



## Ministers' Handbook

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## Introduction

As part of the United Reformed Church's commitment to supporting all Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, hereinafter known as ministers, we are pleased to provide for you the Ministers' Handbook. You will find in this Handbook a range of policies and provisions which offer support to you in your role.

Should you require more detailed information or advice, contact details are included throughout the Handbook. Please note that for further information, you can contact the Secretary for Ministries at [ministries@urc.org.uk](mailto:ministries@urc.org.uk)

This Handbook will be reviewed annually. The latest version can be found in the Ministries section of the website <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/>

## 1 Wellbeing

Ministry is not, and has never been, easy. The pressures of ministry can creep up on any of us, even for those of us who are flourishing. Most ministers are self-directed: we are in control of our own diary and enjoy a valued and valuable sense of autonomy. However, when the 'workplace' is also the home and in the blurring of boundaries between ministerial life and personal life, ministers need to make time for their own self-care and ensure a healthy work/life balance.

The care and wellbeing of ministers is crucial to the health of the mission of the church. Healthy, fulfilled, maturing, joyful ministers who feel valued and supported are an enormous gift to God's Church. A sense of being cared for and loved will give energy and vigour when they face ministerial or pastoral challenges.

The wellbeing of ministers has been high on the church's agenda for many years. Well-being is more than just 'feeling good'. A positive well-being involves the interplay of physical, emotional, and spiritual health, together with the availability and quality of personal and professional relationships, within the wider context of vocation, all contribute to an overall sense of well-being.

## 2 Pastoral Support

Pastoral Support in the first instance is available at a local level from your Synod, usually through your Synod Moderator (or someone designated to deputise for them). This provision varies from Synod to Synod.

### **3 Pastoral Supervision**

Pastoral Supervision offers a regular, intentional space with boundaries in which a practitioner skilled in supervision (the supervisor) meets with a Minister to look together at the Minister's professional practice. It is a relationship characterised by trust, confidentiality, support and openness that offers you the safety to explore issues arising in your ministry. The Ministries Office can give you advice about finding a supervisor. This includes URC trained supervisors.

Pastoral Supervision is mandatory for ministers who are in categories 1-3 of the Active Ministers Policy and for those whom the Synod and Head of Ministries has agreed should receive it. Every eligible minister should have no less than 6 x 1 hour sessions minimum per annum spread over the year although it is recognised that some may require more or longer sessions. Ministers claim the fee for Pastoral Supervision along with their other expenses; the central URC reimburses whoever pays those expenses 50% of the cost. The pastorate or post can claim back the cost from the Ministries Office in the December of each year.

Ministers should sign a covenant with their supervisor normally on an annual basis and send a copy to the Synod Moderator for the Minister's file.

For more information, please see <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/pastoral-supervision-in-the-united-reformed-church/>

### **4 Education for Ministry**

All ministers in the United Reformed Church are encouraged to engage in continuing ministerial development, in ways that are relevant to the ministries to which they are called at particular times and in particular contexts. This is to ensure that people in public ministry are engaged in continuous development, so that they are refreshed and equipped for the constantly changing demands of 21st century ministry.

#### **EM2**

The EM2 phase normally begins at ordination to the Ministry of the Word and Sacrament or commissioning to Church Related Community Work and ends with a certificate of completion of EM2, issued by the Synod in which training has been completed. This process normally takes at least three years. EM2 is about context and development, putting theology and faith in real places with the minister holding real responsibility. Oversight is given from the RCLs and TDO+ Network with a programme of 12 sessions over 3 years. Experience shows that the first public period of ministry can be a time of isolation, where there is little line management, few colleagues and few, if any, staff for whom the EM2 minister is responsible. For many, this is a significant change from a prior employment experience. The EM2 period is a time to learn how to work in new circumstances, to share that learning with others in the same situation and to reflect in dedicated learning events.

For more information see [https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/69/EM2\\_Guidelines\\_2020-3.pdf](https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/1638/69/EM2_Guidelines_2020-3.pdf)

#### **EM3**

Education for Ministry 3 is an opportunity to undertake self-defined ministerial development and lasts until ministers finish their URC recognised ministry, including active retirement. EM3 is at present fairly unstructured and offers many opportunities for development.

Fundamentally, the URC believes that continuing professional development is part of being a reflective, resilient, and effective minister.

### Grants for EM2 and EM3

EM2 and EM3 grant requests are considered seen within an 'application to ministry' context in order to discern if a proposed learning or resource is appropriate. Sometimes a request is more properly a cost of ministry which would more appropriately be reimbursed by a pastorate. EM3 funded learning events and resources are authorised by Synod Training and Development (or other relevant) Officers.

- Active ministers in EM3 are able to apply for a grant of up to £700 per year to use on EM3 events, excluding Sabbatical years.
- If EM3 ministers substantially change their type of ministry, a Transitional Training grant offers a further two weeks' time allowance and an additional £350 grant funding.
- If the £700 limit may not be enough for a significant training event, the **Rollover Funding Scheme** may be used to borrow up to two year's funding from following years.
- A minister of another denomination in an ecumenical post is able to apply for 50% of EM3 grant funds as they will still have access to their own denomination's professional development funds.
- After completion of a standard application form and authorisation by the relevant Synod Training and Development Officer or equivalent, funding can be paid in arrears based on a claim and/or paid in advance directly to a learning provider.
- There may be additional funding available if engaging in a Belonging to the World Church opportunity or engaging in a higher degree such as a Masters' or PhD/DPhil/professional doctorate.

### URC Learning Opportunities

There are a variety of URC organised learning opportunities:

Synod Schools	Synod Schools are organised by individual or joint Synods, usually cover a four-day period and may be offered every year offering a chance for fellowship, learning and reflection.
Sabbaticals	Sabbaticals are organised in dialogue with Synod Training and Development Officers (or equivalent), usually last three months and are offered to ministers every ten years of their ministry from the last sabbatical taken. Sabbaticals must begin before a minister reaches retirement age.
	The Church Leadership Programme (CLP) is offered to ministers

Church Leadership Programmes	ideally in years five to nine of their ministry. The CLP includes lay leaders and consists of two residential weeks, six months apart in separate calendar years with non-residential learning and activity between the residential weeks.
Belonging to the World Church	Belonging to the World Church visits and exchanges are organised in conjunction with the Global & Intercultural Ministries ( <del>Mission</del> ) department. Funding is normally available for one visit every five years with applications being made through Synod Training and Development Officers or equivalent.

There are other opportunities

Further degrees	Further degrees are organised in dialogue with Synod Training and Development Officers and relevant learning providers.
Conferences	Conferences may be regular conferences associated with particular types of ministry or events around particular issues. If the 'application to ministry' criteria apply, these may be funded within EM3
Transitional Training	When a minister substantially changes their type of ministry (eg chaplaincy to pastorate, pastorate to leadership) then further training time and funding is offered. The first stop for discussion is the relevant Synod Training and Development Officer or equivalent.
Other events or support	Many other kinds of support or physical resource may be considered within EM3. The first stop for discussion is the relevant Synod Training and Development Officer or equivalent.

For more information see <https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/developing-your-faith/education-for-ministry/education-for-ministry-phase-3/>

Information on the Interfaith Fund and the Continuing Studies Fund can be found at <https://urc.org.uk/grants-funding-opportunities/>

## 5 Sabbaticals

Ministers on the United Reformed Church payroll may apply for a sabbatical term of up to three months every ten years since the last one. Ministers from other denominations, who serve in the United Reformed Church by virtue of a Certificate of Eligibility, are not eligible for a first sabbatical until they have completed at least five years' service as ministers of the United Reformed Church, after which, up to five years' service in their previous denomination may be 'credited' for sabbatical purposes. (For example, a minister who has served their denomination for six years and the United Reformed Church for five is eligible to apply for a sabbatical).

