



Thinking about Patterns of Ministry

part of

*An Introductory course
on the United Reformed Church*

**for those training as
Elders, Lay Preachers, Local Leaders,
Ministers of Word and Sacraments
and Church Related Community Workers**

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Patterns of Ministry

The appendices to the report on “Patterns of Ministry” are reproduced from *Reports to General Assembly 1995* (and use the words 'province' and 'provincial' to refer to synods).

APPENDIX A - THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY

INTRODUCTION

Each tradition which is contained within the United Reformed Church originally justified its pattern of ministry on the ground that it reflected the pattern of the New Testament Church. The historic pre-Reformation patterns were rejected on the ground that they needed reform, and the criteria for the reformed pattern were derived from scripture, as the reformers understood it. Few today would wish to argue either that the New Testament provides a single pattern of ministry or that the patterns in the various churches can be evaluated by the extent to which they conform to a single New Testament pattern. On the other hand, there is disagreement on the relative importance of New Testament patterns and the needs of the Church today. This issue is not addressed in the Basis of Union and only to a limited extent in BEM. The use of the historic present tense in both documents leaves it unclear whether the primary reference is to theological or historical affirmations.

The following abbreviations are used in the text which follows:

BEM: Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry; Faith and Order Paper no. 111, World Council of Churches, Geneva 1982. References are to the text on Ministry unless otherwise stated. The General Assembly approved a formal response to this text in 1985;

GRU: God's Reign and our Unity, the Report of the Anglican-Reformed International Commission, London & Edinburgh, 1984. The General Assembly of 1985 asked the Doctrine and Worship Committee to prepare a response which was contained in the Committee's report to Assembly, 1986;

URC Basis and URC Structure: the Basis of Union and the Structure of the United Reformed Church, originally approved by the Uniting Assembly of 1972, but (except where otherwise noted) quotations are from the Basis as revised by the General Assembly of the Church from time to time and printed in the 3rd Edition of *The Manual of the United Reformed Church* 1991.

1 MINISTRY IN THE UNIVERSAL CHURCH

1.1 God created the heavens and the earth, including human beings, as an expression of the divine glory: despite human resistance to God's purpose, God's grace and love are manifested in a continuing mission to reconcile humanity and the whole universe to God (GRU 25).

1.2 God calls the whole of humanity to become God's people. By sheer grace God

chose Israel and then in fulfilment of that purpose called the Church into being through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit: mission refers primarily to God's continuing activity in the world, summed up in the accomplished work of Christ (URC Basis 1, BEM 1, GRU 26).

1.3 The life of the Church is based on Christ's once-for-all victory over the powers of evil and death and comes from the power of the Holy Spirit, given to those who believe in the Risen Lord and are recreated as the Body of Christ (BEM 2-3).

1.4 The sovereign rule of God, to which the Church bears witness, is the reality underlying the world God created: the Church is the beginning of the new creation, but has only a provisional character in the service of God's rule, provisional first because it contains only part of the human family and secondly because those within it are only partly conformed to God's purpose (GRU 29, 30).

1.5 The task of the Church is to proclaim the Gospel to the world and to be a foretaste of the joy and glory of God's rule by its witness and service (BEM 4, GRU 73). Christ thus continues his ministry in and through the Church (URC Basis 19).

1.6 The Holy Spirit bestows on the members of the Church diverse and complementary gifts; members should discover, with the help of the community, the gifts they have received and use them for the building up of the Church and for the service of the world (BEM 5, cf. URC Basis 19-20, where these gifts are attributed to Christ). Through the power of the Spirit members of the Church are enabled to participate in the ministry of Christ to the world (GRU 74).

1.7 The first disciples were both the first followers and the first apostles sent to call others to follow (GRU 76). Thus from very early times people were called and set apart to lead and build up the local churches in their life and service to the world, particularly in the proclamation of the Word, the celebration of the sacraments and the exercise of oversight (*episkope*) (BEM 8-9, 13).

1.8 By the third century a common pattern of ministry was emerging which involved a chief pastor in each local church who worked with a body of colleagues and other helpers or assistants to forward the work of Christ in Church and world: this was the origin of the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon (GRU 91, BEM 19-25).

2 MINISTRY IN THE UNITED REFORMED CHURCH

2.1 In the later sixteenth century those who wished "to complete" the Reformation in England, whether presbyterians or congregationalists, rejected the mediaeval form of the threefold ministry, expressed in the understanding of the local church as a diocese. Instead local congregations called a pastor to preach the Word and administer the sacraments, who was surrounded by a group of elders and deacons. At the regional level oversight was exercised not by a single pastor but by councils of pastors and elders (GRU 94).

2.2 Different variations of this pattern were found in the constituent traditions of the

United Reformed Church - Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ. The Basis of Union states the common understanding of church and ministry underlying these traditions.

2.3 The United Reformed Church undertakes to make available, so far as possible, ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments to every local congregation, to accredit suitable people as lay preachers, and to recognise certain members, normally elders or accredited lay preachers, who may be invited to preside at baptismal and communion services where pastoral necessity so requires (URC Basis 24). All ministries are open to both women and men (URC Basis 25).

