youth and family work.
- 4.2 In other places, this strategic leadership role is fulfilled by an individual responding to a call to serve as a volunteer.
- 4.3 The CYDO+ team can offer support and help to local churches exploring, managing and supporting churches that employ people to lead in children's, youth and family work. However, it is local churches that are responsible for the employment, training and personal development of these workers.
- 4.4 Across Synods and the wider denomination, the church should be able to recognise the professionalism, gifts and structured strategic focus these specific ministries bring to the church. However with employment often focussed and managed by the local church, it is not easy for there to be confidence in the ability and professionalism that such workers may be able to use in a wider context.
- 4.5 Recently a couple of Synods have been exploring recognition schemes. Yorkshire Synod, working closely with the Ministries department, has developed a Synod scheme of local recognition of Children and Youth Leaders (employed or volunteers). This is seen as a children's and youth work equivalent to 'Locally Recognised Worship Leaders'.
- 4.6 The Children's and Youth Work Committee recognises the value of such a scheme, and thanks the Yorkshire Synod's Children and Youth Committee and Ministries Committee for their work in developing this with the denominational Ministries Committee. This scheme details some marks of ministry, levels of qualification, an assessment of an observed piece of work, other expected requirements and renewal periods (see www.urcyorkshire.org.uk/lrcyl/).
- 4.7 The Children's and Youth Work Committee encourages the church to acknowledge the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Workers, and encourages Synods to work with Ministries Committee to develop their own similar schemes of local recognition, ensuring a standardised approach across Synods that can be tailored for each context. This should include making a promise to exercise this ministry in accordance with the Statement Concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC (to parallel other formally recognised ministries across the URC).

Resolution 12

The United Reformed Church acknowledges the ministry of Children's, Youth and Family Leaders in local churches and invites Synods to work with the Children's and Youth Work Committee and Ministries Committee to develop appropriate schemes to offer accreditation and recognition of these roles.

A formal ministry of URC Children, Youth and/or Family Minister?

- 5.1 A number of reflections have been offered recently to the Children and Youth Work Committee that suggest the United Reformed Church may wish to consider adding a formal ministry of Children's, Youth or Family Minister; alongside that of Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.
- 5.2 The CYWC have grappled a number of times with this question in different seasons. In many ways we recognise children's, youth and family work as ministry that churches feel led to seek, and individuals feel called to serve in.
- 5.3 The committee have weighed some of the benefits and difficulties of exploring a formal ministry and feel the time is right to seek the mind of Christ through the General Assembly. This is a genuine open question the committee wish to put to General Assembly – the committee need the Assembly's help to direct in this matter – rather than recommend one route forward. To help the Assembly, some of the benefits and difficulties of developing such a scheme, that the committee have identified are detailed below.
- 5.4 Some of the benefits of offering a formal ministry of Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister include:
- a. To enable the denomination and Synods to strategically plan and respond to places and contexts where there is need for such ministry.
 - b. A local church, region or context being able to consider receiving such ministry with less (but still some!) local financial and human resources responsibility.
 - c. A recognised training and professional development programme for ministers fulfilling this role, with a URC ethos, flavour and understanding.
 - d. The ability and a route within the URC for individuals to respond to a call to Children's, Youth and Family ministry.
 - e. A greater stability and a sense of long-term security for those called to such a ministry within the breadth of the denomination.
 - f. The symbolic elevation of ministry among children, young people and families to the equivalent of ministry to adults, and by implication the recognition of children and young people as equal members of the body of Christ.
- 5.5 Some of the difficulties of offering a formal ministry of Children, youth and/or Family Minister include:
- a. Identifying a single ministry role within Children's, Youth and Family ministry that enables the exploration of call.
 - b. Developing a means of considering and exploring call.
 - c. Offering and developing professional training alongside other EM1 structures.

- d. An additional group of ministers to manage, fund, and support through the central structures of the church (Ministries, Pensions, M&M, etc).
 - e. Potential conflict for existing workers and local churches currently employing individuals, and the danger of adding another layer of complication in the support we need to give to local churches, rather than simplifying and standardising approaches.
 - f. Potential to create an unhealthy hierarchy and division between formally accredited ministry and the ministry offered by volunteers and others not wishing or able to pursue this route.
- 5.6 The third resolution, therefore, invites General Assembly to consider where God might be leading us. If the General Assembly believes that there shouldn't be such a formal ministry, then our focus will be to continue to value, support and encourage the ministry currently being offered in local churches. If the General Assembly believes that there should be such a ministry in the church, then the Children and Youth Work Committee, alongside this ongoing support, will work with Education and Learning and Ministries Committees to bring proposals of how such a ministry might be developed to General Assembly 2024.

Resolution 13

The United Reformed Church believes there should be a formal ministry of URC Children's, Youth and/or Family Minister and asks the Children's and Youth Work Committee, the Ministries Committee and the Education and Learning Committee to consider what would be needed to introduce such a ministry and bring proposals to General Assembly 2024.