- Sabbaticals can be taken at 10 yearly intervals ie. 10 years from your previous sabbatical. Sabbaticals cannot be taken with less than 6 months before retirement.
- Sabbatical programmes must be approved by the Synod Training Development Officer or equivalent and accepted by Synod, after consultation with the local church.
- In the case of Assembly Appointed staff, approval should be sought from the Secretary for Ministries after endorsement by the Deputy General Secretary.
- Applications should be made on the form G2 (which you can get from your Synod website) and sent to the Applications should normally be made six months before the beginning of the sabbatical.
- A sabbatical report will be expected when the sabbatical is completed within 3 months. It should be made according to the guidelines laid out by the Ministries Committee and should be sent in the first instance to the Synod Officer responsible for EM3 and the Secretary for Ministries, who will send the report to the URC Research Network via Northern College where it will be uploaded onto their webpage. (It may not be appropriate for some reports to be uploaded onto the webpage and individual permission will be sought before this is done.) If the report is not completed, no EM3 grant will be made in the following year. The Synod Training Development Officer responsible will keep a record of the training and education of each minister and the Ministries office will monitor the grant.
- If the sabbatical is for a period of more than 4 weeks, local churches are entitled to have pulpit fees reimbursed from the Maintenance of the Ministry Fund. Claim forms can be obtained by the church treasurer from the MoM Office at United Reformed Church House, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT.

### Sabbatical Grants

Sabbatical grants are available to:

- a) Ministers receiving a stipend by the URC.
- b) Ministers who are in active ministry after retirement.
- c) United Reformed Church ministers serving in ecumenical posts and paid ecumenically, where the comparable Sabbatical is not available. (In this eventuality,

permission to take sabbatical leave would need to be approved by the partner denomination.

d) Non-Stipendiary ministers in appointments recognised by the Synod.

It is recognised that there will be people who are not included in the above list. Such people will receive grants at the discretion of the Synod Training Development Officer or equivalent responsible for EM3 in consultation with the Ministries Office.

- Grants can only be given for educational/vocational purposes. The purpose of EM3 is to develop ministry through ministry related practical training, educational, spiritual, and professional development. Grants, therefore, can only be given for these purposes. It is also important that sabbaticals retain an appropriate balance between these aspects.
- Ministers may claim the full cost of a sabbatical, including travel, books and equipment up to £1,200. Sabbaticals of less than three months' duration will receive a proportionately lower grant (eg for a two-month sabbatical, the maximum grant will be £800).
- In addition to the sabbatical grant, the £700 EM3 grant can also be claimed.
- Other sources of support for sabbaticals may be available and should be applied for before making an application to the United Reformed Church EM3 Fund. Provision is made for ministers taking sabbaticals at Westminster College, Cambridge, by the Cheshunt Foundation. Other trusts are the Coward Trust, and for sabbaticals involving travel outside Britain, the United Reformed Church's Mission department administers the Belonging to the World Church Programme.
- Details of other support may be available from the Synod Training Development Officer or equivalent.
- Grants authorised by the Synod officer responsible for EM3 are paid by the Synod in two different ways: either
  - a) directly upon presentation of invoices (for example a bill from a training institution or from a travel agent)
  - or
  - b) by reimbursement to the minister upon presentation of proof of payment relating to expenditure made. Sometimes you may not be able to get evidence, such as a receipt or invoice, for cash expenses, especially where the amounts are small. If this happens, make a brief note as soon as you can of the amount you spent, when you spent it and what it was for. HMRC have agreed that receipts for expenditure will not be necessary for train travel of under £20 on any one journey or out of pocket expenses such as car parking or subsistence of under £10. The Assembly element may then be claimed back by the Synod from the Ministries Committee through the Ministries Office at Church House.



## 6 Training to Enrich Your Wellbeing

In order to enhance the wellbeing of its ministers General Assembly has required all ministers to undertake both mandatory Safer Sacred Space and Safeguarding Training. These offer the skills, knowledge and attitudes which are an essential part of what is expected of people in public ministry.

Safer Sacred Space Boundary training arose from the work undertaken by the Sexual Ethics Steering Group (SESG 2006) with a remit to oversee the implementation of recommendations passed at Mission Council and published in *Preserving the Integrity of the Body: Sexual Ethics within the United Reformed Church* (May 2006). Mission Council in May 2013 accepted the final report of Sexual Ethics Advisory Group (SEAG), setting out that each minister within the URC shall be made aware of safe sexual boundaries and should pursue best practice.

The name given to the overall issue is Safer Sacred Space, indicating a desire that all sacred space becomes safer sacred space. The requirement is that EM3 ministers should receive training and updates at 4 yearly intervals.

The outcomes of such training are intended for the EM3 minister to gain:

- A better understanding of safe boundaries including sexual boundaries and potential changes in personal behaviour;
- An increased understanding of URC and non-URC support for safe boundaries;
- Strategies to manage safe boundaries within the local pastorate, within the wider URC and, where possible, within the wider community;
- Strategies to manage safe boundaries within the URC procedures;
- Important professional development

Ministries is working on developing a Ministers' Portal where ministers can access their training record to see when mandatory training is required.

## 7 Ministerial Hours

Custom and practice means that those in ministry have for some years been encouraged to have a day a week 'off' and congregations are instructed to check that this is happening. However, this suggests that ministers have a six day working week and begs the question: 'Is there any common agreement about the length of the ministerial working day?'

In 2010 General Assembly recognised the need for ministers to be encouraged and allowed to establish and work within a proper relationship between living and working, doing and being. The biblical witness on this is rooted in the story of creation. God's period of work is followed by the Sabbath and this is presented as example and injunction to build into a faith-based lifestyle a creative balance of activity and rest. This guidance is intended to give ministers the challenge and permission to reflect on such balance as they build their own working style, and as they consider the example that their pattern of working offers to all members of the church community.

Any guidance on the working week, arising from a wholly admirable desire to care for the minister and their family, is set within the context of ministerial status being that of office



holder with all the flexibility and autonomy that implies.

Such guidance must also take account of the unpredictability of ministerial life in which some weeks are filled with crises and others are as eventful as the minister cares to make them.

The guidance takes note of the vocational life, which leads individuals to respond instinctively to the needs of others, whenever that need arises. However, such an instinct needs to be treated with immense care in order to safeguard the health and well-being of individual ministers and their families. Ministry is not only a series of tasks (e.g. writing the sermon; arranging community events) which can be finished; but is focused on the life of the congregation and/or community and therefore, in a very real sense, can never be finished or quantified.

Rather than talk of 'days off', it might be more appropriate to talk in terms of hours over and above which ministers should view themselves as within their own time, time to be used as they want without any sense of guilt. Because ministry does not fit easily into a routine working week, the hours should be treated with flexibility, dealt with in four-weekly blocks and managed by the minister who alone will know the complexity of their ministry.

The Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration Section 7 defines the working week, translated into hours in a four week period, should be not less than 160 hours and not more than 192.

## **8 Holiday Entitlement**

Stipendiary ministers are entitled to 5 weeks holiday in each calendar year and one further Sunday away from the pastorate. When a minister only serves for part of a year the holiday provision should be pro rata.

One week of holiday may be carried forward to the following year.

Holiday entitlement is not affected by sick leave, parental leave, Jury Service, in-service training courses or sabbatical leave. Such periods of leave/absence may result in more than one week's holiday being carried forward into the following year.