2.4 Within the local congregation the elders' meeting (which consists of the minister(s) and elders) is responsible for ensuring that public worship is offered, the sacraments are celebrated and the word is preached (URC Structure 2(2)). A congregation or group of congregations, with the concurrence of the District Council, calls an ordained minister or ministers of Word and Sacraments to undertake these tasks (URC Basis 21). Some ordained ministers are stipendiary and others are non-stipendiary; the difference between them relates primarily to availability for service. Many congregations, to an extent which varies significantly from place to place, also invite lay preachers to lead worship.

2.5 Responsibility for pastoral care and oversight is shared among ordained ministers and elders, who also constitute the wider councils of the Church (URC Basis 20, 21, 22). The pastoral responsibilities of elders are usually exercised through the assignment of a group of members to each elder for pastoral care. The responsibilities of elders in the government, oversight and leadership of the church are necessarily corporate or collegial in character, and by its relation to the wider councils of the Church the elders' meeting represents the whole Church to the local church.

2.6 The procedures for recognising and calling people to ministry vary according to the ministry concerned. Elders are called, elected and ordained within each congregation; ordination to the eldership is not repeated if an elder moves to another congregation, but such a person does not become a serving elder in the new congregation unless that congregation so decides. Ministers of Word and Sacraments are selected for training by a process involving several councils of the Church but the decision on eligibility for ordination is by the provincial synod on behalf of the whole Church. In each case ordination is to a ministry recognised throughout the United Reformed Church.

2.7 The Basis of Union (23) provides that the General Assembly shall decide what other ministries shall be exercised within the United Reformed Church and how those who are to exercise them shall be set apart. Lay preachers are accredited by District Councils but not ordained; there is also a list of nationally accredited preachers kept by the Accreditation Sub-Committee. The General Assembly keeps a roll of accredited Church Related Community Workers.

2.8 Other ministries are recognised within local congregations with varying degrees of formality, e.g. youth workers, children's workers, organists and leaders of music.

2.9 The United Reformed Church recognises the work of Youth and Children’s Work Trainers and Youth Leadership Training Officers, but they need not be ordained ministers.

2.10 The General Assembly appoints a Moderator for each provincial Synod, who is a minister, separated from any local pastoral charge, and appointed for a period of years, with the possibility of reappointment for further periods if the General Assembly so determines. The task of the Moderator is to preside over meetings of the Provincial Synod and exercise a pastoral office towards the ministers and churches within the Province. The Moderator is involved in the process of suggesting names of ministers to vacant pastorates, and presides, or appoints a deputy to preside, at all ordinations and inductions of ministers within the Province. The Moderator is also a member of each district council in the Province and shares in the council's responsibility for oversight of local churches and ministers (URC Structure 2(4)). The Moderator therefore exercises a personal *episkope* in a conciliar setting, but a Moderator's ministry is not understood as constituting a separate order of ministry. Constitutionally Moderators are officers of the General Assembly, though unlike other Assembly officers they have responsibilities which are primarily regional rather than national.

2.11 The current discussion requires us to clarify our understanding of:

- (a) ordained and non-ordained ministry;
- (b) stipendiary and non-stipendiary ministry;
- (c) elders and lay preachers;
- (d) diakonia.

3 ORDAINED MINISTRY

3.1 Christians understand the qualities of character, which enable them to live the Christian life and show forth the good news of the Kingdom of God in the service of others, as gifts from God rather than resources originating in themselves. Everyone has a unique combination of such gifts. The exercise of such gifts is what we mean by the ministry of the whole people of God. That ministry of self-offering in sacrificial service to and prayer for the world is one way in which Christ's completed work is represented to the world. (See further in Appendix B.) For the building up of the whole people of God in God's service, certain members of the Church are called to a particular ministry.

3.2 In ordination certain members of the Church are designated for public ministry in the Church in the name of Christ by the invocation of the Spirit and the laying on of hands. Such public ministry is understood as a particular gift of the Spirit, which builds upon the individual combination of gifts of the candidate concerned (BEM 39). The existence of such ministry points to the initiative of God in Christ for redemption.

3.3 Those who ordain do so not in their own right but as representatives of the Church, and the ordination prayer is a reminder that the risen Lord is the true ordainer who calls to and bestows the gift of ministry. The laying on of hands is the sign of the gift of the Spirit to a particular person in a particular place at a particular time and also an acknowledgement of the prior gifts and commitment which that person brings to ministry. The prayer of the congregation represents their commitment to support the one ordained (BEM 39-44).

3.4 The word “ordination” has traditionally been used to refer to the commissioning for public office within the church. It has different intentions, according to the specific tasks of the ministries concerned, which are reflected in the liturgies of ordination (BEM 39). Ordination to a particular ministry, like baptism, is not repeated: this is why ordination has been described as “for life”. The Basis of Union recognises the crucial point more precisely when it says that “those who enter on such ministries commit themselves to them for so long as God wills” (URC Basis 20).

3.5 There has been much discussion over whether ordination confers a different kind of being or character, which leads into such questions as the indelibility of orders, etc. The Commentary on BEM 40 notes “a certain difference between the unspoken cultural setting of the Greek *cheirotonein* and that of the Latin *ordo* or *ordinare*. The New Testament use of the former term borrows its basic secular meaning of “appointment” (Acts 14:23; II Cor 8:19), which is in turn derived from the original meaning of extending the hand, either to designate a person or to cast a vote... *Ordo* and *ordinare*, on the other hand, are terms derived from Roman law where they convey the notion of the special status of a group distinct from the plebs, as in the term *ordo clarissimus* for the Roman senate”. Within the discussion there is a cluster of ideas, which can usefully be separated.

