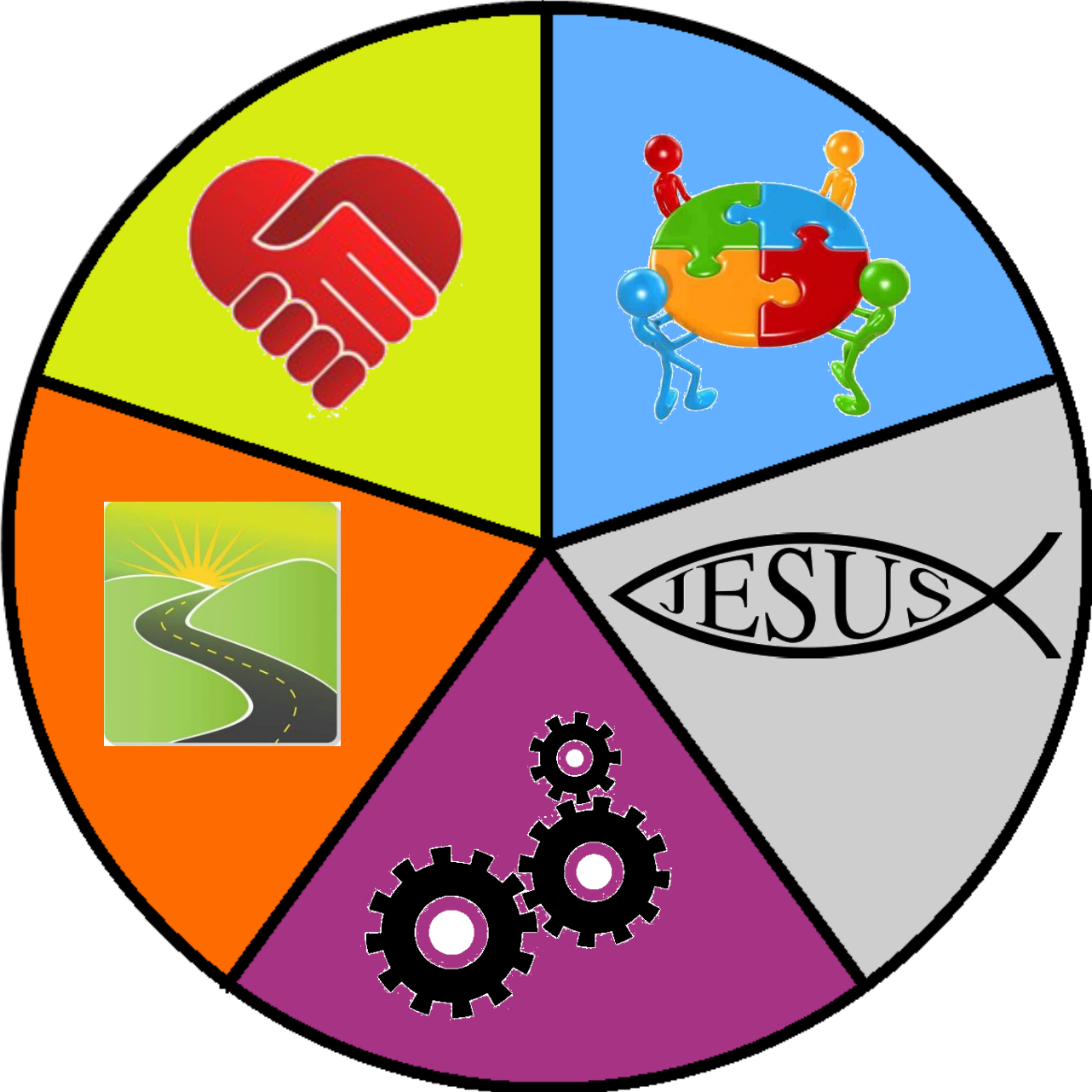


Elders Workbook



This workbook has been compiled to use alongside discussion and information from the workshops around Elders which may be in-person or online. This is your copy so please feel free to make notes on it and take it away with you. All the information in here is extracted from the URC website or the URC Learning Hub.

The intention of these sessions is to share information and experience and support one another. Please feel free to ask questions and raise points for discussion.

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So They've Asked Me To Become an Elder

This guidance is for those who have been asked to consider a call to eldership by their Minister or an Elder in their congregation. It is also relevant to those who have become aware that God is calling them to service in the Church and wish to find out more about eldership.