Where a minister's regular day off falls on a Bank Holiday, or if a minister is unable to take their day off, another day should be taken in lieu within one calendar month. Ministers do not operate TOIL so large amounts of time should not be amassed.

If ministers serve on Christmas Day and Good Friday (as ministers in pastorates would normally be expected to), another day should be taken in lieu within one calendar month.

If a minister resigns/retires from a pastorate or post stipend should be paid for any outstanding holiday entitlement untaken at the date of resignation/retirement, which may include outstanding holiday entitlement from the previous year, always provided that Synod concurs with the arrangements. For part-time ministers, untaken holiday will be calculated based on the proportion of stipend paid.

## 9 Local Mission & Ministry Review

When the Local Mission & Ministry Review (LMMR) was introduced into the URC in 2008, it was envisaged as a tool to be used for support and accountability for ministers within the church. This support is built on the foundation of the covenant relationship between pastorate/post and minister as agreed in the Terms of Settlement. This relationship shapes ordained ministry within the United Reformed Church along with Education for Ministry 2, Education for Ministry 3, Synod staff support, the Churches' Ministerial Counselling Service, Occupational Health and, of course, Pastoral Supervision.

However, when the General Assembly adopted the URC Policy for Pastoral Supervision, the Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal component of LMMR was dropped as it was felt Pastoral supervision should become the principal way of ensuring ministers reflect on their practice and identify appropriate actions to develop and find support. It therefore replaced the Minister's Accompanied Self Appraisal and any similar requirements.

It is now clear that removing the Ministerial Accompanied Self Appraisal component of LMMR may not have been helpful as this removed a useful tool for ministers to reflect on the pastorate's Living Document (pastorate profile) thus removing the 360° review in a local setting.

General Assembly 2024 agreed a revised LMMR process that requires the minister, on an annual basis, to reflect, as part of their self-care and well-being, on their ministry within the context of what has been written by the church as it review of its life (the Living Document). They may wish to share this with their pastoral supervisor. They should send their reflection to the Synod Office for their file or, for Assembly appointed ministers, to the Secretary for Ministries for their file.

At 5 yearly intervals the Synod, through its appropriate committee. will engage with the church and minister in reflecting on the Living Document.

For more information: <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Local-Mission-and-Ministry-Review-H5-GA-2024.pdf>

## 10 The Churches Ministerial Counselling Service (CMCS)

Ministry can bring its own stresses and ministers are not exempt from the other problems of everyday life arising from family and personal circumstances. It is not always appropriate to seek support from a colleague or senior person in the denomination or the organisation, so the CMCS was established to provide confidential independent help

CMCS provides a non-directive, safe and confidential space to talk about your life and anything that may be painful and uncomfortable. It allows you to share with someone who is trained to listen attentively so that they can make their own decisions about improving your wellbeing and living more effectively.

CMCS cannot offer long-term therapy, and normally counselling is concluded within a maximum of twelve sessions, usually of one hour per week. Only in exceptional circumstances can counselling be extended beyond twelve sessions. The sessions are

free to ministers and their immediate family. Contact the CMCS for further information.  
<https://www.cmins.net>

## 11 Place for Hope

Place for Hope work in partnership with the United Reformed Church to provide a range of training, facilitation and support to enable, equip conflict transformation and reconciliation. The expertise of Place for Hope is offered to ministers, congregations and Synods through mediation, facilitation and coaching in times of change and conflict. More information can be found at <https://www.placeforhope.org.uk>

## 12 Marks of Ministry for a URC Minister of Word and Sacraments

- **A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship so that they might model and encourage such life-long patterns in others with integrity; open to learning discipleship from others.
- **A person of integrity and resilience:** self-aware and committed to their own lifelong learning (especially through the URC's provision for ministers); aware of their own limitations and thus willing to seek support; ready to deal with situations of conflict; balancing ministry's joys and pains with the fostering of right relationships with family and friends.
- **A contextual theologian:** delighting in Scripture, rooted in the Reformed tradition, able to communicate their own faith and its implications within and beyond congregations; encouraging others to discover how these rich resources inspire and sustain faithfulness.
- **A worship leader and preacher:** able to craft and lead worship that shows appreciation for the Sacraments and the resources of many traditions and styles yet unafraid to create and advocate new forms as appropriate; passionate and effective in breaking open God's Word in preaching; ready and able to foster skills, techniques and experience in others so that they might lead worship and preach well.
- **A pastor:** sharing with others, especially Elders, in sustaining care; making time to walk in love alongside people; rejoicing and grieving with others through listening deeply and offering prayerful support; wise in knowing their limits and boundaries when more specialised help is needed; reliably dealing with issues of safeguarding and confidentiality.
- **A leader and collaborator:** identifying, developing, and enabling leadership in others, particularly Elders; capable of working in, and leading, teams through collaborative and shared leadership; aware of their own leadership style and open to learning with and from others, when necessary acknowledging their own mistakes and seeking restoration; committed and equipped to building up others in faith and witness so that the gifts and callings of all might flourish; demonstrating love for God's people.
- **A missionary and evangelist:** passionate about and active in sharing the love of God for the world; alive to the significance of contexts and cultures in shaping mission and creative in discovering missional opportunities; empowering and equipping God's people

in mission to share the Gospel and live God's Kingdom of justice and peace to the full.

- **A public figure:** reliable and effective in representing the Church in ecumenical, community and wider settings; committed to and equipped in speaking truth to power and challenging injustice and marginalisation wherever they may be found.
- **A communicator:** who uses written, spoken and other modes with clarity and grace to share faith and build up relationships and communities; helping others to find their voice.
- **A committed participant in the councils of the Church:** responsive to God's call as gift and blessing to be lived out within the discipline and accountability of the denomination which trains, ordains and inducts them and the pastorates and ministries within which they serve.
- **A reformer:** wise in the dynamics and challenges of change; bold yet humble in helping individuals and congregations to discern and respond to the leading of the Holy Spirit as new chapters open in the life of the Church and others close.

Mission Council May 2019

### 13 Marks of Ministry for a URC Church Related Community Worker

- **A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ:** caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship so that they might model and encourage such life-long patterns in others with integrity; open to learning discipleship from others.
- **A practical theologian:** Someone who has a growing familiarity with and understanding of the Bible enriched by a study which neither evades the critical questions nor allows them to silence the central message. Someone who has a grasp of the history of the Church's world- wide mission, particularly as it relates to the ecumenical search for its unity and a grasp of Christian thinking concerned with personal and social ethical issues. Also, a concern of the application of critical faculties and the ability to reflect theologically on present Christian debate and other world views.
- **An agent of local church formation & transformation:** Someone who is a Christian disciple, pathfinder, boundary walker, mission enabler, social entrepreneur, missionary in a plural world. Engaged with the formation of the local church as a distinctive and inclusive community, courageous in sustaining its own habits and traditions, open to sometimes radical critique as a consequence of being open to the gift of the outsider. Someone who has a total commitment to God: Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, and a growing experience of God, through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit, so that the worship, mission and service of God is the central and controlling passion.
- **A community development worker:** Someone who works collectively to bring about social change and justice, by working with communities to:
  - a) identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities
  - b) plan, organise and take action
  - c) evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action

all in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities. Someone who works with the local congregation and church members to enable them to be more involved as agents for change in the wider community