3.6 The act of ordination is described in BEM as involving invocation to God that the new minister be given the power of the Holy Spirit in the new relation between minister and Church, the sign of the granting of this prayer by the Lord who gives the gift of the ordained ministry, acknowledgement by the Church of the gifts of the Spirit in the one ordained, and commitment by Church and ordinand to the new relationship (BEM 42-44, reprinted in GRU 84). The emphasis in this description on the new relationship in which the ordained person stands is significant for the long debate over whether ministry is to be understood essentially in ontological or functional terms. Public ministry is never completely described by listing the minister's tasks: the relationship to others created by a public recognition of the minister's calling to those tasks itself reshapes the being of the minister, as those who exercise such ministry can testify. The ordinand is therefore different from those not ordained because of the new relationship. Moreover the fact that ordination to a particular ministry is not repeated emphasises the definitiveness of the act.

3.7 Although BEM and other documents use the term “the ordained ministry” as though it were a single ministry, the United Reformed Church is not alone in using the term ordination to denote the setting apart of at least two different orders of ministry. The Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church now use the term “ordination” in relation to bishops, priests and deacons, whilst clearly understanding that those ministries are different. Ordination has usually been linked with a public role in services of worship for the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the preaching of the Word: these actions in worship are the way in which the whole community is especially built up in their ministry to the world. Those responsible are also those most intimately concerned in the pastoral care of the congregation. Nevertheless the act of ordination has to be understood in terms of the intention of the ordination prayer which defines the character of the ministry exercised.

3.8 What ordination does in a particular way is to point beyond itself and the person ordained to the initiative of Christ. A person may feel called by Christ to ministry, but that call has to be tested and recognised by the Church: ordination is the solemn ratification of that call by the Church as it prays that Christ, through the Holy Spirit, will enable the ordinand to use and develop his or her gifts for the public ministry to which he or she is called. It is in this sense that the United Reformed Church can endorse such statements in BEM as “In order to fulfil its mission, the Church needs persons who are publicly and continually responsible for pointing to its dependence on Jesus Christ, and thereby provide, within a multiplicity of gifts, a focus of its unity” (8) or “Their presence reminds the community of the divine initiative and of the dependence of the Church on Jesus Christ” (12). The idea that the minister is a pointer to Christ is perhaps more helpful than the commoner view that the minister is the representative of Christ, a view which tends to lead implicitly to the idea that there can be only one minister in a congregation. Moreover there are some who are called to special ministries such as hospital or industrial chaplaincies, etc., which cannot be understood in the same way as ministry within a local congregation.

3.9 The United Reformed Church can readily accept the statement in BEM 13 – “The chief responsibility of the ordained ministry is to assemble and build up the body of Christ by proclaiming and teaching the Word of God, by celebrating the sacraments and by guiding the life of the community in its worship, its mission and its caring ministry”. The question of the difference which ordination makes tends to be focussed on the extent to which such responsibilities are exclusively those of the ordained ministry - a point which is not adequately met in the Commentary on this paragraph “These tasks are not exercised by the ordained ministry in an exclusive way”, even though that was presumably its purpose. What can be said firmly is that ordination is a matter of authorisation rather than power: it is concerned with relationships (compare 3.6 above) and particularly the relationships between congregations in different places, since the mutual recognition of those authorised embodies the links which bind the Church together and manifest its unity (GRU 82). Furthermore, whilst it can be said that ordination confers status, in a Christian context that is the status of the servant of all, following the example of Christ himself. The fact that ordination is understood as primarily a matter of authorisation explains why Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Churches of Christ have all had procedures which enabled those responsibilities entrusted to the ordained to be exercised by those not ordained on occasions. In each tradition the argument for the normal exercise of such responsibilities by the ordained is one of order in the sense of orderliness, not that they have exclusive powers or rights.

3.10 If ordination is understood, as the process of authorisation, rather than the conferring of power, the question as to which ministries in the Church are to be the subject of ordination is raised more acutely. Why does the United Reformed Church ordain elders as well as ministers, but not, for example, lay preachers or Church Related Community Workers? Historically, the answer to this question for the Church as a whole is largely pragmatic and traditional. However, there is a sense in which ordination has been reserved for those ministries which most closely recall us to the foundational ministry of Christ himself. The ministries of Word and Sacraments are linked because each amplifies the significance of the other. The ministry of oversight and pastoral care is

linked to Christ as king and shepherd. The diaconal ministry is linked to Christ as servant. A case could therefore be made for ordaining Church Related Community Workers as deacons. A case could also be made for ordaining lay preachers to the ministry of the Word if they were regular rather than occasional preachers, and in view of the link between Word and Sacraments it would seem logical to ordain those who regularly conduct worship to the ministry of Word and Sacraments, particularly if their ministry is exercised in several congregations. The important point here is that made in GRU 83 when the advocacy of “lay celebration” on the ground that it witnesses to the priesthood of all believers is shown to be self-contradictory since it implies that the president alone is the priest. It is important that the theology behind ordination is understood, since an extension of ordination might be opposed both by ministers concerned to defend their clerical status and by lay people who wished to reject that same clerical status.

