

# Paper C8

## The Competencies and Expected Standards of Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments

### Ministries Committee

#### Basic information

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<b>Action required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft resolution(s)</b>	<b>Resolution 24</b> <b>General Assembly adopts the framework of Competencies and Expected Standards of Conduct and Behaviour for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments as set out in this paper.</b>

#### Summary of content

<b>Subject and aim(s)</b>	<p>This paper is a tidying up of two former policies: Expectations of Ministry (General Assembly 2016) and the Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments (General Assembly 2020).</p> <p>It establishes a clear grounded framework for understanding competencies and expected standards within the covenantal life of the United Reformed Church. It affirms that ministry is exercised within relationships of mutual trust, accountability and shared responsibility, and therefore requires both clarity about the nature of ministry and fairness in how it is recognised, formed and sustained.</p>
<b>Main points</b>	<p>Competencies describe the broad capacities required for faithful ministry — encompassing knowledge, skills, judgement and dispositions — while expected standards define the level at which these must be demonstrated in practice. Together, they provide a developmental and accountable framework for discerning readiness for ministry, supporting formation, and sustaining effective service over time.</p> <p>Grounded in the Basis of Union and the promises made at ordination, the framework integrates the Marks of Ministry (what a minister is), the Gifts and Graces (how ministry is lived out), and the Expected Standards (what is demonstrated in</p>

	<p>practice). This ensures a coherent approach to recognising and nurturing faithful, effective and responsible ministry across diverse contexts.</p> <p>The paper also sets out clear expectations for professional behaviour, including personal integrity, safeguarding, collaborative working, accountability within the councils of the Church, and the maintenance of healthy relationships and boundaries. It recognises that ministers may serve in a variety of settings, including externally regulated roles, and affirms that these standards apply appropriately within each context.</p>
<b>Previous relevant documents</b>	<p>Expectations of Ministry (General Assembly 2016)          Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Ministers of the Word and Sacraments (General Assembly 2020).</p>
<b>Consultation has taken place with...</b>	

**Summary of impact**

<b>Financial</b>	N/A
<b>External (eg ecumenical)</b>	N/A

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 This paper places competencies and expected standards within the covenantal life of the Church because ministry in the United Reformed Church is exercised within relationships of mutual trust, accountability and shared responsibility between the minister, the councils of the Church and the wider people of God. Discernment therefore requires both clarity about the nature of ministry and fairness in the way ministry is recognised, formed and sustained.
- 1.2 Competencies describe the broad capacities required for faithful ministry within that covenant: the knowledge, skills, judgement, behaviours and dispositions through which ministry is exercised responsibly in the service of Christ and the Church. They identify key areas of formation, including theological reflection, pastoral sensitivity, communication, leadership, collaboration, self-awareness and the capacity to work within the conciliar life and polity of the United Reformed Church.
- 1.3 Competencies alone, however, are insufficient, because they do not indicate the level at which such qualities must be demonstrated, nor whether they are exercised with sufficient consistency and maturity to sustain the trust which covenantal ministry requires.
- 1.4 Expected standards therefore give practical expression to competencies by describing the threshold at which they must be evidenced in lived ministry. They make clear what the Church is seeking when discerning readiness for candidating, training, ordination and continuing in active ministry.
- 1.5 Together they provide a developmental framework which honours vocation while ensuring that those entrusted with ministry exercise that trust with integrity, pastoral wisdom and due responsibility.

- 1.6 Whilst this policy is framed primarily with Ministers of the Word and Sacraments in pastoral charge in mind, it recognises that those serving in other forms of ministry, including Non-Stipendiary Ministers and those in Assembly-appointed roles, exercise their vocation in different contexts. Accordingly, not all of the expected standards will apply in the same way. Nevertheless, the standards remain of equal importance and are to be interpreted appropriately in relation to the nature and scope of each minister's authorised role.

## 2. Basis of Union

The foundation for the conduct of Ministers is 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 promises in Schedule C are:

- a) '...confess anew your faith in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- b) '...believe that the Word of God in the Old and New Testaments, discerned under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is the supreme authority for the faith and conduct of all God's people?
- c) '...believe that Jesus Christ, who was born of Mary, lived our common life on earth, died upon the cross, and who was raised from the dead and reigns for evermore, is the gift of God's very self to the world? Do you believe that through him God's love, justice and mercy are revealed and forgiveness, reconciliation and eternal life are offered to all people? And will you faithfully proclaim this Gospel?
- d) '...believe that the Church is the people gathered by God's love to proclaim the reconciliation of the world to God through Jesus Christ?
- e) '...zeal for the glory of God, love for the Lord Jesus Christ, obedience to the Holy Spirit and a desire for the salvation of the world, so far as you know your own heart, the chief motives which lead you to enter this ministry?
- f) '...to live a holy life and to maintain the truth of the Gospel whatever trouble or persecution may arise';
- g) '...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
- h) ...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'.

