

Paper A8

Employment of lay workers

Business Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	Myles Dunnett, Programme Manager, Church Life Review myles.dunnett@urc.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 31 General Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to give advice to the URC Trust in relation to the making of charitable grants out of the restricted Church Life Fund for lay worker roles, in line with the criteria set out in section four. Resolution 32 Assembly instructs Church Life Fund Committee to publish relevant templates and application advice via the Resources Hub. Resolution 33 Assembly affirms the proposed distinction between lay work and ordained/commissioned ministry, and instructs Church Life Fund Committee to uphold this distinction and seek advice where necessary. Resolution 34 Assembly instructs that funding is only given when Church Life Fund Committee have confidence that the liability of individuals will be limited and all legal obligations will be met. Assembly reminds employers that they are personally responsible for ensuring they are compliant with all legal requirements when employing someone, and failure to comply can lead to serious legal consequences. Resolution 35 Assembly recommends that applicants for lay worker grants carefully consider the appropriate employing entity.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	To propose a process through which the Church Life Fund will make grants for lay workers in local churches.
Main points	Executive summary The paper sets a clear framework for Church Life Fund grants to employ lay workers in local churches to increase missional capacity – either directly (e.g., children/youth, regeneration) or by releasing capacity (e.g., administration). Funding is by grant only: CLF/URCT will not be the employer or assume vicarious liability. Applications must evidence a robust legal employer (ideally a synod trust/CIO/incorporated church), compliance with employment law and safer recruitment, appropriate insurance, line management and pastoral care, CPD, payment of at least the Real Living Wage, time-bound contracts, and provision for redundancy. Success measures are set at application, with proportionate annual reporting. A firm boundary is drawn between lay work and ordained/commissioned ministry (and CRCW competencies): funded roles must not replicate ministerial functions (e.g., presidency at sacraments, routine worship leading). Eligibility will be safeguarded by the CLF Committee, with support from Ministries and Accreditation.
Previous relevant documents	This paper follows the report in Paper A7 Paper N1, General Assembly 2023 (Resolution 51)
Consultation has taken place with...	CLR Steering Group and Sub-Committee Eido Research (and employees/line managers/employers in eight case study locations) Business Committee Resources Committee Mr Ed Morgan KC Various synod officers, staff, and trustees through informal visits and conversations Deputy General Secretary (Ministries)

Summary of impact

Financial	Funding will be made available through the Church Life Fund (CLF). This funding will be made as grants.
External (eg ecumenical)	It is possible that some of the lay workers funded may be in ecumenical contexts. This should be considered by the synod and noted in the application, with reference to the possibility of part or match-funding from the ecumenical partner.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. This paper follows Paper A7 and its accompanying Resolution, and should be read and understood alongside it. Paper A7 sets out evidence from eight case studies on church-employed and synod-employed models, and draws out recommendations in areas including line management, HR support, parity, and clarity of roles. This paper translates some of those findings into eligibility,

governance, and operating criteria for the Church Life Fund (CLF) grants made to support lay worker employment.

- 1.2. Lay worker roles will be eligible for funding from the CLF, as one of three funding streams (alongside shared services and new communities). Funds will be given on a grant basis. CLF, and by extension URC Trust (URCT), will not act as employer in any case. URCT does not assume vicarious liability for the posts it funds. Applications must therefore demonstrate a robust employing entity and compliance with employment law and best practice.
- 1.3. Applications will be reviewed by the Church Life Fund Committee (CLFC) with the support of the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) and Accreditation Sub-Committee.

2. Purpose and scope of the grants

- 2.1. CLF grants for lay workers in local churches exist to increase missional capacity – either directly (e.g. a children and youth worker, a church regeneration worker) or indirectly (e.g. administrative support that frees Ministers, Elders, and other volunteers for specific missional work).
- 2.2. There is evidence from across the denomination of the vital role lay workers play in the life of the church. The hope is that the new lay worker roles will help lift some of the burden on local churches, freeing capacity for other work. Lay worker applications may also be paired with new community applications.
- 2.3. The grants will not be used to fund ordained or commissioned ministry, and applications for roles which too closely resemble ordained or commissioned ministry will not be eligible for funding from the CLF.
- 2.4. Any local church may apply for a lay worker, provided they have the support of their synod. As with all other applications to the CLF, applications should be passed through the relevant synod. Applications will be assessed on their individual merits.
- 2.5. Several synods have asked whether local church lay worker roles they are currently funding can or should be transferred to the Church Life Fund. This is not precluded, but may not be worthwhile if the current arrangement is working well. Existing roles which synods wish to transfer should be assessed jointly by CLFC and the relevant synod on a case-by-case basis, rather than as a binary policy.

3. Distinguishing lay work from ordained or commissioned ministry

- 3.1. The funding made available through the Church Life Fund will not be used to fund roles which, in practice, replicate the functions of an ordained or commissioned minister. To do so – without the accompanying theological education, ecclesial grounding, denominational oversight, and disciplinary structures – would be inappropriate. Presidency at the sacraments and regular leading of worship should not routinely fall within the remit of a CLF funded lay worker.
- 3.2. Roles funded through the Church Life Fund will not overlap significantly with the Marks of Ministry or Core Competencies of Church Related Community

Workers. While some of the roles may at times include elements of these, they should not, in combination, form a core part of the work. For example, the distinction between community workers and CRCWs is that lay workers will not simultaneously act as contextual theologians, missionary and evangelists, and ecclesially-rooted community development practitioners.