3.11 The practice of the United Reformed Church in the ordination of ministers is that this is an act of the District Council, in fellowship with the local church. The Provincial Moderator or his/her deputy presides, and will be assisted in the laying on of hands by at least two other ministers and often one or two elders appointed by the District Council (unlike the Church of Scotland where elders do not lay on hands at the ordination of a minister).

3.12 The practice of the United Reformed Church in the ordination of elders is that this is an act of the local congregation which elects them. The minister (or interim moderator) presides and will normally be assisted in the laying on of hands by at least two elders (as suggested in the Service Book rubric). Although responsibility for conducting ordinations of ministers is specified as a function of District Councils, a similar responsibility for conducting ordinations of elders is not assigned to either the Church Meeting or the Elders' Meeting in the URC Structure. In view of the fact that one of the functions of elders is to represent the congregation in the wider councils of the Church, particularly the District Council, it would be appropriate for the District Council to be formally represented at the ordination of elders and for the Council to provide appropriate training.

3.13 The following statement to explore the relationship between ordination and the ministry of the whole people of God, the links between spiritual gifts, patterns of ministry and experience, and the relationship between servanthood and leadership is offered for consideration:

The Church embodies an upside-down reflection of the world - the first shall be last and the last shall be first, the greatest among you shall be your servant, etc. Secular leadership models, whether based on ancient kingship or modern business practice, will always need to be transformed in a Christian context to embody this reversal of worldly values. This means that the authenticity of ministerial leadership will be experienced in the minister's service to the congregation and to the world in which it is set. It is as a servant of God to the people of God, alongside fellow-Christians, that an ordained Minister proclaims and teaches the Gospel, celebrates the sacraments, guides the life of the community or serves in the world. More particularly, ministers have a responsibility to help congregations interpret the Gospel for today and to pray for the Church and the

world. This helps to make sense of ordination, because ordained ministry points beyond itself to Christ, upon whose reconciling work all ministry depends. Ordination to representative servanthood emphasises identification with rather than separation from. It involves the recognition of gifts given by God, which can be nurtured by appropriate training or experience. Ordained ministry does not therefore detract from the ministry of any Christian, but it adds an availability to all which is costly service. Like the ministry of every baptized Christian, it is essentially reciprocal in character, depending on the wider community in which it is set. In sum, therefore, the distinctive identity of the minister, like the distinctive identity of every Christian, is created by relationships rather than tasks.

APPENDIX B - THE PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS

1 God's people are on pilgrimage, caught up in adoration, spent in joyful and sacrificial service to one another and all people everywhere, all the time growing in grace and in the knowledge of Christ. By sharing in the life of the local church, they enter into the life of the Church throughout the world and in all ages, being made part of the communion of saints (URC Basis 16; cf. BEM 2-40). The church meeting is the place where the priesthood of all believers is gathered to confess the Lordship of Christ. It is through this whole people (the laos of God), not through clergy alone, that the Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry (URC Basis 19). (It cannot be too often emphasised that the clergy are part of the laos, which has a more all-embracing meaning than the popular connotation of "laity".)

2 In the Basis of Union (20) the role of those who exercise particular ministries in offices recognised within the Church is understood as the equipping of the whole people of God for their total ministry. This total ministry is sometimes referred to as "the priesthood of all believers". That phrase in turn is sometimes misunderstood as implying that "anyone can do anything". Since it is important that the calling of ordained ministers is affirmed in a way which does not derogate from the calling of the whole people of God, the relationship between "lay" and "ordained", "priesthood" and "ministry" needs to be explored and placed in the context of Scripture and our traditions.

3 The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers finds its principal New Testament support in I Peter 2:9 and occasional references in Revelation - 1:6, 5:10. 1 Peter 2:9 is a notoriously difficult verse to translate and interpret; but however it is translated, it is the Church as a corporate body which shares in the high priesthood of Christ. The verse is not speaking about the ministry or priesthood of Christians as individuals. Priesthood is a corporate description not an individual mandate. It is a function of the community of believers, derived from their participation in the high priesthood of Christ.

4 "The priesthood of Christ and the priesthood of the baptised have in their respective ways the function of sacrifice and intercession. As Christ has offered himself, Christians offer their whole being "as a living sacrifice". As Christ intercedes before the Father, Christians intercede for the Church and the salvation of the world. Nevertheless the differences between these two kinds of priesthood cannot be overlooked. Whilst Christ offered himself as a unique sacrifice once and for all for the salvation of the world, believers need to receive continually as a gift of God that which Christ has done for them" (BEM 17 Commentary).

5 Christ's sacrifice has broken down all barriers both between God and humanity and between peoples, so the Christian priestly community is inclusive, not exclusive. It is the whole people who are called and sanctified by the Spirit to share Christ's ministry (1.2; 1.5). All ecclesiology is ultimately an expression of God's self-revelation in Christ, which is another way of saying that its focus must be a missionary focus.

6 The New Testament doctrines of the high priesthood of Christ and the priestly function of the believing community undergird the concept of the ministry of the whole

people of God. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers properly belongs in that context. There is little evidence in the New Testament of a doctrine of the ordained ministry being built on the foundations of the priesthood of all believers. There is no clear link between the two concepts in the New Testament.