It gives an overview of the role, core responsibilities and necessary skills and abilities of post holders. The functions of the Elders meeting are set out in The Basis of Union.

A word of reassurance – individual Elders are not expected to have all the gifts, skills and abilities listed – eldership is definitely a team activity!

Eldership is, with doubt, challenging – and in some ways, as the role has developed and changed over the past ten years or so, the challenges have grown. But so too has the level of fulfilment and the potential for Elders to make significant, creative and exciting contributions to the life of their local church and community and the wider United Reformed Church.

Eldership has always been both a privilege and a responsibility – but it's also deeply fulfilling.

Discerning a call

You may be surprised to have been asked to consider being an Elder; you might be feeling proud, or scared, or even immediately certain of your answer.

Whatever your feelings we suggest you take your time to discern if this invitation feels like a call to you – or definitely does not. Don't feel pressurised into giving a quick response – whatever the circumstances of your local situation. Think and pray about it and, if possible, seek the counsel of someone whose judgement you trust – ideally someone who is currently or has recently been a serving Elder in the URC and can answer any questions.

As part of your discernment process we strongly recommend you get as much information about the realities of serving as an Elder; read this resource, talk to other Elders; ask the Elders' Meeting if you could shadow a serving Elder, and ideally attend an Elders' meeting to see first-hand how the Elders interact with

one another, how decisions are reached and how the eldership team works in your local context.

What else to consider?

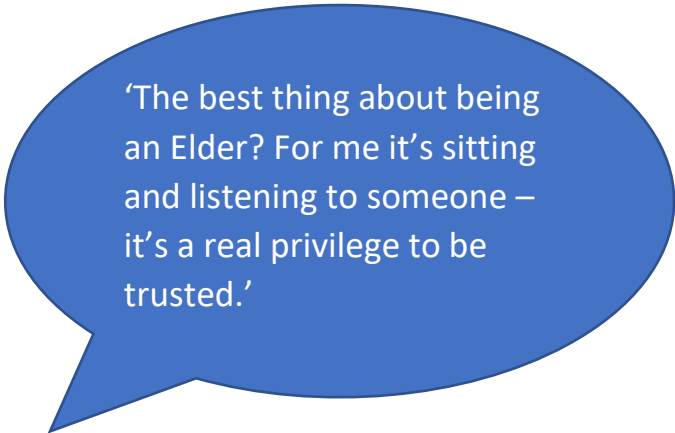
You may feel you lack the faith to be an Elder – ultimately only you and God know the innermost working of your heart, but it is worth remembering most (if not all) Christians feel inadequate or unsure of their abilities at times, and if you feel the call to eldership within yourself, you can be certain that God will help you meet its challenges. And don't forget that Elders are no different from any other church members – all are called to develop and grow in faith, through prayer, worship, sacraments and learning – the call to eldership is a renewed call to these things as well.

In the United Reformed Church, the eldership of a local congregation is a significant ministry – the Elders share

responsibility, with the Minister of Word and Sacraments, for the spiritual oversight of the congregation. The Elders' meeting is intended to be a distinctive and vital part of every URC congregation – with the Elders collectively possessing the abilities, skills and spiritual gifts of leadership.

At its best, the Elders' meeting is at the heart of every local congregation, providing impetus and positive influence on the mission, witness and service of the church. In short, Elders play an essential role in enabling the congregation to live fruitful lives as God's people. It's also worth noting that, both as a result of the steady fall in the number of Ministers of Word and Sacraments and the need for the church to respond to its changing context, the role of Elder has changed significantly in the last decade or so.

There is now more recognition that Elders are a key part of the church leadership team, actively and creatively serving at the heart of the local church, as it seeks to respond to the needs and circumstances of the 21st century. For example, at least one synod has recently run a course to train Elders to conduct funerals; and, in churches up and down the country, Elders are taking the lead



'The best thing about being an Elder? For me it's sitting and listening to someone – it's a real privilege to be trusted.'

