

Paper C5

Inactive Ministers Policy

Ministries Committee

Basic information

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Action required	Decision
Draft resolution(s)	Resolution 21 General Assembly adopts the Inactive Ministers Policy and directs its implementation.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	This policy provides a clear framework for recognising and overseeing ministers who remain on the Roll of Ministers but are not currently authorised to exercise ministry on behalf of the United Reformed Church. It exists to protect the peace, unity and good order of the United Reformed Church by distinguishing clearly between ordination or commissioning, which is lifelong, and current authorisation to minister, which depends on present accountability, safeguarding and recognised context.
Main points	<p>The policy affirms that Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers hold office as persons in a position of trust. They must not present themselves as exercising ministry on behalf of the United Reformed Church, or undertake ministerial functions, unless duly authorised by the councils of the Church. Inactive status therefore provides an ordered and recognised category for those who remain ordained or commissioned, but who are not currently authorised, appointed or permitted to exercise public or representative ministry.</p> <p>It makes clear that inactive status is not in itself disciplinary and should not be confused with suspension, incapacity or misconduct. It recognises that inactive status may arise for a wide variety of reasons, including retirement, ill health, caring responsibilities, relocation, vocational transition or voluntary withdrawal from active ministry. At the same time, it establishes that unauthorised exercise of ministry by an</p>

	<p>inactive minister is a serious matter affecting the Church's discipline and good order.</p> <p>The policy sets out how inactive status is determined, recorded and reviewed, and confirms that ministers who are inactive remain within the pastoral care, oversight and discipline of the Church. It also provides a pathway for return to active ministry, making clear that such return is not automatic but requires formal discernment, appropriate safeguarding, confirmation of good standing, and readiness to resume authorised ministry.</p> <p>It should be read alongside the Active Ministers Policy.</p>
Previous relevant documents	
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Moderators URC Legal Adviser

Summary of impact

Financial	N/A
External (eg ecumenical)	N/A

1. Purpose

- 1.1 This policy exists so that the United Reformed Church can respond faithfully, wisely, and pastorally to the needs of its people and communities. Across the United Reformed Church there are times of vacancy, transition, illness, and increased local demand when congregations require the support of authorised ministers who can lead worship, celebrate the sacraments, conduct funerals, and offer trusted pastoral care.
- 1.2 Ministers of the Word and Sacraments, and Church Related Community Workers, hold office as persons in a position of trust, recognised and authorised by the Church to exercise ministry on its behalf. This trust carries both privilege and responsibility, requiring integrity, accountability, and clarity in how ministry is represented. Accordingly, individuals should not present themselves as ministers of the United Reformed Church, nor undertake functions associated with that office, unless they are duly authorised to do so by the councils of the Church.
- 1.3 This policy sets out how the United Reformed Church recognises, records and oversees ministers who remain on the Roll of Ministers but are not currently authorised to exercise ministry on behalf of the Church.
- 1.4 It exists to provide clarity concerning ministerial standing where a Minister of the Word and Sacraments or Church Related Community Worker is not holding active status, while ensuring that vocation, accountability and pastoral care remain properly held within the life of the Church.

1.5 The policy protects the peace, unity and good order of the Church by distinguishing clearly between ordained or commissioned status and current authorisation to exercise ministry.

1.6 Inactive status is a recognised ministerial category within the Church's ordered life. It is not intended to imply misconduct, incapacity or failure.

2. Definition of Inactive Ministry

2.1 Inactive ministry is a formally recognised status in which a minister remains ordained or commissioned and on the Roll of Ministers, but is not currently authorised, appointed or permitted to exercise ministerial functions publicly or representatively on behalf of the Church.

2.2 A minister holding inactive status:

- remains ordained or commissioned within the United Reformed Church;
- retains ministerial standing unless removed from the Roll;
- does not hold an authorised appointment, pastorate, placement or recognised ministerial role;
- may not preach, preside at the Sacraments, lead public worship, exercise pastoral leadership, conduct funerals, or in Scotland solemnise a marriage, or undertake representative ministry unless expressly authorised.

2.3 For the avoidance of doubt, the frequency with which ministry is exercised does not remove the requirement for authorisation. Ministers who preach or otherwise exercise any ministerial function, whether regularly or on an occasional basis (including fewer than four occasions within a calendar year), do so as persons in a recognised position of trust. Accordingly, they must hold the appropriate authorisation, including a current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)/Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) check where required, prior to undertaking such ministry.

2.4 Where a minister does not hold such authorisation, they shall be regarded as holding inactive status and may not exercise ministerial functions. Ministers who wish to resume or undertake such ministry must request designation as active in accordance with the Active Ministers Policy.

