

Ordination and Induction of Elders

Eldership has been, and remains, an essential feature of the United Reformed Church. Where people of our tradition have the joy of worshipping as part of a Local Ecumenical Partnership, not all the wording here will be appropriate for the induction of their local leaders, but the use of some of the key elements is encouraged.

This service is offered as an example. Ministers and worship leaders are free and encouraged to choose appropriate Bible passages, and to write or prepare their own prayers and material to use alongside or instead of the examples here. **There are, however, some parts of the text that must be used and these are indicated (by the orange boxes).**

The ordination and induction of Elders should take place during Sunday worship in the local church where the Elders are to serve. The service should normally be led by a Minister of the Word and Sacraments. Recognising that an Elder is part of the leadership of the whole Church as well as of the local congregation the explicit involvement of representatives from the wider Church is encouraged in the ordination and induction of Elders.

The Structure makes it clear Elders are normally ordained by the Minister, or in a vacancy the Interim Moderator. However, pastorates have evolved since the Structure was drafted, and

it might be impossible for either the Minister or the Interim Moderator to conduct the ordination of Elders.

In naming the Minister and the Interim Moderator specifically, the Structure is establishing the principle that Elders are ordained by a representative of the wider Church, not just the local, and Ministers and Interim Moderators are ordaining Elders in their capacity as members of the synod rather than their office in the local church. Therefore, in order of preference, the following may preside at the ordination of Elders: the Minister, a duly appointed Local Church Leader (themselves an ordained Elder), the Interim Moderator, another relevant synod office holder, such as the Synod Moderator, Training Officer, Mission Enabler, Pastoral Convener etc, provided that they themselves are either an ordained Minister or Elder, another URC Minister, an Assembly accredited Lay Preacher, with the agreement of a relevant synod office holder.

It is the custom of the United Reformed Church to lay hands on those who are ordained which signifies the invocation of the Holy Spirit that the person is equipped for their new ministry.

The worship should include the reading of Scripture and proclamation of the Word, and

normally the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Section **5** should only be used when new Elders are to be ordained. When all the Elders have

been previously ordained, Section **5** should be omitted and the other elements of the service used to induct them for renewed service.

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Introduction

Through baptism, members of the Church are called to serve God in the world and to proclaim the love of Christ by the way they live. There are a variety of ministries within the Church and, in the United Reformed Church, some are called to be elders, to share in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local church. Today, according to the decision of the Church Meeting, we are to ordain ... A ... (and ... B ...) to the office of elder, and to induct them (with ... C ... and ... D ...) to serve in this congregation.

Statement of purpose

Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service. To equip them for this ministry he gives particular gifts, and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within the Church. Some are called to be Elders. Elders share in the leadership of the local church and the pastoral oversight of its members. In the Elders' Meeting they take counsel together for the whole congregation.

They are responsible for making provision for Christian worship and discipleship, for maintaining proper standards of membership, and for promoting witness and service to the community, encouraging mission and fostering the peace, unity, and welfare of the Church. It is their duty to arrange for the proper maintenance of church buildings, and to ensure the oversight of church finances. Some Elders represent the local church in the wider Councils of the Church, and by virtue of their membership of these Councils represent the whole Church to the local church.

Elders, being elected by the Church Meeting, are ordained to their office and inducted to serve for such period as the church which elects them determines. (Here in this congregation we induct Elders for a period of ... X ... years.) Their ordination and induction is an act of the Church. It is right at this time to share in the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church, and to identify ourselves with it.

Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church

This Statement (Basis of Union, Schedule D) is read in one of the approved forms such as the one below:

This Statement is to be read aloud in one of the two prescribed forms. **VERSION II** is printed here, however **VERSION I** may be used if preferred.

With the whole Christian Church
the United Reformed Church believes in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

All **The living God, the only God, ever to be praised.**

The life of faith to which we are called is the Spirit's gift
continually received through the Word, the Sacraments
and our Christian life together.

All **We acknowledge the gift and answer the call,
giving thanks for the means of grace.**

The highest authority for what we believe and do
is God's Word in the Bible,
alive for his people today through the help of the Spirit.