- **A social analyst and cultural researcher**
- **An interpreter of power relationships:** Someone who is a believer in the value of all people; a bridge builder; someone who has a righteous anger about the injustices in society and a determination to work for peace, justice and wholeness in the world. Someone who recognises and has a deep awareness of the influence of race and gender on individual, corporate and institutional life and positive commitment to opposing and overcoming racist, sexist and other oppressive forces wherever they are found.
- **An effective manager:** Someone who has a self-discipline in the use of resources, personnel, time and ordering of priorities which sets aside time with God, for others, for family, for self
- **An educator & storyteller:** Someone who is a “reflective practitioner” who takes the time to listen, interpret, and remember the stories that are derived from projects and new ventures that the local church is participating in. Being an imaginative storyteller who is able to bring these stories and interpreted experiences into the conversation and life of the rest of the local congregation.
- **A facilitator of and participant in worship:** Someone who is open to and comfortable with different traditions, styles and expressions of spirituality, prayer and worship
- **A collaborator:** Someone who has a willingness to deal constructively with personal and inter-personal conflict, & with conflict between individuals and groups and who has a real desire to recognise with thankfulness the gifts of others, a readiness to receive from those gifts & to co-operate with them for the good of the Church’s mission and ministry.
- **A companion and listener:** Someone who is empathetic & compassionate and has a willingness to live with questions and uncertainties, to deal with them honestly and faithfully, and to support others as they do the same. Someone who has a measure of the simplicity and humility required to be available to others, and the ability to maintain confidentiality  
Someone who has a realistic knowledge and acceptance of self, an awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses, & the desire to grow through interaction with new events & people
- **An effective communicator:** Someone who can use a variety of methods & media to effectively communicate about the processes and products of church related community development work.

May 2009

## 14 Expectations for the Behaviour & Conduct of Ministers and CRCWs

Ministry is both a privilege and a responsibility and those involved in ministry need to establish

boundaries that enable trust and safeguard ethical relationships with those to whom they minister.

All who serve in ministry should be bound by the ordination/commissioning vows taken and the Gospel values of the Christian faith we proclaim.

The church is concerned with the spiritual care, nurture and wellbeing of all, whether within or outwith the membership of the United Reformed Church. Ministers have ethical obligations in the way they carry out their ministry. These obligations prohibit harm and promote the good of the person. The context of ministry is one in which people are often vulnerable and in need of support, and in which ministerial office is seen by society at large as a marker of integrity. Establishing appropriate boundaries fosters trust, helps to clarify ethical actions and enables the relationships involved in ministry to function effectively.

Ministry usually proceeds without any explicit agreement. It takes place wherever there is need and it is often unplanned. Even in a caring relationship, however, there is also a possibility that attempting to do good may result in a degree of harm, and that in helping others, those involved in ministry may be fulfilling a personal need. Therefore, in deciding what to do in any particular situation, those involved in ministry need to be able to exercise ethical reasoning and deliberation in order to justify their actions.

The guidelines set down what the URC expects of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers in terms of behaviour towards others whether ministerial colleagues, Elders, members or others as well as the councils of the church.

The foundation for the behaviour and conduct of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments can be found in the Basis of Union, summarised in Schedule E paragraph 2:

‘Ministers must conduct themselves and exercise all aspects of their ministries in a manner which is compatible with the unity and peace of the United Reformed Church and the affirmation made by ministers at ordination and induction (Schedule C) and the Statement concerning the Nature, Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church (Schedule D) in accordance with which ministers undertake to exercise their ministry.’

The relevant promises in Schedule C are:

- a) to live a holy life and to maintain the truth of the Gospel whatever trouble or persecution may arise;
- b) to fulfil the duties of your charge faithfully, to lead the church in worship, to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, to take your part in the councils of the Church, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world; and
- c) as a Minister of the United Reformed Church ‘to seek its well-being, purity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. The foundation for the behaviour and conduct of CRCWs can be found in the Basis of Union, Paragraph 22,

‘Some are called to the ministry of Church Related Community

Work. After approved preparation and training, they may be called to be Church Related Community Workers in a post approved by the United Reformed Church, are then commissioned and inducted to their office to serve for a designated period. This commissioning and induction shall be in accord with Schedules D and F. Church Related Community Workers are commissioned to care for, to challenge and to pray for the community, to discern with others God's will for the well-being of the community, and to endeavour to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim the love and mercy of God through working with others in both church and community for peace and justice in the world.

The relevant promises in Schedule F are:

- a) to live a holy life, and to maintain the truth of the gospel, whatever trouble or persecution may arise;
- b) to care for, to challenge and to pray for the community, to discern with others God's will for the well-being of the community, to take your part in the councils of the Church and to enable the church to live out its calling to proclaim the love and mercy of God through working with others in both church and community for peace and justice in the world; and
- c) as a Church Related Community Worker to seek its well-being, purity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

CRCWs additions in blue:

## **Standards of professional behaviour**

### **Personal integrity and health**

- To live a Christian life as a person of prayer and integrity.
- To recognise the need for and have concern for a healthy lifestyle, to balance availability and accessibility to ministry demands with time for family and friends, personal renewal and rest and spiritual growth.
- To maintain strict confidentiality of all matters shared with them in confidence, except when required by law to do otherwise eg when children or adults are experiencing or at risk of experiencing abuse, harm or neglect, or when there is a safety issue affecting the whole congregation.
- To safeguard people and protect the more vulnerable by attending and refreshing mandatory URC Safeguarding training (basic and intermediate) and having a working knowledge of the URC's Safeguarding Policy and Guidance (Good Practice 6 and its code of conduct in working with children and adults at risk page 94).
- To be aware of and maintain appropriate boundaries by undertaking mandatory URC Safer Sacred Space Boundaries training and promoting safe and healthy relationships with those they come in contact with.
- To exercise care and sensitivity in seeking counsel from colleagues and to protect the identity of third parties unless permission has been granted.
- To attend meetings, respond to correspondence and keep appropriate records



efficiently and effectively, having regard to the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations requirements (GDPR).

- To observe the URC's Gift Policy for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers and to account carefully for expenses and any funds held on behalf of others.
- Not to undertake duties whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs or when medically advised not to do so.
- To refrain from using privilege or power for personal advantage or gain, whether financial, emotional, sexual or material (Good Practice 6 page 58).
- Not to do anything to undermine the spiritual health of another.

## **Relationships with ministerial colleagues**

### **All Ministers:**

- To strive to protect colleagues from prejudicial discrimination on the basis of gender, race, age, disability or sexual orientation.
- To consider very carefully taking any position of responsibility in a pastorate served by another Minister and to support the direction of church life initiated through the leadership of the pastorate.
- To respect the work of predecessors and successors and deal honourably with their record.
- To consider carefully the location of retirement housing and try to avoid living in the immediate area of past pastorates.

### **Ministers in pastoral charge:**

- To support the ministry of other Ministers and not interfere with the conduct of ministry or the direction of church life of other pastorates.
- To sever all professional ties with a previous pastorate and refer any requests or enquires of previous pastorates to the Interim Moderator or new Minister.
- To welcome retired colleagues and those Ministers serving the wider church as members and worshippers in the pastorate.

## **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.
- Not to seek to influence inappropriately a pastorate in the call of a new minister.
- [To consider very carefully taking any position of responsibility in a pastorate served by another CRCW or a Minister of Word and Sacrament and to support the direction of church life initiated through the leadership of the pastorate.](#)
- To work collaboratively and value the contribution of the whole church in decision-making processes.
- To seek advice from colleagues or other professionals who may offer specialist advice if in doubt about one's competence to deal with any issue or situation.
- To consult and liaise with the church Safeguarding Coordinator (or the Synod Safeguarding Officer if a coordinator has not been appointed or been available)

when a safeguarding concern, allegation or incident arises.