2.5 Inactive status must be distinguished from:

- active ministry;
- retirement with active authorisation;
- suspension under the disciplinary process;
- limited authorisation granted for specific purposes.

2.6 Inactive status reflects the Church's understanding that vocation remains lifelong, while the exercise of ministry requires present authorisation, accountability and recognised context.

3. Circumstances in which Inactive Status may apply

3.1 A minister may hold inactive status for a variety of reasons including:

- retirement without active authorisation;
- voluntary withdrawal from active ministry;
- health or wellbeing considerations;
- caring responsibilities;

- vocational discernment or transition;
- relocation;
- absence from authorised service;
- other circumstances agreed by the Church.

3.2 Inactive status may be entered voluntarily by request of the minister or by formal determination of the Church through its proper councils.

3.3 Inactive status shall not be used as an informal substitute for capability, incapacity or disciplinary procedures where those processes are more appropriate.

4. Authority for determining Inactive Status

4.1 Inactive status shall be determined by the Accreditations Sub-Committee acting on behalf of the Ministries Committee, following appropriate recommendation and notification.

4.2 A recommendation may arise from:

- written notice from the minister;
- Synod Moderator;
- Synod Pastoral Committee;
- relevant denominational office or process.

4.3 The effective date of inactive status shall be formally recorded on the database.

4.4 The minister shall receive written confirmation of:

- status;
- date of commencement;
- any review arrangements;
- any restrictions applying.

5. Restrictions applying to Inactive Ministers

5.1 A minister holding inactive status may not exercise public ministry unless specifically authorised.

5.2 This includes:

- preaching;
- presiding at the Sacraments;
- conducting baptisms, weddings or funerals;
- exercising recognised pastoral leadership;
- representing the Church ministerially in formal settings.

5.3 Any limited permission granted by the Synod must be explicit, time-defined and formally recorded.

5.4 Unauthorised exercise of ministry by an inactive minister constitutes a disciplinary matter affecting the peace and good order of the Church.

6. Accountability and Continuing Relationship with the Church

6.1 Ministers holding inactive status remain within the discipline and pastoral oversight of the Church.

- 6.2 They remain subject to:
- safeguarding expectations where relevant;
 - standards of conduct;
 - denominational discipline;
 - obligations arising from ministerial standing.
- 6.3 Ministers who are inactive shall maintain connection with the Church through:
- membership in a United Reformed Church congregation; or
 - inclusion on the Isolated Members Roll where appropriate.
- 6.4 Such connection sustains accountability within the covenant life of the Church.
- 6.5 The absence of any meaningful connection with the United Reformed Church may result in the removal from the Roll, or a determination that the minister is no longer considered to be in good standing with the denomination. It is recognised that, for some ministers, regular attendance within a local United Reformed Church may not be possible because of the nature of their personal circumstances. In such cases, membership should ordinarily be held within a wider fold church, details of which may be found at the Synod Office.

7. Annual Review of Inactive Status

- 7.1 The Ministries Office shall contact ministers holding inactive status annually.
- 7.2 This annual review shall confirm:
- continued inactive status;
 - contact details;
 - membership connection;
 - whether return to active ministry is being considered;
 - whether continued inclusion on the Roll remains appropriate.
- 7.3 Synods shall be informed of ministers within their pastoral area holding inactive status.
- 7.4 The denominational database shall be maintained accordingly.

8. Pastoral Care of Inactive Ministers

- 8.1 The Church recognises that periods of inactivity may arise through complex personal, vocational or pastoral circumstances.
- 8.2 Synods shall therefore ensure that reasonable pastoral contact is maintained.
- 8.3 Such care should respect privacy, dignity and proper boundaries.
- 8.4 Pastoral care does not in itself imply active authorisation.

9. Return to Active Ministry

- 9.1 Return to active ministry is not automatic and requires formal discernment.
- 9.2 A minister seeking return shall contact:
- the Synod Moderator; and
 - the Ministries Office.

- 9.3 Before return can be considered, the following must be confirmed:
- good standing;
 - safeguarding clearance;
 - current training requirements;
 - Fitness to Practise;
 - readiness for authorised ministry.
- 9.4 Additional formation, supervised re-entry, mentoring or refresher learning may be required.
- 9.5 Recommendation for return shall normally be made by the Synod and confirmed through the Accreditations Sub-Committee.
- 9.6 Active status begins only when formal authorisation has been given and recorded.
- 10. Relationship with Other Policies**
- 10.1 This policy shall be read alongside:
- Active Ministers/Fitness to Practise Policy
 - Ministerial Capability Process
 - Discipline Process
- 10.2 Where concerns arise involving health, conduct, safeguarding or capability, the relevant specialist process shall take precedence.