

Paper H9

Withdrawal of Call

Ministries Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 29 General Assembly agrees the additions to the URC Policy on Withdrawal of Call.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	General Assembly 2023 adopted Paper H5 and instructed the Ministries Committee to bring a revised policy to General Assembly 2024 with three additions to the paper.
Main points	The three additions are: 1.7 To clarify that, in most cases, a minister's call will come to an end when the minister accepts a call to another pastorate/post/partnership. 3.2 To clarify what happens to ensure complaints are not spurious. 5.5. To extend the period that a minister and their family may remain in the manse after the withdrawal of Call from three to six months although this would be a matter of the Synod or pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements.
Previous relevant documents	Paper H5 General Assembly 2025.
Consultation has taken place with...	

Summary of impact

Financial	
External (eg ecumenical)	

Paper H5 GA 2023

1. Call and vocation

- 1.1 In the United Reformed Church, ministry is exercised by the whole people of God. Call and vocation are intrinsic to our faith. God calls and we respond, seeking ways to use our God-given gifts, talents, abilities, and opportunities, to be faithful followers and God's presence in the world. Every moment of every day for every follower of Jesus is a response to this call on our lives; all people are called by God – believers or not.
- 1.2 However, within the whole people of God 'the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts for particular ministries and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 20).
- 1.3 Where someone feels a sense of prompting by God to ordained or commissioned ministry, the URC seeks to discern this vocation through its various Councils. The Assessment Board discerns if the call is to Church Related Community Work or the ministry of Word and Sacraments. The Reformed tradition always sites Call to ministry within the context of the consent of the people with whom ministers serve. According to the *Basis of Union*, those called as Ministers of the Word and Sacraments '... may be called to be ministers of local churches, or missionaries overseas, or to some special and approved ministry, and are then ordained and inducted to their office' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 21). Those called as Church Related Community Workers '... may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned to the office of Church Related Community Worker and inducted to serve in a particular post for a designated period' (*Basis of Union*, paragraph 22).
- 1.4 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers are called to their particular ministry (which might be a local pastorate or project, a Special Category Ministry, a Synod role, or a General Assembly post) normally by a Church Meeting or combined Church Meetings in a Joint or Group Pastorate, or by a Call Group which acts on behalf of a Synod or the General Assembly to which the wider Councils of the Church are asked to concur. Therefore, the *Basis of Union* is clear that the call of God is confirmed by one of the Councils of the Church. Our Councils determine where and when ministry is needed, and ensure good order.
- 1.5 It is recognised that, while a call process may be used for non-stipendiary ministers (NSMs) with concurrence given by the Synod, NSMs (categories 1-4) are appointed by the Synod to their particular ministry. However, Synods always appoint to, and sustain in, such roles considering the views of the church with whom the NSM will be ministering.
- 1.6 Therefore, within the United Reformed Church, a particular call to exercise ministry in a certain time and place is rooted in the call to serve the whole Church which, through its Councils, offers concurrence to local calls in both the receiving and sending Synods.

- 1.7 *Most calls come to an end when the minister accepts a call to another pastorate/post/partnership. Concurrence to leave the pastorate / post / partnership is required in both the sending and receiving Synods.
- 1.8 Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers enjoy, by way of ordination or commissioning, recognition as ministers of the Church as outlined in the *Basis of Union*. Any withdrawal of a Call from a particular post or appointment will not normally affect that recognition as ministers may still be able to receive a Call and serve in some capacity elsewhere.
- 1.9 For the sake of clarity in this document, the term minister shall apply to both Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers.

2. Withdrawal of a Call through discipline or capability processes

- 2.1 There are two scenarios where a Call might be withdrawn which are covered by existing URC policies and processes:
 - 2.1.1 *As a result of the Discipline Process*

An Assembly Commission for Discipline may, following a finding of ministerial misconduct, curtail a Call or Appointment. Such a sanction might be seen as more serious than a warning, but less serious than deletion from the Roll of Ministers.
 - 2.1.2 *As a result of the Capability Process*

Where a minister's competency is questioned by the Elders' or Church Meeting, the Local Steering Group of a Church in Community Project, or the Synod Moderator and Pastoral Committee, or by the ministry supervisor in a Special Category post, Synod or General Assembly role, the Capability Process can be used, which may result in the Call to serve in that particular context being withdrawn.