7 Although the New Testament speaks of an exciting and creative diversity of ministry in the primitive communities, it is equally clear that most (if not all) of these churches had a ministry which was less than the sum of its members (eg 1 Cor 12:27-30; Eph 4:11-12). Ministry in some form (rarely Ignatian orthodoxy, cf. Appendix A, 1.8) was pervasive, its purpose to enable the ministry of God's people, not to usurp it, "to knit God's holy people together for the work of service to build up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12).

8 The traditions belonging to the United Reformed Church derive their emphases on the priesthood of all believers from Scripture and the writings of the reformers of the 16th century. It is therefore important that their understanding of the doctrine is appreciated. The agenda of the reformers was to recover that set of relationships between Christ, his people and the ministry, which they perceived to have been lost. Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were not against the ministry but against a particular view of the priestly office. They did not intend to wreck the unity of Christendom. They have surprisingly little to say about the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. Their attention was focused primarily on the relationship between God and humanity, on sin and forgiveness and the workings of the penitential system. Ministry was a secondary concern.

9 Luther is regarded as a champion of the doctrine. However, although it is a necessary consequence of his conviction of the free availability of God's grace, his treatment of it is ambiguous and frequently polemical. Luther's first discussion of the doctrine was in his polemical writings of the early 1520s in which he attacked the privileges of Roman clergy and criticised Roman ordination. The radical logic of his rhetoric was tempered by his innate conservatism - elsewhere he claims the parish to be a divine institution, and in 1532 loudly insisted on the need for an official ministry in the face of the number of self-appointed preachers who were over-running Saxony. In some places he seems to build his understanding of the ministry on the priesthood of all believers, but elsewhere he argues that the ministry is dominically appointed and of the *esse* of the Church. By the Diet of Augsburg of 1530 Melancthon could dismiss the priesthood of all believers as of secondary importance, and it is passed over in silence by the Augsburg Confession.

10 Calvin was logical and clear on the subject. Ministry was derived from the universal priesthood, which in turn was dependent upon the priesthood of Christ. He was equally clear that the doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry were distinct. Ministry was essential to the life of the Church – "neither are the light and heat of the sun, nor meat and drink, so necessary to sustain and cherish the present life, as is the apostolic and pastoral office to preserve a Church in the earth" (*Institutes* 4.3.2). Ministry was not priesthood, a point made with admirable clarity by the Second Helvetic Confession:

“Accordingly, there are great differences between a priesthood and a ministry. For the former is common to all Christians... but the same is not so with the latter, and we have not removed the Ministry out of the midst of the church when we have cast the papistical priesthood out of the Church of Christ”.

In other words, by denying a separated priesthood and affirming the priesthood of all believers, it was possible to base the theology of a separated ministry on a different foundation.

11 It should now be abundantly clear (in Gordon Rupp's words) that the priesthood of all believers did not mean for the reformers what it tends to mean for us, “an otiose ministry and an omnicompetent laity”. The reformers did not think that anyone could do anything in church, far from it. They had discovered something much more exciting - that the whole people of God participated in the intercessory priesthood of Christ.

12 The blurring of the doctrinal boundaries between the priesthood of all believers and the doctrine of the ministry is a relatively recent phenomenon. Early Congregationalists and Presbyterians did not doubt the truth of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, or the calling of some to ministry.

13 The Evangelical Revival and explosion of church planting and building which followed, increased the demand for ministry and hastened the breaking down of prejudice against lay preaching - most clearly evidenced by “Mr. Wesley's preachers”. It was the occasion of little theological comment because the right of the believer to preach was part of the English dissenting tradition. The theological difficulties began when English dissenters (particularly Congregationalists and Baptists) reacted against the sacerdotal emphasis of the Tractarians and their successors in the mid-nineteenth century. Ministers strove to become as un-priestlike as possible. Amongst the leaders of this movement (like R.W.Dale) distinctive clerical dress was rejected along with the title “Revd”. Ordination fell out of favour and testing of calls became much less stringent. It was in this context that Dale asked the Carr's Lane, Birmingham, church meeting to allow a layman to preside at communion once a year as a reminder of the priesthood of all believers. Such a view prevailed for some thirty years, when it was severely criticised by such leaders and scholars as J.D.Jones and P.T.Forsyth.

14 This was at best an aberration in the history of Congregationalism. It is ironic that Dale's real aim, the spiritualisation of the laity, led only to the debasing of the ministry. In any doctrine of ministry within the Reformed tradition, a distinction between the doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and the ministry must be maintained (as in the New Testament and the writings of the reformers) or else neither will be honoured.

15 *God's Reign and our Unity* provides an attractive snapshot of ministry in the early church, when it observes that “the company gathered behind their closed doors on that first Easter evening was the church in embryo” (para 74) and “also the ministry in embryo” (para 75). To extend that image, the infant church's DNA included a patterning of “calling and sending” so that the church always had a structure of leadership. “Ministerial leadership in the church may therefore be defined as following Jesus in the way of the cross so that others in turn may be enabled to follow in the same way” (para

76). Although it is true that different accounts of Easter evening (e.g. Luke 24:33 and Acts 1:14) present a different theology of the relationship between church and ministry, the emphasis in John 20:19-23 is paralleled elsewhere: those whom Jesus called, he also sent to proclaim God's word of peace and forgiveness. This strand in early Christian experience echoes our own experiences of ministry under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is for this reason that we remain uncomfortable with the language of "clergy" and "laity". Ministry is Christ's gift to the whole laos.