3. **Within the United Reformed Church, ordination already presumes the Marks of Ministry (Mission Council 2019).** The Marks of Ministry describe the fundamental character and identity of the minister whom the Church ordains and recognises. They articulate the theological shape of ministry — what a minister is within the life of the Church. The Gifts and Graces (Competencies) describe the habits of character and practical abilities through which that ministry is lived out. They express how a minister grows, develops and exercises their calling in practice over time. The Expected Standards describe the accountable pattern of ministry as it is exercised in the Church’s life. They indicate what a minister demonstrates in practice, providing a shared framework for recognising faithful, effective and responsible ministry.

**A Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the United Reformed Church is a person:**

Who is:	Who lives (Marks of Ministry):	Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (Expected Standards):
<b>A Faithful Disciple</b>	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 other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their own experience of life and faith;</li> <li>• The Gospel and their own account of it;</li> <li>• The importance of prayer, scripture and worship for sustaining ministry;</li> <li>• The need for openness to learning and continuing development;</li> <li>• The significance of intergenerational discipleship</li> </ul>	Living a Holy Life by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articulating growth in faith and practice;</li> <li>• Reflecting on learning and responding to challenge;</li> <li>• Relating in good, flourishing relationships to those both within and beyond the Church community;</li> <li>• Faithful participation in pastoral supervision and continuing professional development.</li> </ul>

Who is:	Who lives (Marks of Ministry):	Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):	Who demonstrates ability in (Expected Standards):
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>A person of integrity and resilience</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What it means to live a Christian life of integrity, humility and selflessness;</li> <li>• The importance of resilience, perseverance and a healthy lifestyle;</li> <li>• Maintaining strict confidentiality of all matters shared with them in confidence unless given permission to do so, is a danger to the discloser or others or if the discloser is likely to become involved in a criminal offence;</li> <li>• The appropriate use of power and responsibility in ministry;</li> <li>• The demands of accountability within the URC.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective practice and self-awareness;</li> <li>• Maintaining appropriate boundaries and confidentiality;</li> <li>• Engagement with safeguarding, safer sacred space training and anti-racism training and other mandatory training as rolled out;</li> <li>• Healthy time management and sustainable patterns of ministry;</li> <li>• Willingness to seek support and manage conflict constructively</li> </ul>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>A contextual theologian</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Bible and the Reformed tradition, including its expression in the URC;</li> <li>• The significance of context and culture in shaping faith;</li> <li>• The importance of being a theologian for particular times and places;</li> <li>• The value of reflective practice;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theological reflection on ministry experience;</li> <li>• Interpreting and renewing the traditions of faith within their particular context;</li> <li>• Analysis, discernment and critical evaluation;</li> <li>• Engaging people of all ages and backgrounds in theological conversation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Who is:</b></p>	<p><b>Who lives (Marks of Ministry)</b></p>	<p><b>Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):</b></p>	<p><b>Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):</b></p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);"><b>A worship leader and preacher</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patterns of worship and their theological roots</li> <li>• The demands of shaping worship in contemporary culture</li> <li>• The importance of clear and faithful communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality in leading worship and the sacraments</li> <li>• Preaching and spoken ministry;</li> <li>• written communication</li> <li>• Reflective engagement with feedback</li> <li>• Deepening faith and worship for others</li> <li>• Offering ministerial service at major Christian festivals, including Christmas and Easter, unless in exceptional circumstances and by agreement from the Synod Moderator.</li> </ul>

<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">A pastor</p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pastoral sensibility and ministry as accompaniment</li> <li>• Patterns of human relationship, community and society</li> <li>• The human psyche</li> <li>• The importance of self-care alongside care for others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening and pastoral presence;</li> <li>• understanding and interpreting people and situations</li> <li>• Relating well to Elders, members and others</li> <li>• Recognising need and making appropriate referrals</li> <li>• Reflective self-care.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Who is:</b></p>	<p><b>Who lives (Marks of Ministry):</b></p>	<p><b>Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):</b></p>	<p><b>Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):</b></p>
<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">A leader and collaborator</p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their own leadership style and particular gifts</li> <li>• Group dynamics and how communities function</li> <li>• Shared and collaborative models of leadership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling and developing the gifts of others</li> <li>• Community and team building;</li> <li>• Collaborative leadership and decision-making</li> <li>• Administration and management;</li> <li>• Sustaining constructive relationships with Elders and colleagues.</li> </ul>