- To consult with colleagues, Elders and others as appropriate when considering taking on extra work.
- To observe proper boundaries in relationships and not to enter into a sexual relationship with anyone in their care.
- Not to meet alone with a child, a young person, children or young people under the age of 18. If a child or young person wants to discuss a personal matter, follow Good Practice 6 Guidance on Lone Working.

### **Relationship with Councils of the Church**

- To be active in the councils of the Church.
- To accept the oversight of synod and the pastoral care of Synod Moderators.
- To submit to disciplinary procedures when initiated by the councils of the church and to inform as soon as possible the Synod Clerk and Synod Moderator, or where appropriate the Secretary for Ministries, when involved in legal proceedings (civil or criminal).
- To undertake mandatory training including Safer Sacred Space Boundaries training, Safeguarding Training at an appropriate level, Pastoral Supervision and any other mandatory training deemed appropriate.
- To work to the agreed Terms of Settlement.
- To be aware of the guidelines for on-going ministerial training issued by the Ministries Committee.

Mission Council 2020

## **14 Competency**

Ministers work in a variety of roles for the church – most in local pastorates or church in-community projects, some in special category posts, some for the wider Synod (often alongside local roles), and some in General Assembly posts. Regardless of role, the church has reasonable expectations of satisfactory ministerial performance and maintenance of professional standards. Both the Marks of Ministry for Ministers of Word and Sacraments and for Church Related Community Workers outline the expected professional standards. Whilst these are detailed documents, it is accepted that no minister is expected to exhibit exceptional gifting in every area. The United Reformed Church has, however, discerned the framework of gifts and graces described in these documents to be that which forms the basis of discernment in both training and assessment.

The Church will undertake the ministry of discernment around performance and standards in two stages – the first under the oversight of the Synod (Or by the General Assembly for ministers in Assembly roles); the second under the oversight of the General Assembly's Assessment Board. The primary aim of this process is to provide a pastoral framework to maintain, and where necessary restore, satisfactory performance and professional standards.

In the event that a Ministers' competency is called into question, the Competency Process is not a quick fix remedy to address issues of underperformance; it is in place to be used as a tool for working collaboratively with local churches, minister, Synod, and Assembly, where possible, to an agreed process to achieve the best outcome for all concerned.

If managed correctly, underperformance issues may take between three and 12 months to resolve. This is not to put an unnecessary burden on the minister, or those with whom the minister works, but to demonstrate that the United Reformed Church is committed to addressing competency issues within a system that promotes consistency, impartiality, equality and fairness.

At all times throughout the process those charged with overseeing ministry are reminded to respond sensitively respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the minister in question.

When ministers enter into this process, they shall be given a copy of this policy and a full description, in writing, of the concerns that have been identified.

For the full process please see: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/ministerial-capability-process/>

## **15 Confidentiality**

The United Reformed Church affirms that the church should be a place of trust and safety for everyone, whether they are church members or not.

The United Reformed Church keeps and uses personal data for the purpose of general church administration e.g. pastoral care and oversight including calls and visits, ministry to children and young people, preparation of rotas, maintaining financial records, safeguarding vulnerable groups, training and to contact people to communicate church news, events and activities.

This data may be held by the United Reformed Church at local church, Synod and General Assembly levels. It can be held in paper filing systems and in computer databases. Data is kept by the United Reformed Church under the Data Privacy Notice and disclosed to other church leaders, administrators, Synod Officers and pastoral visitors as necessary to facilitate the administration and ministry of the church activities whether at local church, Synod or General Assembly.

The confidentiality policy asks everyone to be aware of the information they hold about other people and explains the expectations of the denomination in relation to confidentiality. The policy provides guidance notes to those who will be receiving, handling and storing personal, criminal convictions data and “special category” (formerly termed “sensitive”) data.

When offering prayer support to congregations, whether vocalised prayers during a church service, prayers written in books, hung on prayer trees, and passed on to prayer chain networks, it is important to consider the sensitivity of the information and the impact of what is shared on the member and their family. In other words, whether you are breaching their data. It may be advisable to pray for the member by mentioning their name only, and nothing else (on the basis they might reasonably expect and welcome prayers); or to pray about the illness, without making mention of the member (i.e., anonymisation); or try to obtain expressed consent from the member, as health information is sensitive personal. Where the member is unable to give expressed consent, consent can be sought from family members, as they will be able to decide on behalf of the member.

For more information please see: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/urc-confidentiality-policy/>

## 16 When Things Go Wrong

From time to time there may be concerns about a minister's behaviour. When such concerns are raised the URC must proceed to investigate in terms of its Disciplinary process. For more information please see: <https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Section-O-February-2024.pdf>

## 17 Exit interviews

GA Resolution 25 on Ministerial Changes 2006 agreed that, whenever a minister leaves a pastorate either by moving to a new pastorate or resigning, they should be asked to write a statement giving the reasons for their course of action. A copy of this statement should be sent by the Synod Moderator to the Secretary of Ministries.

*NOTE:* Ministers who are retiring are asked to write a statement summarising their ministry and giving a general outline of their future plans.

When a minister is leaving active ministry for another post consideration will be given to whether such a minister should remain on the Roll of Ministers by the Accreditations Sub Committee. The minister shall produce a written document which should include:

- A reflection on reasons for leaving
- reflections on things achieved in current post or, if retiring, in the whole ministry
- regrets (and lessons taken from them).
- what can be shared with the pastorate(s) from the first three bullet points
  - need to know
  - should be encouraged to resolve
  - should be encouraged by
- exit strategy/laying down work and passing on responsibilities
- family/future plans: how relationships are affected by the move
- practicalities: timing of move, resettlement grant, is the manse OK etc.
- other things
- how the minister discerns that God has been active in and through ~~you throughout~~ ~~you're~~ their ministry?

Therefore, the Synod Moderator shall meet with the minister to discuss the written document which they shall forward to the Secretary for Ministries for a decision to be made at the Accreditations Sub-Committee.

## 18 Gift policy

The Bible is rich in its encouragement of generosity: the command to give freely in Matthew 10:8, the cheerful generosity of the Macedonian church in 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, sacrificial giving in 1 John 3:16-18. It is a biblical imperative.

Gifts may be given to ministers for all sorts of reasons and can come in all shapes and sizes; from the gift for speaking at a church event other than a normal preaching engagement through to a gift from a member of the congregation to express thanks for a 'job well done', or to help out at a difficult time. This policy is written according to UK legislation and is about protecting the reputations of ministers and the church ensuring good practice and

expectations of ministry.

The Guidelines on Conduct and Behaviour include the following for Ministers:

### 3a Personal integrity and health

- To refrain from using privilege or power for personal advantage or gain, whether financial, emotional, sexual or material.

This policy refers to gifts from individuals rather than leaving gifts from local pastorates or other posts and gifts received from speaking engagements. Neither does it apply to wedding or funeral fees which are received as part of general ministerial duties.

Keeping the above in mind

1. Gifts and hospitality, within certain limits, remain a legitimate means of fostering good relationships.
2. Gifts and hospitality can, when excessive, constitute a bribe and/or a conflict of interest. Care and due diligence should always be exercised when giving or receiving any form of gift or hospitality on behalf of the Church.
3. The following factors should be considered to test whether gifts, hospitality or expenses are made for the right reason:
  - if a gift or hospitality, it should be given clearly as an act of appreciation;
  - if an expense then for a bona fide business purpose;
  - no obligation – the gift, hospitality or expense should not place the recipient under any obligation;
  - no expectation – expectations are not created in the giver or an associate of the giver;
  - made openly – if made in secret and undocumented then the purpose will be open to question;
  - reasonable value – the size of the gift is small and the value of the hospitality or expense accords with general business practice. Cash should be neither given nor received as a gift under any circumstances;
  - appropriate – the nature of the gift, hospitality or expense is appropriate to the relationship and accords with general business practice;
  - legal – the gift or hospitality is compliant with relevant laws;
  - reported and documented - the gift, hospitality or expense should be recorded and reported to the Synod Moderator and a note placed on the minister's/CRCWs file;
4. All gifts and hospitality offered, unless of a nominal value (under £100) will be recorded and documented as above, whether accepted or not.