3. Ministers move on

- 3.1 Active ministers, of course, may end a Call by seeking a new Call at any time for a number of reasons:
 - a) a minister accepts a new Call at any time, realising a new challenge would be welcomed or that their ministry in that particular place is concluded
 - b) a minister retires, normally upon reaching the normal retirement age unless the processes for an extension of service have been followed
 - c) a minister resigns seeking some other form of work or ministry outwith the United Reformed Church
 - d) a post might be time-limited
 - e) a minister wishes to leave because of a breakdown in relationship with colleagues, Elders, or significant people within a church, project or post.
- 3.2 *When there have been relationship breakdowns, it is always open for complaints to be made – complaints about ministers are normally dealt with through the Manual's Section O process. Sometimes it is appropriate to deal with complaints through the Section Q process with the agreement of the complainant. However, a minister may wish to complain about how Elders or other office holders have behaved. In these cases, either the Manual's Section Q or the Discipline of Office Holders process should be used.

4. Breakdown of a pastoral relationship

- 4.1 On occasions, pastorates or projects and ministers find themselves in a position where there is a breakdown in relationship, with talk of withdrawing Call. This breakdown might be because of intractable difficulties which aren't related to capability or discipline, such as a complaint under Section Q of the Manual, or might simply be as a result of a sense that this ministry has gone on for too long.
- 4.2 In these cases, the Elders Meeting¹ should invite the Moderator (or their deputy) to speak with the minister, and indicate their feeling that circumstances are such whereby the view is that the minister should consider seeking a new call through the Moderators' List. The Moderator will need to determine whether the complaint is vexatious or not. The Moderator will explore with the Elders' Meeting and the minister whether mediation would be fruitful.² The local pastorate must engage with the Moderator, the minister and the relevant Synod Committee or equivalent if mediation is to take place.
- 4.3 In a multi-church pastorate, the Moderator (or their deputy) shall speak with the Elders' Meeting of each church to ascertain whether the issues have been replicated across the pastorate.
- 4.4 In these cases, the Moderator should also consider whether using the Competency Process is appropriate.
- 4.5 In a local pastorate or Church-in-Community project, it is always open to the Elders' Meeting/Steering Group to ask the Church Meeting to withdraw the Call. In such circumstances, the Synod Moderator will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful or has failed, then the Pastoral Committee will appoint an Interim Moderator to chair the Elders' Meeting/Church-in-Community Project Steering Group and the Church Meeting/s for this matter. The Interim Moderator (or deputy such as representatives from the Synod Pastoral Committee) will ensure that a statement from the Elders' Meeting / Church-in-Community Steering Group explaining why it thinks the Call should be withdrawn, and a reply from the Minister, either in person or in writing, is given to the Church Meeting(s) which shall vote on the resolution 'the Minister shall continue in office'. If the Minister attends in person, the Interim Moderator will invite the Minister to speak. The Minister may be accompanied by a friend or ministry colleague for pastoral support. Such a Call shall be sustained by the majority originally required to issue the call. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.
- 4.6 In an LEP where a URC minister is in post, it is always open to the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) to ask the Church Meeting to withdraw the Call. In such circumstances, the Synod Moderator will discern whether mediation would be fruitful, as well as consulting with the appropriate leadership personnel in the denominations which are partners of the LEP, to

¹ For Elders' Meeting read any equivalent body eg the Steering Group of a Project or Church-in-Community, in Synod or General Assembly role, Pastorate Steering Group or Council in the case of a joint pastorate.

² See 1 above

ensure they are fully informed at all stages of the process. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the Pastoral Committee will appoint an Interim Moderator to chair the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) and the Church Meeting(s) for this matter. The Interim Moderator (or deputy such as representatives from the Synod Pastoral Committee) will ensure that a statement from the Elders' Meeting (or equivalent body in the LEP) explaining why it thinks the Call should be withdrawn, and a reply from the Minister, either in person or in writing, is given to the Church Meeting/s which shall vote on the resolution 'the Minister shall continue in office'. If the Minister attends in person, the Interim Moderator will invite the Minister to speak. The Minister may be accompanied by a friend or ministry colleague for pastoral support. Such a Call shall be sustained by the majority originally required to issue the call. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.