<p>A missionary and evangelist</p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>contemporary contexts and cultures</li> <li>The demands of evangelism today</li> <li>How societies are formed and challenged</li> <li>The importance of journeying with people as well as proclaiming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inspiring and enabling others in mission and evangelism</li> <li>Effective communication and public engagement</li> <li>Engagement with change</li> <li>Sustaining ministry under pressure</li> <li>Nurturing resilience in others.</li> </ul>
<p>Who is:</p>	<p><b>Who lives (Marks of Ministry):</b></p>	<p><b>Who knows and understands (Gifts and Graces):</b></p>	<p><b>Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):</b></p>
<p>A public figure</p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Social and political contexts;</li> <li>Power and its effects</li> <li>Life at the centre and margins of society.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ecumenical and (where appropriate) interfaith engagement;</li> <li>Engagement with public bodies;</li> <li>Participation in the wider life of society.</li> </ul>
<p>A communicator or</p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interpersonal, oral and written communication;</li> <li>The use of different media and technologies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preaching and public speaking</li> <li>Use of text, image and sound</li> <li>Appropriate use of information technology</li> <li>Timely and effective correspondence including emails.</li> </ul>

<p><b>A participant in the Council of the Church</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Basis of Union</li> <li>• nature of oversight and accountability.</li> </ul>	<p>Participates faithfully in the councils of the Church, recognising that ordination includes that promise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prioritises attendance at Synod meetings as an expression of this promise, except in exceptional and agreed circumstances by the Synod Moderator</li> <li>• Contributes constructively to the discernment and decision-making of the Church in its councils, where appropriate</li> <li>• Complies with mandatory training requirements</li> <li>• Serves within agreed Terms of Settlement</li> <li>• Engages in ongoing ministerial development through EM2 and EM3</li> <li>• Engages appropriately with formal processes, including disciplinary processes where required.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Who is:</b></p>	<p><b>Who lives (marks of ministry):</b></p>	<p><b>Who knows and understands (gifts and graces):</b></p>	<p><b>Who demonstrates ability in (expected standards):</b></p>
<p><b>A reformer</b></p>	<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understands the ethos and history of the United Reformed Church</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting as an agent of change;</li> <li>• Supporting congregations through this transition.</li> </ul>

## 4. Standards of professional behaviour

A Minister of the Word and Sacraments is called to model, in public and in private, the Christ-like character that befits this office. Accordingly, it is expected that ministers will consistently treat all people with respect and dignity, recognising in each person the image of God, and conducting themselves in a manner that strengthens the Church's witness. The following standards articulate, in practical terms, the professional behaviours that the United Reformed Church has a right to expect of those who serve in ordained ministry.

Whilst ministers remain accountable to the discipline and oversight of the Church, it is recognised that those serving in contexts such as chaplaincy or other externally regulated roles are also accountable to the professional and institutional standards governing that setting. Accordingly, a failure to meet those external standards may properly be considered within the Church as a failure to meet the expected standards of ministry, since such ministry is exercised on behalf of the Church within that wider professional context.

### 1. *Personal integrity and health*

Ministers are expected:

- **To live a Christian life of prayer and integrity**, sustaining a faithful rhythm of worship, scripture and spiritual discipline appropriate to the responsibilities of ministry.
- **To attend to personal wellbeing and sustainability**, maintaining a healthy pattern of life that balances availability and accessibility to the demands of ministry with time for family and friends, personal renewal and rest, and ongoing spiritual growth.
- **To maintain strict confidentiality** in relation to all matters shared in confidence, except where disclosure is required by law or necessary to safeguard others; for example, where a child or adult is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse, harm or neglect, or where there is a safety concern affecting the wider congregation, consistent with the URC Confidentiality Policy.
- **To safeguard children and adults at risk**, by undertaking and refreshing mandatory URC Safeguarding Training (Advanced), and by maintaining a working knowledge of the URC's Safeguarding Policy and Guidance in accordance with the guidelines, including the relevant code of conduct for working with children and adults at risk.
- **To maintain appropriate boundaries**, by undertaking mandatory URC Safer Sacred Space Boundaries training, and by promoting safe and healthy relationships in all contexts of ministry.
- **To exercise care and sensitivity in seeking counsel**, including appropriate professional discretion, and the protection of third-party identities unless permission has been granted for disclosure.
- **To be diligent and reliable in administrative responsibilities**, including attending meetings, responding to correspondence in a timely manner, and keeping appropriate records efficiently and effectively, with due regard to the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK GDPR requirements.