## 19 Useful Information

### A *Illness and Sickness Absence Policy*

The URC aims to support ministers during periods of sickness absence, and to provide help and guidance towards returning to work.

Responsibility for carrying out these procedures is divided between the individual minister,

their Synod Moderator (who may delegate some aspects of the Synod role) and the Maintenance of the Ministry sub-committee (MoM) through the MoM officer. In some situations, input will be sought from others, for example in relation to potential ill-health retirement. Where ministers are not deployed within a synod their line manager will fulfil the role ascribed to the Synod Moderator.

A copy of the full procedures is available to ministers upon request.

### **Sickness Absence Policy – Principles**

The policy aims to ensure that during the course of an illness there is:

- Good pastoral and practical support
- Respect for an individual's privacy
- Use of professional medical advice at an appropriate time
- Clarity about the financial implications of extended absence

While individual needs and circumstances differ, the policy aims to ensure that ministers can and do take sufficient time off to recover from illness. For this reason, ministers should not carry out any of their normal duties while they are advised by their doctor that they are not fit for work ie. conducting funerals, attending conferences and taking services etc. as a minister will not be insured. Where the doctor advises that an individual may benefit from a phased return to work this should be discussed with the Synod Moderator who will normally agree the details of a phased return to work, building up to a full workload over a planned period.

### **Pastoral care during Sickness Absence**

Ministers should notify their Synod Office, pastorate/post and the MoM Office if they are unable to work for more than three days due to sickness and ensure that they are kept up-to-date if the absence becomes prolonged.

Pastoral care will be provided through the Synod Moderator who may delegate some elements of this to others (further references to the Moderator should be taken also to refer to such delegates). Regular contact will be maintained between the Moderator and those whose sickness absence extends beyond four weeks. The preferences of the minister and their family for the frequency and manner of such contact will be respected, subject to the minimum requirements of the procedures for regular Moderator reviews of sickness absence.

It is also the responsibility of the Synod to satisfy itself that the churches within a minister's pastorate are supported, as far as is possible, during a minister's extended absence.

The Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee may become involved where the Synod Moderator judges this to be helpful.

### **Continuation of Stipend**

The stipend will be paid during periods of sickness in such sums as shall be determined from time to time by the MoM sub-committee and will take into account the regulations and benefit schemes of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

Under the terms of the current [Plan for Partnership](#) (para 6.1.2), ministers who are unable to work because of sickness or accident shall be paid full stipend (less any Employment Support

Allowance or Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit received) for a period of six months. Any sickness arising in the twelve months prior to the first day of a new period of sickness will be taken into account in the calculation of those six months.

At the appropriate time after the beginning of any sickness absence, the MoM sub-committee shall determine, in consultation with the Synod Moderator and having taken independent occupational health advice, what further help, if any, should be given when the entitlement to full stipend comes to an end. The level of any payments to be made after six months will be notified by the end of the fifth month of absence, in the first instance, and may be reviewed later with regard to circumstances.

### **Occupational Health Advice**

The MoM sub-committee may seek advice about the impact of an illness on the individual and their ability to work from the Church's medical adviser and also from a specialist Occupational Health organisation. This may include a review of relevant medical records and a telephone or personal consultation.

Such advice requires the consent of the individual. Where consent is not given, the decisions of the MoM sub-committee will be based only upon the available information. However, under the terms of the Pension Fund Rules, any application for an ill-health pension may only be granted after obtaining such independent medical advice.

### **Disability**

The URC aims to follow the spirit of relevant legislation such as the Equalities Act 2010 (regardless of whether in an individual's situation the legal obligations apply). Where an illness leaves a minister with a disability, the Synod will work with the individual and the pastorate/post to ensure that appropriate reasonable adjustments are made to allow the individual to work effectively.

### **Extended Periods of Absence**

For some individuals incapacity through physical or mental illness may be judged to be permanent. In such cases ministers who belong to the URC Ministers' Pension Fund may apply for an ill-health pension.

At the point at which payments of stipend cease, some ministers will still feel unable to resume their full duties even though their illness is not considered permanent. Where such a situation is anticipated their Moderator may make reference to the Pastoral Reference and Welfare Committee for stipend support.

### **Grievance**

Where a minister has a grievance about the way in which the sickness absence procedures are implemented, they are encouraged to make every effort to resolve this informally with those involved. Where an informal approach does not resolve the grievance the URC Grievance Procedure provides a means of seeking a fair and impartial resolution of the grievance.



## **Sickness Absence Procedures**

The pattern of timescales and requirements set out in the following sections may be applied flexibly where considered appropriate. The MoM convener will consider all individual cases and may make adjustments as judged appropriate. A summary of the key elements and timing of the procedures is set out in Appendix 1.

### **Notification of absence**

Ministers should notify their Synod Office and the MoM Office if they are unable to work for more than three days due to sickness. This enables the proper records to be maintained. The first seven days of sickness may be self-certified (by letter, email or telephone) but after that all continuing sickness must be covered by a doctor's statement of fitness for work ('Fit note'). Copies of these notifications should be sent to the Synod Moderator and MoM Office.

Both MoM and Synod offices should also be informed when the minister returns to work after a period of certificated absence.

### **Record-keeping**

The MoM Office will maintain a full record of sickness absence, decisions about the continuation of stipend, including copies of correspondence and notes of any telephone calls. They will initiate the Moderator Reviews, doctor's reports and Occupational Health assessments as required and retain copies of the completed reports.

The Synod will maintain a chronological record of all their contacts with the minister and complete the necessary forms/reports needed by the MoM sub-committee in a timely manner so that decisions about the levels of stipend payable are based upon full information about the individual's situation.

### **Fit Notes**

The "Statement of Fitness for Work" was introduced to replace the old sick note in 2010. Doctors use the note to offer advice about the individual's fitness for work.

The two main options are that the individual is "not fit for work" or "may be fit for work" taking into account the doctor's advice.

In the latter case the Fit note may contain advisory information from the GP such as suggestions for a phased return, workplace adaptations or temporary adjustment to duties. The information given on the form is advisory and is not binding.

Where a note is received indicating that the minister may be fit for work, the Synod Moderator should take the initiative in contacting the individual to discuss how these recommendations can be put into effect. More details are given in 'Return to Work', below.

## **Actions During Absence from Work**

While all doctors' Fit notes should be sent to the MoM Office, communications with the minister will normally be through the Synod Moderator or their delegate.

It is important to maintain good communications with a minister who is absent due to sickness for more than four weeks. Regular pastoral contact by the Synod Moderator or a representative can demonstrate care and ensure that the Moderator has up to date knowledge of the minister's condition. This may also enable the Church to provide appropriate support. With some ministers, perhaps in the event of mental illness, there will be a need for extra sensitivity; in such cases the Moderator may agree with the minister that a family member or friend be the Synod's prime point of contact.

In any event, in order that the MoM sub-committee can carry out its duties, Moderators are expected to complete formal review discussions with the minister as described below.