APPENDIX C - HISTORICAL NOTE ON ORDINATION

1 The constituent traditions of the United Reformed Church had different practices in relation to ordination. Congregationalists ordained ministers but not deacons (elders having disappeared quite early on in the history of English Congregationalism). Presbyterians ordained ministers and elders, but not usually deacons (although the United Presbyterians did prior to 1876). Churches of Christ ordained ministers, elders and deacons.

2 Although Calvin's views were differently expressed in different editions of the *Institutes*, in the final edition (*Institutes* 4.3.8) he regards bishops, presbyters or pastors (the terms are for him equivalent) as exercising the ministry of the word in local churches, and sees two other ministries as of perpetual duration - viz. government and care of the poor. "By these governors I understand seniors selected from the people to unite with the bishops in pronouncing censures and exercising discipline". The care of the poor was committed to deacons, among whom Calvin distinguished two distinct classes: those who administered alms, and those who actually took care of the poor (3.9). In discussing the appointment of ministers he emphasised that "if any one would be deemed a true minister of the Church, he must first be duly called; and secondly, he must answer to his calling (3.10). The choice of ministers lay with the people, though the fact that this was accompanied by prayer and fasting showed the serious nature of the action (3.12-15). Calvin understood ordination by the laying on of hands to have apostolic precedent for pastors, teachers and deacons. He acknowledged that there was no fixed precept concerning the laying on of hands but said that it would be regarded "in the light of a precept" because of its careful observance by the apostles. He added that it was useful "that by such a symbol the dignity of the ministry should be commended to the people, and he who is ordained reminded that he is no longer his own, but is bound in service to God and the Church" (3.16).

3 Within the Reformed tradition there have been different approaches to the office of elder in different countries. The evolution of the office in Scotland in the later sixteenth and early seventeenth century is a complex one. The Scottish Book of Discipline of 1560 made elders and deacons offices to which election was made annually, and they were clearly understood as lay offices. The Second Book of Discipline (adopted by the General Assembly in 1578 but rejected by parliament) reflected the triumph of presbyterianism both in its rejection of the principle of diocesan episcopacy and in its stipulation that elders were to be elected for life. The development of the elders' role in discipline was a threat to the powers of the ecclesiastical courts in this area, and also indirectly to the powers of the civil magistrate, given that the Church of Scotland was established. Towards the end of the sixteenth century elders also tended to assume the functions of deacons in relation to the poor, thereby rendering the specific ministry of the diaconate less clear. The revival of this model of eldership by Thomas Chalmers at the beginning of the nineteenth century reinforced the problem and led indirectly to the development of managers as a distinct group from the elders concerned with matters of church finance and fabric.

4 Elders and deacons are mentioned in *The Form of Church Government* of 1645, when the English Parliament passed an ordinance regulating the election of elders. But ordination was not a central issue, and indeed the opposition of independents to presbyterianism at this point was based mainly on the fear that the Church would henceforth have an authority which would come into conflict with that of the state. Ironically the *Statement on The Institution of Churches* annexed to the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658 specifies ordination by prayer and the laying on of hands for pastors, elders and deacons (para 12), probably because its authors were clearer in their minds that these were officers of a congregation rather than a civil parish. (The Savoy Declaration omitted the Westminster Confession's paragraph on Church Censures.) Nevertheless it was within presbyterianism rather than congregationalism that the practice of ordaining elders and deacons persisted. In congregationalism deacons became the primary group of lay church officers, and ordination was dropped.

5 The United Secession Church (and later the United Presbyterian Church after 1847) whose formularies on the relation between church and state and on the ordination of ministers and elders were reflected in those of the Presbyterian Church of England and the United Reformed Church, was clear that elders and deacons should be ordained, and as a non-established church had a congregational, rather than a parochial, view of the extent of their responsibilities. Alexander Campbell, who grew up in the Secession tradition, drew on this for his views on church government in *The Christian System* which was written for Disciples or Churches of Christ in the 1830s. Campbell distinguished three ministries - of bishops, deacons, and evangelists - and argued that all should be set apart by prayer and the laying on of hands (*Christian System*, xxv, 6, 16-17). He was also clear that "it is, indeed, the Holy Spirit and not the congregations which creates Bishops and Deacons" (*ibid*, p 185). Churches of Christ in Great Britain, where full-time ministers have always been few, placed much more emphasis on the ordained eldership in the leading of worship, than Disciples of Christ in the USA, where full-time ministers have been more plentiful. Within Churches of Christ, in fact, elders tended to have a more important public role in the leading of worship, preaching and pastoral care, while deacons (though ordained) tended to be more like Congregationalist deacons and Presbyterian elders. The mid-twentieth century practice in Churches of Christ was determined by the Reports of two Commissions approved by the Annual Conference, that on Ordination approved in 1942 and that on the Ministry approved in 1954. The Report on Ordination proposed forms of service for the ordination of ministers, elders and deacons, and for services in which voting on the election of elders and deacons took place. The emphasis, however, was on the divine action: "It is Christ himself, through the Church, who appoints, ordains, and sends His Ministers forth" (*Year Book* 1942, p 134). Also ordination has been the mark of those called to ministry rather than paid service.