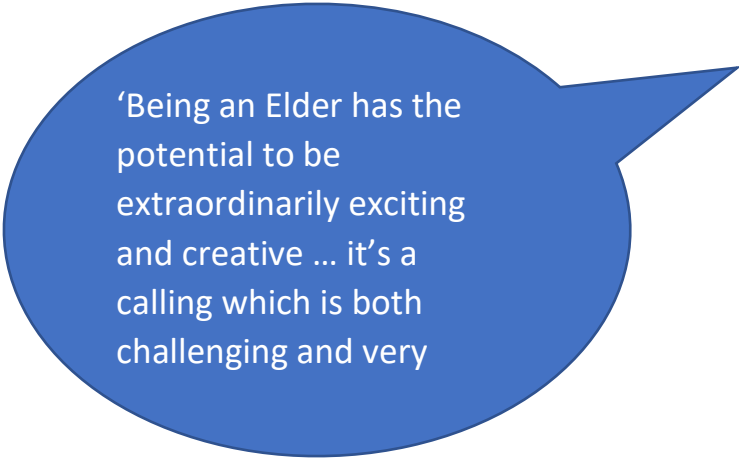
on any number of building and other projects. Don't be tempted to dismiss the role as 'dry and dull' – it's frequently anything but!

Daunted? Don't be! Elders work as a close knit and supportive team, with each Elder bringing distinct gifts and abilities to the eldership, as they work together for the good of the congregation they serve. The current Elders should already be fulfilling the responsibilities of eldership, and if you decide you're being called to join them, you will be part of the continuing work. As you consider whether you are called to eldership it's essential to remember its team element.

Roles and responsibilities of Elders

Or, to put it another way, what do Elders do? The answer to this depends very much on the particular life and circumstances of your own congregation – including the number of serving Elders. The 'official' functions of eldership have been set out in The Basis of Union, so you may like to read the full text below, and perhaps discuss it with a serving Elder, to find out how the Elders' meeting deals with these duties. Some of the duties are ongoing, some occasional, some are done by small groups, some by everyone.

Obviously, within the Elders' Meeting, and the life of the church, specific roles and ministries need to be undertaken, and it might be that others are keen for you to take on one or more of these because of the gifts and skills they've already seen within you. It's worth asking the Elders' Meeting what it thinks your particular contribution could be.



'Being an Elder has the potential to be extraordinarily exciting and creative ... it's a calling which is both challenging and very

The Elders' Meeting (the Minister and the serving Elders) are normally the charity trustees of the local church funds and, under the terms of the Charities Act 2011, have specific and legal responsibilities, as "the persons having the general control and management of the administration of a charity".

The safeguarding responsibilities of serving Elders

The serving Elders of United Reformed churches are responsible for overseeing all aspects of safeguarding – these duties include responding appropriately and quickly to any incidents of abuse/alleged abuse, ensuring appropriate and sufficient pastoral care and support is in place, overseeing children's, youth and community work, assessing risks and implementing and following safer recruitment procedures – basically ensuring everyone who engages with the life of the local church is kept safe.

Elders in churches that don't currently have children or adults at risk attending, need to be mindful that, at any point in the future, people from either group could start attending and/or accessing services of the church – for this reason good safeguarding practices need to be in place in all churches. Having the right procedures and safeguards in place not only protects and promotes the welfare of children and adults and protects the reputation of the church but also enhances the confidence of all involved in the life of the local church.

The safeguarding responsibilities of Elders are an important part of the role of Elder – but they are not things to be scared of! Taking the necessary steps to ensure everyone in the congregation is kept safe is one of the duties shared with other Elders.

Elders and potential Elders looking for more information about this role, should, in the first instance, contact their local synod office.

Expected characteristics of Elders

You have been asked to consider being an Elder because those who have asked you have already recognised in you the expected traits and characteristics of Elders. These include: integrity, a commitment to prayer, ability to keep confidential information confidential; listening skills; willingness to be supportive of colleagues (including the Minister and the eldership team).

What is the time commitment?

All church ministry is, in some way, costly – and becoming an Elder is no exception. It will mean committing time and energy to the role, along with a

sharing and giving of self. As mentioned above, so much of the role is dependent on local circumstances: local churches vary tremendously in what is asked of their eldership so it would be sensible to check with one or two serving Elders just what would be involved in terms of time and priorities related to this calling.

At the very least attendance at the Elders' meetings (often held monthly) is important and you would be expected to prioritise this. In addition, in some churches' Elders take part in study days, training days and occasional residential retreats.

Ask yourself: is this a priority I can make and to which I am willing to give my time and energy? Are there things which I'll need to give up or let go of, to enable me to say yes to this new ministry of eldership?

How long are Elders appointed for?