All **We respond to this Word, whose servants we are
with all God's people through the years.**

We accept with thanksgiving to God
the witness to the catholic faith
in the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds.
We acknowledge the declarations made in our own tradition
by Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ
in which they stated the faith
and sought to make its implications clear.

All **Faith alive and active: gift of an eternal source,
renewed for every generation.**

We conduct our life together according to the Basis of Union
in which we give expression to our faith
in forms which we believe
contain the essential elements of the Church's life,
both catholic and reformed;
but we affirm our right and readiness, if the need arises,
to change the Basis of Union
and to make new statements of faith
in ever new obedience to the living Christ.

All **Our crucified and risen Lord,
who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.**

Held together in the Body of Christ
through the freedom of the Spirit,
we rejoice in the diversity of the Spirit's gifts
and uphold the rights of personal conviction.
For the sake of faith and fellowship
it shall be for the church to decide
where differences of conviction hurt our unity and peace.

All **We commit ourselves to speak the truth in love
and grow together in the peace of Christ.**

We believe that Christ gives his Church
a government distinct from the government of the state.
In things that affect obedience to God
the Church is not subordinate to the state,
but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ,
its only Ruler and Head.
Civil authorities are called
to serve God's will of justice and peace for all humankind,
and to respect the rights of conscience and belief.

All **While we ourselves are servants in the world
as citizens of God's eternal kingdom.**

We affirm our intention to go on praying and working,
with all our fellow Christians,
for the visible unity of the Church in the way Christ chooses,
so that people and nations may be led to love and serve God
and praise him more and more for ever.

All **Source, Guide, and Goal of all that is:
to God be eternal glory.
Amen.**

Affirmations

All may stand as the presiding minister asks those to be ordained and/or inducted to affirm their faith.

(These are from Schedule B to the Basis of Union “Affirmations to be made by Elders at ordination and induction”)

In the light of this Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church and the statement concerning the functions of the eldership, the Elders-elect are now asked to answer the following questions:

Do you confess again your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

I do.

In dependence on God’s grace do you reaffirm your trust in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and your promise to follow him and to seek to do and to bear his will all the days of your life?

I do.

Do you believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God’s people?

I do.

Do you accept the office of Elder of the United Reformed Church in this congregation, and do you promise to perform its duties faithfully?

I do.

Do you promise as an Elder of the United Reformed Church to seek its well-being, unity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always so far as you are able to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church?

By the grace of God I do, and all these things I profess and promise in the power of the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ The final question was added by the General Assembly in July 2021

Ordination

This section is only used for those not previously ordained.

All those to be ordained Elders may kneel.

Thank you, God,
for the various gifts which you give to your people,
and for the varieties of ministry in the Church.
Thank you for all *those* of faith and integrity who have served this local church.
Thank you, now, for ... A ... (and ... B ...).

The presiding minister, and appointed Elders lay hands on each person to be ordained, praying thus:

Empower *them* with your Holy Spirit,
give *them* humility and grace,
so that by *their* faithfulness,
they may show your love to your people:
in the name of *our Saviour* Jesus Christ.

All **Amen.**

In your name, and trusting it to be your will, we now ordain ... A ... to be an Elder.

Induction

The Minister asks the members of the church to accept the ministry of all the Elders named, both newly ordained and any previously ordained:

Will you encourage and support them,
and respond to their ministry
acknowledging that it comes to you from God?

All **We will**

Eternal God,
you have called us all to serve you in the world
and to share your love with each other and our neighbours.
Through the decision of this local church
you have called ... A ... (... B ... , ... C ... and ... D ...) to serve us as
an Elder/Elders.

Give *them* the promised blessings of your Holy Spirit
and fill *them* with fresh vision and courage,
to lead us in the work you have called us to do.
Make *them* wise with the mind of Christ,
and give *them* the gifts they need to fulfil this service faithfully;
in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

All **Amen.**

Declaration of Ordination and/or Induction

... A ... (... B ... , ... C ... and ... D ...), in the name of Jesus Christ the only Head of the Church, and according to the decision of the Church Meeting, I declare you to be (*ordained and*) inducted to serve as *an Elder/Elders*, and welcome you into this office.