6 Interestingly, the question of the length of tenure has tended to influence attitudes to ordination. Mention has already been made of the shift between the First and Second Books of Discipline in the tenure of elders in Scotland. After reunion in 1929 the Church of Scotland specified that elders would always be ordained, as would deacons if elected to office for life. However, it is open to congregations to elect deacons for a term of years, and if this happens they are not ordained. The same provisions existed in the Presbyterian Church of England before union, except that the option of election for a

limited time was mentioned before the option of election for life. No provision was made for deacons in the United Reformed Church. In Congregational Churches deacons originally served for life, but from the nineteenth century, particularly in larger congregations, it became customary for them to serve for a specific number of years; in Churches of Christ it was customary for elders and deacons, once elected, to serve for life.

Local Church Leadership

At the 1998 General Assembly the Discipleship, Stewardship and Witness Committee asked Assembly to consider a resolution about local church leadership. Resolution 29, reproduced below with its supporting text, was passed.

RESOLUTION 29 Local Church Leadership

Assembly encourages synods and district councils in consultation with local churches to identify forms of local church leadership to explore ways in which these may be recognised, affirmed and developed using the Guidelines

1.1 For several years the United Reformed Church has been thinking about how best to provide local leadership of churches. In some Provinces ideas floated in the 'Patterns of Ministry' report have been tried; others are keen to explore new forms of leadership but would like a sense that the Church is acting as a whole rather than piece-meal.

1.2 There are clearly many questions raised by the thought of 'local leaders':

- ◆ How would they differ from elders?
- ◆ How would they relate to ordained ministers?
- ◆ Doesn't 'local leadership' describe precisely what we expect of non-stipendiary ministry?
- ◆ Is this a 'back-door' into ministry for people who would otherwise not be accepted?
- ◆ Will this lead to a change in role for ordained ministers?
- ◆ Isn't the church secretary usually regarded as the lay leader in the local congregation?
- ◆ Would we be thinking about this at all if there were not a shortage of 'real' ministers?
- ◆ What are the implications for ecumenical situations?

1.3 We often quote the phrase in the Basis of Union which refers to 'the ministry of the whole people of God.' Perhaps we need to reflect on those words, and what they mean. Ministry is service, and we are all called to it, for every church member has a ministry to exercise. In the local setting we discover among the members of the church many different gifts, and the church is enriched as more and more people are enabled to use their gifts in a creative and satisfying way.

1.4 One gift, among many, is the gift of leadership: this may include the ability to be a focus of the church's unity, to represent and arbitrate, to discern and draw out other people's abilities, to bring order and mutual respect. Down the centuries the church has

recognised that though there may be many spiritual and pastoral leaders acting together (the eldership) nevertheless it is a human instinct to look for one person who will personify that oversight, and that person has usually been the local minister.

1.5 But what do we do when the local minister lives ten miles away and is looking after four churches? We do one of two things: either we expect that minister and the elders somehow to carry on regardless; or we begin to think about personal leadership in a more flexible way. We stop worrying about titles and status, and we think about the job that needs doing and the gifts that are available. We stop thinking that it's either ordained ministry or local leadership, and we start to practice teamwork. We stop hankering after a pattern of ministry which, if we are honest, has often disabled the majority of believers in their own spiritual growth, and we look for an appropriate model of leadership for today - true to our Biblical understanding, and true to our needs.

1.6 Suppose, then, we simply give ourselves permission to experiment, and see what happens

And suppose we agree some guidelines which will help us to experiment without hurting too many people in the process

And suppose we remember that the wider leadership offered by ministers of the word and sacraments will still be there, a key part of the whole process, and a vital calling to which we should ask the Lord to draw people

2 So let's look at local leadership.

2.1 The task in general is to be a focus for the unity of a particular local church. The specific tasks of the local leader will, however, vary according to local circumstances, personal gifting, and other gifts present in the life of a congregation.

2.2 The team in any situation will include the elders, worship leaders, children's and youth workers, and others in leadership. There will be an ordained minister who relates to the team, offering support and oversight.

2.3 The ordained minister may relate to several congregations, but will be available to assist the prophetic and sacramental ministry which keeps the local church within the church universal.

2.4 The wider church through the District Council will help to identify local needs and appropriate leaders, and will manage a simple system of appointment and review, and a job description.

2.5 The job description will clarify what is being asked of this particular local leader at this time, and will set out realistic expectations and demands. It will list such practical details as the tasks to be undertaken, the support offered, expenses paid, and training to be done.

2.6 The training will be tailored to suit the individual and the local context. It will be organised by the Province, and will not take the local leader away from the sphere of

ministry.

2.7 The ministry will be seen as belonging to the whole people of God, among whom some function in particular forms of leadership for a time, as part of the Whole.

2.8 These are the key elements of our understanding of local leadership. Below are the guidelines which may help during the process of experimentation and development.