- **To observe the URC Gift Policy** for Ministers of the Word and Sacraments and Church Related Community Workers, and to account carefully for expenses and for any funds held on behalf of others.
- **Not to undertake ministerial duties** while under the influence of alcohol or drugs, nor when medically advised not to do so.
- **To refrain from any misuse of privilege or power** for personal advantage or gain whether financial, emotional, sexual or material in accordance with the URC's Safeguarding Policy and Guidance.
- **Not to act in any way that undermines the spiritual health of another**, recognising the particular trust placed in ministers and the potential impact of ministerial conduct on the life and wellbeing of individuals and congregations.

### 2. *Relationships with ministerial colleagues*

#### **All ministers are expected:**

- **To protect colleagues from discrimination and prejudice**, and to act in ways that uphold the equal dignity of all, regardless of gender, race, age, disability or sexual orientation
- **To respect theological diversity** where differing views are held in good faith and are consistent with the faith and order of the United Reformed Church as expressed in the Basis of Union and are seen as a gift to the Church and contributes to its discernment, witness, and unity in Christ
- **To exercise discernment** before accepting responsibility within a pastorate served by another minister, and, where appropriate, to support the direction of church life shaped through that pastorate's authorised leadership
- **To respect the ministry of predecessors and successors**, and to deal honourably with their work and record
- **To consider carefully the location of retirement housing**, seeking, where possible, to avoid residing in the immediate area of a former pastorate, in order to protect the integrity of boundaries and the freedom of successor ministry.

#### **Ministers in pastoral charge are additionally expected:**

- **To support the ministry of other ministers**, and not to interfere with the conduct of ministry or the direction of church life in other pastorates
- **To sever professional ties with a previous pastorate**, referring all requests and enquiries relating to that pastorate to the interim moderator or the new minister
- **To welcome retired colleagues and ministers serving the wider church**, as members and worshippers within the pastorate, encouraging a culture of generosity and mutual respect.

### 3. *Relationships with elders, members and others*

#### **All Ministers are expected:**

- **To regard all people with equal love and concern**, reflecting the breadth of Christ's welcome and the Church's commitment to justice and inclusion.
- **To uphold the values of faithfulness, trust and respect** in all relationships, recognising that healthy relationships are foundational to credible ministry.

- **To share leadership and pastoral care** with elders and others who are called to these purposes, working collaboratively and valuing the contribution of the whole Church in decision-making.
- **Not to seek to influence inappropriately** a pastorate in the calling of a new minister, guarding the integrity of the Church's processes of discernment.
- **To seek advice and specialist support when needed**, including from ministerial colleagues or other professionals, where an issue exceeds one's competence or requires specialist knowledge.
- **To consult the Church Safeguarding Coordinator**, or where none is appointed or available, the Synod Safeguarding Officer, whenever a safeguarding concern, allegation or incident arises.
- **To consult appropriately before taking on additional commitments**, including with colleagues, elders and others, so that workload remains sustainable and ministry responsibilities are exercised with integrity.
- **To observe proper relational boundaries**, including the requirement not to enter into a sexual relationship with anyone in their pastoral care without first speaking with their Synod Moderator.
- **Not to meet alone with a child or young person under the age of 18**, and where a child or young person seeks to discuss a personal matter, to follow the Good Practice 6 Guidance on lone working.

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

##### **Ministers are expected:**

- **To participate actively in the Councils of the Church**, recognising conciliar life as intrinsic to the URC's identity and discipline.
- **To accept the oversight of Synod**, and the pastoral care of Synod Moderators, as part of accountable ministry within the denomination.
- **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—if involved in civil or criminal legal proceedings.
- **To undertake mandatory training**, including Safer Sacred Space Boundaries training, Safeguarding training at the Advanced level, Anti-racism training, and any other mandatory training deemed necessary.
- **To engage in pastoral supervision at least six times per year**, as a normal expectation of reflective, sustainable and accountable ministry.
- **To serve in accordance with the agreed Terms of Settlement**, and to work within the responsibilities and boundaries they establish.
- **To be familiar with, and responsive to, the guidelines for ongoing ministerial training** issued by the Ministries Committee, recognising that continuing formation is a normal and expected element of ordained ministry.