The Minister and other representatives of the Church may offer a sign of welcome. They may, for example, offer 'the right hand of fellowship'.

Paul wrote in Galatians 2:9;

'...when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship.' So we, recognising the grace that is in you, shake your hand.

May the God of peace sanctify you entirely,
and may your spirit, soul and body be kept sound and blameless.
The one who calls you is faithful, and will do this.

Renewal of commitment

And now as Elders and members of this church and congregation, let us confirm our commitment to each other and to the gospel. Let us pursue what makes for peace and build each other up in love.

**All We will grow together in humility, gentleness and patience;
we will nurture each other in faith;
we will bear with one another in love;
we will make every effort
to maintain the unity of the Holy Spirit in the bond of peace,
so that we may faithfully proclaim the gospel of Christ.
The God of peace will make us complete in everything good.
To whom be glory for ever.**

May God's peace be with you.

All And also with you.

Eternal God, accept this commitment made in your presence,
and give us grace to make it true,
so that we may not fail you in the end,
but give you glory and honour by the way we live
and through everything we say and do,
in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

All Amen.

The Lord's Supper normally follows, and the newly inducted Elders serve or are served together.

Communion Prayer for use at a service Ordaining and Inducting Elders

The newly ordained Elders may be invited to read I Corinthians 11:23-26:

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

God is here!

All **God's Spirit is with us!**

Lift up your hearts

All **we lift them up to God!**

Let us give God our thanks and praise!

All **This is indeed our duty and joy!**

Eternal Majesty,
before the ages began you formed the heavens and the earth,
the moon and the stars proclaim your glory,
and all that was created sings your praise.
You make humanity in your own image,
intending us to glorify and enjoy you forever.
Again and again, we turn away from your love,
despite the guidance of your Law and the warnings of your prophets.
In the fullness of time, you emptied yourself of all but love and dwelt with us.

O Jesus, our Saviour,
you proclaimed good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners,
sight for the blind and liberation for the oppressed,
but we preferred to turn away from freedom
choosing the bondage of sin, and nailed you to the Cross.
Yet you defeated the powers of death and evil
and revealed a new life for all who follow you.

Before you were given over to the powers of your age,
you shared in the simplicity of a meal with your friends,
and, during that meal, you took bread, said the ancient blessing,
broke the bread and gave it to your friends, saying

Take this all of you and eat it, for this is my body
which is broken for you. Do this in memory of me.

When Supper was over, you took the cup of wine,
again prayed the ancient prayer of blessing,
gave the cup to your friends and said:

Take this all of you and drink from it,
this is the cup of my blood,
the blood of the new and everlasting covenant
so that sins may be forgiven.
Do this in memory of me.

Let us proclaim the mystery of our faith:

All **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Come, O Holy Spirit,
on these gifts of bread and wine,
that they may be, for us, the body and blood of Christ.
Lift us into your presence that our faith may be renewed,
our commitment to follow strengthened,
and our understanding of Church deepened.

Bless those who serve this congregation as Elders,
that through their Meetings the mind of Christ may be discerned,
this congregation strengthened in its mission
of worship and witness, evangelism and service,
so that the bruised and broken find healing,
the proud and mighty find humility,
and the poor and lowly find their dignity.

Through Jesus, with Jesus, in Jesus,
in the loving power of the Holy Spirit,
all honour and glory are Yours, O Most High,
forever and ever,

All **Amen!**

It is fitting for the newly ordained and inducted Elders to serve Communion.

Some suggested Scripture readings: Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures):

Exodus 18:13-27, Numbers 11:16-17, 24-30, Isaiah 42:1-9,
Ezekiel 34:11-16 New Testament: Matthew 25:14-28, Mark 10:35-45,
John 21:15-17, Acts 20:28-35, Romans 12:1-18, 1 Corinthians 12:4-13,
Ephesians 4:1-16, Philippians 2:1-11, 1 Peter 4:7-11, 1 Peter 5:1-4.