

Commentary on the United Reformed Church Retirement Policy for Ministers in Stipendiary Ministry

1. About this policy
2. Personnel responsible for this policy
3. Fixed retirement age
4. What to expect as you approach the fixed retirement age
5. Requests to continue in Ministry beyond the retirement age
6. The conclusion of Ministry on retirement

1. ABOUT THIS POLICY

1.1 Ministers on the Roll of Ministers of the United Reformed Church (URC) are office holders. The URC consider that age diversity is beneficial to the Denomination and for the purposes of the retirement of Ministers in stipendiary service and, as good practice, adopts the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 in respect of age provisions and retirement. The URC are committed to not discriminating against Ministers because of age in respect of retirement and adhere to the principles set out in our Equal Opportunities Policy.

1.2 The URC have decided that it is appropriate to have a fixed retirement age for stipendiary Ministers. The reasons for this are set out briefly at Paragraph 3 of this document. We will review whether this fixed retirement age remains necessary from time to time and will let Ministers know if we consider this needs to change and bring any proposed changes to this to General Assembly.

1.3 This policy sets out the steps the URC will take as you approach the fixed retirement age, giving you the opportunity to express your preferences and expectations, and enabling us to plan for the life and development of the Church.

1.4 This policy applies to all Ministers in stipendiary service.

1.5 This policy does not form part of a Minister's Terms of Settlement and we may amend it at any time.

2. RESPONSIBILITY FOR THIS POLICY

2.1 The Ministries Committee has overall responsibility for the effective operation and fair application of this policy but may delegate aspects to your Moderator or other personnel within

the denomination as appropriate.

3. FIXED RETIREMENT AGE

The URC have a fixed retirement age of 68 years for stipendiary Ministers. We consider that there are the following legitimate strategic social policy objectives and denominational reasons for this fixed retirement age and that these aims cannot reasonably be met by other means:

- A. The promotion of intergenerational fairness and dignity.
 - i) Creating a balanced denominational Ministerial team by promoting access to Ministry for younger people.
 - ii) The efficient planning of the departure and recruitment of Ministers.
 - iii) The sharing of opportunities for Ministers fairly between the generations.
 - iv) Ensuring the mix of generations so as to promote the exchange of experience and new ideas amongst Ministers.
 - v) Avoiding disputes with older Ministers over their fitness to Minister.

- B. The management of the number of serving Ministers in a shrinking denomination.
 - i) The total number of Ministers needs to be managed year on year in order to match the needs of the denomination, local churches and available funding. There will be less opportunity and available funds for new Ministers to be trained and called to Ministry if there are too many senior Ministers. It is important to ensure that there are opportunities for new Ministers to come through with fresh ideas.
 - ii) The changing demographics of the denomination results in Ministers having to take on more and different duties, which enhance the risk of health and safety issues e.g extended hours, stress, emotional fatigue and other potential issues such as the increased risk of legal claims. These issues and the denomination's continuing health and safety obligations towards Ministers become more difficult and costly for the Church to manage past the fixed retirement age which diminishes available financial resources.

4. WHAT TO EXPECT AS YOU APPROACH THE FIXED RETIREMENT AGE

4.1 The URC would like to consult with you well in advance of your retirement date. You will receive a letter 12 months in advance of the fixed retirement date. That letter will explain the normal circumstances of retirement from URC ministry and invite you to request any appropriate consultation which would normally take place through your Synod Moderator. If you wish you may request a meeting, in which case you are able to bring a friend or colleague with you to the meeting should you wish.

At the meeting we can discuss any relevant issues, such as whether a handover period is necessary or how your skills could be passed on to others within the denomination. You may

also wish to discuss whether you would like to continue beyond the retirement date or in a different capacity in accordance with Paragraph 5. below.

4.2 You may decide that it is beneficial to meet on more than one occasion, in which case an additional meeting can be arranged.

4.3 You should feel free to initiate a discussion with your Moderator and or the Ministries Committee about your future plans with regard to retirement. You may want to retire earlier than the fixed retirement date or work flexibly or in an alternative role in the period leading up to retirement. If so, we would like to know what your plans are and discuss them with you. Alternatively, you may wish to make a request to change your working arrangements.

5. REQUESTS TO CONTINUE IN MINISTRY BEYOND RETIREMENT AGE

5.1 If you would like to continue in Ministry beyond the retirement age, in either a full or part time capacity, you may raise this with your Moderator and the Ministries Committee, and we will consider your request in the light of our social policy objectives and denominational reasons for having a fixed retirement age. The circumstances of each request will be considered individually and in a consistent way. Any decision to allow one Minister to continue in Ministry beyond the retirement age does not mean it will be possible for another to do the same.

6. THE CONCLUSION OF MINISTRY ON RETIREMENT

6.1 Under your Terms of Settlement your Ministry concludes automatically at the end of the month when you reach the age of 68 years. Your Terms of Settlement set out the notice period that we will give you on retirement, or that you must give us if you wish to retire before reaching retirement age.

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