### **Initial Moderator Review**

Our practice is based upon evidence from research showing that people are more likely to get back to work as their illness recedes when they and their employers talk during periods of sickness and make plans for returning to work. Good practice is to begin to discuss and set a framework for actions towards a return to working when someone has been absent from work for a period of time, probably between 4 – 6 weeks, and review this in the light of the actual course of the illness.

Where a minister's sickness absence is expected to continue beyond four weeks, the MoM office will ask the Moderator to arrange a visit to the minister and complete a Ministerial Sickness Review Form. The completed form should be sent to the MoM Office who will forward this to the MoM convener. The minister will be sent a copy of this and any subsequent reports by the MoM Office if requested.

### **Subsequent Moderator Reviews**

In the light of the initial review, and the nature of the minister's illness, the MoM convener will determine a pattern for further reviews. The normal timing of follow-up reviews will be to request one at 10 weeks, and if necessary further reports to be completed by 5, 8 and 11 months. While best practice would be for these to be conducted during a visit, it is acceptable to conduct the reviews over the telephone by mutual agreement.

### **Medical Adviser's Report**

A medical adviser's report will be requested if a fit note is received indicating that the absence may extend to 10 or more weeks or if there are earlier indications that the illness may extend beyond three months.

In such situations the MoM Office will request a report from the Church's medical adviser. When a report is needed, the MoM Office will send the minister a form which includes information about their rights under the Access to Medical Records Act 1988. The minister is asked to give consent and pass the form to their GP, who will forward their responses to the Church's medical adviser. The GP's answers remain confidential to the medical adviser, who will make a report based upon them, including a diagnosis. This report will be sent to the MoM convener.

## **Occupational Health Assessment**

In addition to the medical adviser's report, the Church's appointed Occupational Health organisation will be asked to review the position if the sickness absence continues for more than three months and where it seems possible that absence may extend to six or more months.

It is important that this report is completed and returned to the MoM Office in good time to allow the MoM sub-committee to consider whether, and at what level, any stipend payments should be made beyond six months. This decision has to be made by the end of the fifth month of absence. An additional important benefit of this assessment is that it incorporates an opportunity for the minister to have a confidential general discussion of health issues and receive advice on lifestyle/ health management.

The process is initiated by the MoM Office, who will inform the Moderator and the minister of the need for Occupational Health assessment. The minister will be sent an information sheet and the consultation referral form. The referral form will indicate the specific questions on which advice is sought. The minister is asked to complete Section D and send it on to the Moderator for their completion of Section E and return to the MoM Office. The form will then be sent to the OH company who will conduct their consultation with the minister either by telephone or face-to-face.

When the OH company has undertaken the consultation and sent its report to the MoM Office, the contents will be shared with the Moderator and the MoM sub-committee. The report, which is advisory only, will focus upon the work-related aspects of the minister's health, their fitness to work and the practical steps that might facilitate a return to work. Medical information remains confidential to the OH organisation.

The minister may obtain a copy of the OH report from the MoM Office. If they wish to comment on the contents of the report, they may send such comments to the MoM Office, who will forward these on to the MoM sub-committee and Synod Moderator.

A further OH report may be sought at a later date if the MoM sub-committee considers it necessary in deciding whether further stipend payments should be made.

## **Application for Ill-health Pension**

Where incapacity to work appears to be permanent, a minister who is a member of the URC Ministers' Pension Fund may apply for an ill-health pension. The Pensions Executive will consider this request on behalf of the Fund's Trustee.

Their decision will be based upon an assessment of whether the minister is, and will continue to be, unable to carry on the occupation because of physical or mental impairment. As the pension fund rules require the Trustee to make a decision based upon advice from a registered medical practitioner, an OH assessment will be requested in these circumstances.

## **Return to Work**

On return to work, the date of return should be advised to the MoM and Synod offices.

Where there has been an extended period of absence a phased return to work may be appropriate. When a Fit note suggests a pattern of increasing duties, the Moderator should initiate a discussion about phased return to work. Such discussions might also arise in the course of regular contact between the minister and Moderator. Any such planned return to work must be agreed between the Moderator, the pastorate/post and the minister in a written plan of increasing involvement towards full duties. The plan would normally last up to two months, and not generally beyond three months.

The aim of phased return to work is to build up the workload in stages, beginning with those that seem easiest to undertake or by limiting working hours/location to those that best suit the minister's condition – and not necessarily beginning with the aspects perceived to be of most importance to the church(es). The approach will differ for different people and illnesses; there are no hard and fast rules.

Some examples of such patterns of return to work are: to begin with only Sunday services with the attaching preparation being undertaken; starting by working only mornings or afternoons with no evening meetings or pastoral visiting; in a multi- church pastorate, return might be limited to specific church(es) for the first few weeks.

Once a planned pattern of return to work has been agreed the MoM Office should be informed of the date of phased return to work. At this point, where stipend has been reduced, the MoM sub-committee will normally agree to restore payments to the full level.

If in practice a return to work does not continue as planned, this should also be notified to the Synod Moderator and MoM Office. In any event the Moderator should report to the MoM Office on progress at the end of the planned phased period of return to work, and monthly if the period extends beyond four weeks.

Where, at the end of the planned phased return to work, the minister has not yet returned to full duties, but is expected to recover sufficiently to do so in future, the MoM sub-committee will decide whether it is appropriate to reduce the stipend payable to reflect the level of work being undertaken. If it is considered unlikely that in the foreseeable future the minister's health will recover sufficiently to allow a return to full duties, the process of formally reducing the minister's full-time service should commence immediately.

<https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/urc-ministers-sickness-absence-policy-and-procedure/>

## **B      *Death in Service***

There is a Death in Service insurance policy in place for ministers in service who are also enrolled in the AON Pension Scheme. DIS Benefit is 8 x stipend [calculated at date of death] for those in service under age 68. An Expression of Wish form should be completed in regard to this benefit.

## **C      *Health and Safety in Ministry***

Ministers should be able to carry out the functions of their role without being exposed to unavoidable risk to health, safety, welfare or wellbeing.

It is particularly important for ministers to be aware of any risks associated with lone working and to make appropriate judgements relevant to the situation. While there will undoubtedly be pastoral situations that may invite lone working, it is good practice to arrange to meet in a public space/café if there is any concern around the situation, or if any individual is unknown

to you. It is also good practice to inform others of any lone working, and where you will be and when you expect to return. It can also be advisable to ask for an Elder or congregational member to accompany in any visits that may have any perceived risk.

#### ***D Maternity, Adoption/Paternity and Shared Parental Leave***

Maternity/Adoption/Paternity provisions: ministers are entitled to statutory pay and leave and

full details of the arrangements can be obtained from the MoM Office. Although office holders are not entitled to additional maternity/adoption/shared parental leave, and Keeping in Touch (KIT) days, the General Assembly has agreed that these provisions should be extended to ministers. For more information contact the Ministries Office [ministries@urc.org.uk](mailto:ministries@urc.org.uk)

#### ***E Ordination/Commissioning Loan***

Those to be ordained or commissioned can apply for an Ordination/Commissioning Loan from the Payroll Office.

For more information: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries//the-plan-for-partnership/>

#### ***F Removal Expenses and Resettlement Grant***

##### **Removal**

The receiving local church is responsible for paying the costs of removal (see para 6.3.3 of the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration). Where the removal is within the United Kingdom reimbursement of up to 50% of the cost incurred (subject to a maximum reimbursement shown in Appendix A) is available from the Ministry and Mission Fund and application should be made via the MoM Office. Where special circumstances mean that 50% of the sum paid by the church is significantly more than this maximum, the MoM Sub-Committee shall have discretion to exceed the maximum (currently £2200). Where a minister is called from abroad reimbursement from that Fund to the local church will be based on the removal costs from the port of entry. This applies to stipendiary minister moves only.