- 4.7 When a breakdown of relationship between a minister in a Synod role, whether stipendiary or non-stipendiary, or in a Special Category Ministry, and the Synod occurs, it is always open to the Synod to appoint a Commission to resolve the issue of withdrawal of Call. In such circumstances, the Synod Pastoral Committee will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the Synod shall appoint a Commission of three people unconnected to the post holder, or others who have experienced difficulty, to decide the issue. These may be members of another Synod. The Moderator will ensure that a statement is prepared outlining why it is felt the relationship has broken down. The Commission will also receive a reply by the Minister and will invite a representative from the Synod to speak. The Minister will also be invited to speak. The Commission shall then decide, by majority, on the question of 'the Minister shall continue in office'. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.
- 4.8 When a breakdown of relationship between a minister in a General Assembly role and the General Assembly occurs, it is always open to the General Assembly to appoint a Special Group from the General Assembly Appointment Panel, in the case of those appointed by the Nominations Committee, or an Assembly Commission in the case of those appointed by an appointments panel, to resolve the issue of withdrawal of Call. In such circumstances, the General Secretary, or Deputy General Secretary, will discern if mediation would be fruitful. If mediation is not deemed fruitful, or has failed, then the General Secretary, or Deputy General Secretary, will ensure that a statement is prepared outlining why it is felt that the relationship has broken down. The Special Group will also receive a reply by the Minister and will invite the Minister's ministry supervisor and the Minister to speak. The Special Group shall then decide, by majority, on the question of 'the minister shall continue in office'. It is always open for an appeal to be lodged against such a decision using the normal appeals process.
- 4.9 Given that it is the local church/pastorate that calls, and the Synod which gives concurrence, the appropriate councils of the Church need to be involved in the process for a Call to be withdrawn. Therefore, the local

church/pastorate/church in community, the Synod and its appropriate committee will all be involved.

5. Manse provision and expenses when a Call is withdrawn

- 5.1 Manses are provided rent free for the better performance of the minister's duties. It is usually a place where some functions linked with the role of ministry are fulfilled.
- 5.2 The policy recognises that Synods operate different manse policies.
- 5.3 Once ministerial service to the local pastorate, post, project or church-in-community ceases, so does the provision of a manse.
- 5.4 If the whole call is withdrawn, the vacation of a manse would be a matter of negotiation between the minister (and/or family) and the Synod or pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements; normally three months' notice is given. During this time, all other expenses would be reimbursed as normal eg car and other allowances.
- 5.5 *A Call to a new pastorate may take some time. However, it is envisaged that the minister and their family will remain in the manse and receive the normal expenses and allowances whilst a new Call is sought, normally for three months, but this may be extended to six months. Any extension to this would be a matter of the Synod or pastorate, depending on local ownership and management arrangements.
- 5.6 While the minister is engaged in the process of seeking a Call, the synod or pastorate would continue to be responsible for the manse costs.
- 5.7 When the scoping has been reduced, the minister and their family can remain in the manse and is normally responsible for the percentage of manse costs outside the scoping although, in some cases, the Synod or pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.
- 5.8 Where a Housing Allowance is paid, this should be continued for the period of stipend/stipend support being paid.
- 5.9 Where scoping is reduced, a Housing Allowance is given appropriate to the scoping although, in some cases, the Synod or pastorate may wish to continue to pay the full costs.

6. Stipend when a Call is withdrawn

- 6.1 *The stipend should continue while the minister is seeking a new Call for six months.
- 6.2 After six months, the Synod Moderator may wish to make application to the GA Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee for the committee to consider stipend support.

7. Appeal

- 7.1 The appeal will be conducted in line with the United Reformed Church's appeals procedure, as set out in the Rules of Procedure, and should be

notified to the Clerk of the appropriate Council of the Church. Appellants should ask for a copy of the minute of the decision within 14 days of being notified of the decision, and lodge their appeal with the Clerk of the appropriate Synod within a further 14 days.