GUIDELINES

Affirming the United Reformed Church's commitment to the ministry of the whole people of God, Assembly determines that local church leadership will be exercised:

1. in conformity with the Basis of Union,
2. according to needs and gifts identified by Church Meeting and District Council,
3. by those who are members in good standing of their own churches, whose gifts have been recognised and who have been appointed by the local church and District Council,
4. for an agreed period of service, according to a clearly defined Agreement and job Description, approved by all parties,
5. under the authority of the District Council which, in consultation with the Province, is ultimately responsible for all aspects of local leadership including training, support and review,
6. with a title chosen in relation to the work being undertaken,
7. in partnership with those exercising ordained ministry,
8. rooted in the local eldership, and in collaboration with others exercising lay ministries in the local church,
9. by those who have made a commitment to take part in in-service training,
10. by those who have been affirmed in a Service of Recognition conducted by the District Council.

Future Patterns of Ministry - a summary of the interim report

This interim report to the 2002 General Assembly is a response to Resolution 35 at the 2000 General Assembly which itself related to a Review of non-stipendiary Ministry (section 4 is the relevant part, and well worth reading). The review group recognised that uncertainties over the role of NSMs was symptomatic of a state of flux in the Church's thinking and practice of ministry (and cited the ministry of Elders, local church leaders and Church-Related Community Workers to support this view) and called for the discussion to be pursued. This Summary shows the line of thought taken by the working party set up as a consequence. The working party reported more fully at General Assembly 2004 with 'Equipping the Saints: Changing Ministry for the Challenge of Mission' though without repeating many of the arguments set out here.

The current situation

The ratio of members to Ministers has changed in the life-time of the URC, from 176 (1972) to 130 (2002).

A world church perspective is that this is an extravagant use of Ministers.

The notion that there was ever a time when there was a minister for every congregation is false.

In answer to the question, 'Does the URC really need more ministers?' the Working Party gives a resounding 'No! certainly not more stipendiary Ministers'; an increase would be both unrealistic and inappropriate.

Instead the Church should look again at Churches of Christ pattern: peripatetic ministers with a primarily teaching role and Elders exercising sacramental ministry.

The problem

Many Ministers and churches feel that the task of ministry is impossible.

There are various reasons for this perception:

The number of congregations per minister increased from 1.9 (1972) to 2.4 (1997)

The stress levels in multi-role leadership

The increasing average age of congregations

The lifestyle of church members has changed significantly (see box: Lifestyle survey on next page)

Decreasing membership means a smaller recruitment base for ministers

The financial burden of ministry falls on fewer members

The Working Party notes that the Church always faces challenges about ministry and that the current situation has many similarities with the 1920s Congregational Church; but will today's Church accept the challenge?

Lifestyle survey		Source: <i>Institute of Management</i> research (1999)	
Workers work longest hours in EU			
Perceived effects		1997	1999
No time for other interests		77%	87%
Damaging their health		59%	71%
Adverse effect on relationships			
with their partners		73%	86%
with their children		72%	79%
Reduced productivity resulting in lack of satisfaction		55%	68%
Workers do not want evenings and weekends cluttered with committee meetings etc.			

What is the Church for?

When the view of ministry set out in the URC Basis of Union is put alongside the Five Marks of Mission set out in the *Growing Up* report to General Assembly (1999), the answer to this question is clear: the Church, and therefore the Church's ministry, exists for mission. This mission is enacted through the ministry of the whole people of God.

Responding to *Growing Up*

Addressing this report specifically, the Working Party affirms the need to develop the concept of 'church in community' and the importance of evangelism; it agreed that the physical resources for mission are the Church's funds, its premises, and its people.

However, the Working Party refuted the idea that the 'people resource' can be fully described as comprising Ministers, Church-Related Community Workers, people with professional training and skills, and those with spare time. "This robs the church of the majority of its people resource and encourages the church to opt out."

Who does what the Church is for?

The line of argument leads clearly to the answer that it is the ministry of the *whole* people of God

But what precisely is this ministry and how is it exercised?

At this point the Working Party notes a missing link in the Church's ministry: any emphasis in its teaching or intercessions relating to the world of work.

It recognises a number of popular misconceptions:

- Real discipleship means doing things for the church
- Ministry happens exclusively in the church
- Only the 'in-crowd' are reliable
- Only regulars are committed

What is the Church in Community?

Without seeking to give a definite answer to this question, the Working Party gives guidelines by issuing a Challenge both to churches and to church members. To churches, it gives the challenge

“to fulfil the church’s calling requires a deliberate engagement with the local community.”

to stimulate a lively awareness of what is going on

suggesting that “Jesus reaches and transforms the parts of society that others either cannot or will not.”

To church members the challenge is

to be aware of a sense of vocation and mission

to engage faithfully with the communities to which they belong

and that these communities might include

home & family

neighbourhood

civic

employment

recreation

church

The Working Party quotes an Administry report (*Supporting Christians at Work*) that 47% say church teaching is irrelevant to daily life and least relevant to where most time is spent.

What is the purpose of our recognised ministries?

“The ministry of the whole people of God is constituted when Ministers and people work together in such a way that by leadership and example the Minister enables the release of the people into their own proper and personal ministries within the range of their communities in the secular world.”

The working party said that success or failure of the Church’s work is to be judged by the extent to which this is happening.

They said that, in addition to their enabling roles, Ministers also exercise individual ministries experimenting with their roles as missionaries in community.