- 3.3. The Church Life Fund Committee will have a key role in safeguarding this distinction, ensuring that eligible lay worker roles are clearly differentiated from roles that too closely resemble ordained or commissioned ministry. In doing so, the Committee will need to draw on the expertise of the Deputy General Secretary (Ministries) and the Accreditation Sub-Committee (who will already be involved in reviewing new community applications). CLFC may also need to establish its own lay worker sub-committee to support them in making the distinction. CLFC members should also receive training at the outset of their term, to help them recognise some of the key questions they are likely to face.

4. Funding Criteria

- 4.1. To be eligible for funding from the Church Life Fund, lay worker applications:

- Must demonstrate missional benefit, either directly through the requested role, or by releasing capacity for project work which is detailed in the application.
- Must clearly outline how the employer will meet legal obligations and good practice (contracts, handbook, policies, safer recruitment, equality, etc).
- Must have considered and planned the appropriate employing entity (synod trust/missional partnership/local church) and insurance arrangements.
- Must have identified plans for line management and pastoral care.
- Must outline the financial position of the church, and if possible, make a tangible offer of funding towards the role. Redundancy costs must also be budgeted from the outset.
- Must commit to Continuing Professional Development for the lay worker.
- Must commit to pay at least the Real Living Wage.
- Must include a job pack, including a proposed job description, person specification, terms (salary, annual leave, pension), and contract length.
- Must demonstrate sympathy with the ethos of the URC and set out safeguarding expectations.

5. Employing entity, liability, and insurance

- 5.1. The CLF will not act as employer for any of the funded roles. In its role as grant-maker, URCT will not take on vicarious liability for lay workers funded through the CLF. The Committee must have confidence in the employment arrangement being proposed. If this confidence cannot be given, the role will be ineligible for funding.
- 5.2. In order to limit legal liability, the employer should ideally be established as a legal entity (synod trust/missional partnership CIO/incorporated church). If a church employs a lay worker as an unincorporated voluntary association (which it the legal default in an unincorporated church), the Elders' Meeting

assumes unlimited legal liability. This is a significant level of personal risk.

- 5.3. In some circumstances, churches wishing to employ lay workers will not be incorporated. Although ideally grants will be made to employers incorporated as legal entities, grants may be made to unincorporated local churches. In this case, synods must have undertaken necessary due diligence, exploring potential options for incorporation with churches who wish to employ a lay worker funded by the Church Life Fund.

Church Life Fund Committee will also seek to engage with synods proposing lay worker grants for unincorporated local churches, to explore potential incorporation. If grants are made to unincorporated local churches, steps must be taken to ensure liability is as limited as possible; this may be through indemnity insurance, for example.

- 5.4. As laid out at length in the Eido paper, there are essentially two primary options for local churches to employ a lay worker (plus a third, depending on context):
- A local church (ideally incorporated, or unincorporated) employs a lay worker directly
 - The relevant synod trust employs the lay worker on behalf of the local church
 - In some cases, for example North Western Synod, there is a third option, whereby a CIO, covering a group of local churches arranged as a Missional Partnership, acts as employer on behalf of a local church.
- 5.5. Law and Polity Reference Group are currently working on a standard constitution for local churches who wish to constitute as a CIO. This will be made available on the resources hub once it is complete, given that it is complementary to the Church Life Fund's grant-making operations.
- 5.6. The Church Life Review has previously sought, in conjunction with North Western Synod, counsel's opinion from Mr Ed Morgan KC. That advice has formed the basis of the approach taken in this paper, recognising the need to provide proper and secure legal protection for employers and employees alike.
- 5.7. As set out at length in Eido's report (Paper A7) both primary structural options have benefits and disbenefits. The Steering Group have given careful thought to this issue from the perspective of risk at the local level. The entire Church Life Review is focused on doing things collectively to better support and reduce the burden on local churches. Given this, the Steering Group encourages applicants for lay worker grants to carefully consider the appropriate structural option in conversation with their synod trust.
- 5.8. Applications must state who is insured, and how cover will operate when delivery occurs on local church premises.

6. Success measures and reporting

- 6.1. As with all work funded by the Church Life Fund, lay worker roles will need to be assessed in line with success criteria. There is a need to do this in a way

that is pastorally sensitive and legally compliant, to ensure safety for the worker, manager, and employer (and by extension, the church and synod).

- 6.2. Success criteria are set at application and must be proportionate to the role. They should include outputs (what is delivered), outcomes (difference made), and enablers (capacity released).
 - 6.3. Reporting should be annual and proportionate. CLFC will require brief line-manager and local church reports, a post-holder reflection, and a third-party view. At the end of the original contract term, synods should undertake a thorough review and provide CLF with the outcome regarding eligibility for ongoing funding. CLF will produce documentation to enable this process.
 - 6.4. The standard will be that CLFC agree funding for the duration of the contract. CLFC will however reserve the right to terminate funding mid-contract in exceptional circumstances and after all other processes have been exhausted, e.g. in the case of a significant legal issue.
- 7. Contracts, time-bounding, and redundancy costs**
- 7.1. Contracts should be time-bound with review/extension points clearly identified. Extension requests must be submitted well in advance of the end of the contract.
 - 7.2. Redundancy costs must be budgeted within the grant application from the outset, as CLF will not hold a reserve for redundancy.
- 8. Line management and support**
- 8.1. Applications must show how supervision will balance support and challenge, and the ways in which employed workers can access pastoral care. If a synod-based manager is proposed, there must be an element of local supervision.