For more information: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries//the-plan-for-partnership/>

##### **Resettlement Grant**

Every stipendiary minister, whether full-time or part-time, shall be entitled to a resettlement grant (see Appendix A) upon settling into their first pastorate and each subsequent pastorate or into an appointment paid under the terms of the Plan and upon final retirement; always provided that the settlement involves a change in the place of residence and that the grant shall not be payable more than once in any period of three years.

Except at the time of a minister's initial induction (when a full resettlement grant is payable) where the pastorate is part-time the grant shall be pro rata according to the scoping of the pastorate to be served. Upon retirement the resettlement grant shall be calculated based on the last ten years of service up to age 68 or earlier retirement. The grant will be reduced pro rata where the minister has not been in the stipendiary service of the Church for all of those ten years' or those years of service have not all been full-time.

In the case of a minister who dies before retirement the spouse shall be entitled to the equivalent of a resettlement grant upon the first change of residence. If the death occurs after final retirement but before the first change of residence, then the spouse shall be entitled to the equivalent of a resettlement grant.

Where the minister approaches planned retirement and, with the approval of the pastorate and the Synod, moves into property designated as a retirement home, retirement resettlement and removal grants shall be paid. Retirement removal and resettlement grants shall only be paid once during the ministry of a minister, or ministerial married couple.

If a minister does not receive a resettlement grant upon removal into a property which, at a later date, becomes the retirement home, a retirement resettlement grant will be made available. This will be a taxable emolument.

Where a minister has not received a retirement resettlement grant at the time of retirement, they shall be entitled to a resettlement grant upon the first change of residence (subject to the three years' restriction in para 10.1.1).

For more information: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries//the-plan-for-partnership/>

## **G**     *Pensions and Planning for Retirement*

### **Age to retire**

Planning for later life and retirement is important part of a minister's calling. As life expectancy increase the options are more varied and retirement offers a time for reflection and renewal as well as a time for relation and leisure.

If you are in stipendiary service, you will be aware there have been changes to your pension. Your old style URC pension will be paid at  $x/80$ ths of the stipend at the date of your retirement where  $x$  is the number of years' service you had up to March 2023 when that pension scheme closed for further contributions. Your new pension fund can be used in a variety of ways which will be explained by AON.

For more about pensions please see: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/urc-ministers-pension-fund/>

Planning for retirement will involve lots of decisions which should include where to live, how to relate to a congregation, how to settle into a new community without a specific role, developing the freedom to saying 'yes' and not feeling guilty about saying 'no', and for some to begin to think what future service might be appropriate if any. Boundaries can also be set as to relationship with former pastorates, especially the last one, and at this stage ministers should be aware of ~~that it says in~~ Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers (updated) GA 2020 and Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of CRCWs.

### **Where will I live?**

You are expected, and it's good for your own sake too, to move an appropriate distance from the last pastorate or post upon your retirement. This is to enable your church members to

establish a relationship with their new minister and their new minister to develop their new ministry without feeling inhibited. This clearly has implications for your spouse, especially if they have been involved in the life of a congregation in your pastorate. We appreciate this is not so easy for you if you are non-stipendiary as you will have your own house, but consideration should be given to how you will leave space to allow the congregation to grieve your retiring and for you to let go of your ministry there.

If you are a stipendiary minister and think you might need assistance with housing in retirement, then you should contact Ministries Office to check your eligibility as you will need to have completed 15 years unbroken or 25 years broken service before eligibility can be considered. You will also need to start conversations at least five years before retirement so that the Retired Minister's Housing Society (RMHS) can plan and match its supply of housing to the likely needs of its ministers. You will have some choice as to location but the maximum amount the Society will invest in a property is limited to the relevant county ceilings, which are reviewed annually. The provision of retired housing is means tested. Savings worth three times the annual stipend are disregarded. You need to have, after this disregard, funding for 25% of a property if you are wanting to have a shared ownership arrangement.

The Society recognises service outside the URC in some instances. However, the criteria are clear and, in some cases, up to 10 years' service will be counted.

Being in RMHS housing, unlike being in a manse, means ministers are responsible council tax and water rates. Rent is below market costs and covers repairs and decoration and the ongoing support the Society offers. This might seem like a lot to take in but, at the Pre-retirement course to which you will be invited, there are opportunities to talk on a one-to-one basis with RMHS to look at your housing needs in retirement.

If you require RMHS housing and wish to remain in the vicinity of a previous pastorate, the Synod Moderator shall be consulted by RMHS.

### **How do I lay down work?**

At most departures from a particular ministry there is a sense of loss or bereavement. This needs to be acknowledged. In addition to these a minister may also feel a certain loss of status, responsibility, isolation (from having been at the 'centre' of things). In some instances, the label 'retired minister' brings with it the perception of a ministry no longer useful. In a similar way, you may have the sense of being de-skilled or undervalued and your knowledge and experience are not needed. These and other feelings need to be dealt with. You should address them in pastoral supervision before retirement and we will pay for three sessions of pastoral supervision over the first 6 month of retirement to help this transition.

From having served in a ministry very different from the one you knew when first ordained/commissioned with many different demands, a minister may also feel a sense of relief and liberation. This must also be acknowledged.

The farewell process can be extremely protracted. This can be exhausting and exasperating as for some considerable time it is public knowledge that the period of service is coming to an end. There will be many questions about 'what are you going to do next'. The farewell process can begin with 'last services' at congregations, as well as at Synod meetings and even special occasions. These are potentially supportive and affirming as well as potentially



draining.

You will need, at the same time as reflecting on the past, to reflect on the future. To have the spiritual, physical and emotional energy and time to explore what the future will bring as call into retirement is crucial but may not be easy. It is for this reason that Ministries advises a minister moving into retirement that they should take six months before taking on any new pieces of work. If married, you should not underestimate the effect this all may have on your spouse. The new routine may take some getting used to.

### **Pre-retirement Course**

More details and further information will be given at the pre-retirement course to which every minister is invited, and which is held 5-3 years before retirement.

### **Retired Minister's Housing**

For more information about Retired Ministers' Housing please see: <https://rmhs.org.uk/>

### ***H Extension of Ministry beyond the normal retirement age***

The URC have a normal 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 normal retirement age and that these aims cannot reasonably be met by other means. These include the promotion of intergenerational fairness and dignity and the management of the number of serving Ministers in a shrinking denomination.

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 normal 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.

In reaching a decision over whether to grant an extension, the Accreditations Sub- Committee needs to also take into consideration the deployment strategy across the whole denomination as well as whether the extension will have serious budgetary effects.

For more information see: <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/extension-to-stipendiary-ministerial-service-beyond-the-normal-retirement-age/>

### ***I Retired Ministers' Benevolent Fund***

All retired ministers should be treated fairly and equally wherever they live in the UK, and as far as possible, Synods should act similarly. The retired ministers' benevolent fund seeks to give a compassionate response to cases of need, within the constraints of available resources. If you are experiencing financial hardship you should speak with your Synod Moderator.

### ***J Other Useful Policies and Papers***

## **The Manual**

<https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/general-assembly/the-manual/>

## **Basis of Union**

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/The-Basis-of-the-Union.pdf>

## **Data Privacy policy**

<https://urc.org.uk/privacy-notice/>

## **Plan for Partnership**

<https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries//the-plan-for-partnership/>

## **NSM Expenses Policy**

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-NSM-Expenses-Policy.pdf>