In the URC, Elders, like Ministers of Word and Sacraments, are ordained for life. Ordination is an outward sign of God's call; it recognises both the spiritual nature of the call and the important role that Elders play in church leadership. However, although ordination as an Elder is for life, this doesn't mean that you'll be expected to serve as an Elder for the rest of your life. The most common practice is for a three-year term of service, renewable by agreement of the Church Meeting and the Elder – with many churches operating a mandatory sabbatical of at least a year after six years of service.

Not all churches operate in this way, as with all aspects of church life different practices exist for a whole host of reasons. In some churches there is a distinct shortage of leaders, and as a result, Elders tend to serve for more than three years; perhaps not best practice but a realistic and practical solution to the church circumstance. Elders not actively serving are known as non-serving Elders.

At ordination, an Elder becomes an Elder of the denomination, not just the congregation. So, if you move to another United Reformed Church, you will still be an ordained Elder and eligible to be asked to serve in your new church home.

(In fact, if you move to another part of the world, you will probably be recognised as an Elder in most Reformed churches across the globe.)

What preparation and development will I receive?

The local church, the synod and the wider Church all offer support as well as preparation and development opportunities. Many churches hold ‘away days’ and/or study evenings for Elders; synod and Assembly events are also offered to Elders; and the three Resource Centres for Learning (Northern College, the Scottish College and Westminster College) provide a range of courses and events relevant to Elders.

Speak to your Minister, a serving Elder in your church or contact the synod office for more information on what’s available in your area. In addition, there are excellent preparation and development resources available on the URC website.

A prayer for those considering Eldership

Loving God, guide me now as I seek to find your way for me.

Create in me a renewed dedication to your service.

Set before me the example of Christ Jesus.

Fill me with the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

This I pray, trusting in your grace.

Amen.

Notes & Comments

Safer Election of Elders

1. Introduction

1.1 In the United Reformed Church, the office of Elder within a local congregation is a significant ministry. Elders share responsibility, with the Minister of the Word and Sacraments (where possible), for the spiritual oversight of the congregation.

1.2 The elders' meeting is intended to be a distinctive and vital part of every URC congregation with the Elders collectively possessing the abilities, skills and spiritual gifts of leadership to serve the local church actively and creatively as it seeks to respond to the needs and circumstances of the 21st Century.

1.3 At its best, the elders' meeting is at the heart of every local congregation, providing impetus and positive influence on the mission, witness and service of the church. In short, Elders play an essential role in enabling the congregation to live fruitful lives as God's people.

2. The ministry of the Elder

2.1 The United Reformed Church recognises the ministry of the Elder is a calling rather than a job for which the church recruits personnel.

2.2 Elders are called into ministry by the church meeting which recognises that calling through the charisms (or gifts) they display in their Christian living and ordains and inducts them.

2.3 This is a ministry acknowledged by the whole United Reformed Church and exercised on its behalf as well as on behalf of the local church.

2.4 However, the United Reformed Church acknowledges that those who are in positions of trust within its life, and who show they have gifts appropriate for their office, should be properly equipped for the ministry to which they are called.

2.5 The Basis of Union and The Manual <https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/general-assembly/the-manual/> detail the role, promises and functions of an Elder.

a) Schedule A paragraph 23 (page 6) of The Basis of Union sets out the ministry of Elder within the United Reformed Church.

b) Schedule B (page 21) of the Basis of Union details the promise and Elder makes, with God's grace, at their ordination to:

- accept the office of Elder of the United Reformed Church and to perform its duties faithfully;
- pray for the Minister/CRCW they will be working with (or interim moderator if no minister or CRCW is in place);
- seek together with the Minister/CRCW and each other, the will of God;
- give due honour, consideration and encouragement;
- build one another up in faith, hope and love;
- in dependence on God's grace, to be faithful in private and public worship;
- live in the fellowship of the church and to share in its work;
- give and serve, as God enables them, for the advancement of his kingdom throughout the world;
- follow Christ and to seek to do and to bear his will all the days of their life.

c) Schedule B (page 4) of the Manual details the functions of the elders' meeting.

3. Why Safer Election and not Recruitment?

3.1 The United Reformed Church is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all within our church communities. The United Reformed Church recognises the importance of carefully selecting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility within the Church.

3.2 Elders are ordained (prayerfully set apart to this public office in the church). They are inducted to serve in a particular congregation, sometimes for a fixed period of time. Elders share with the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the pastoral care and spiritual leadership of the local church. They also represent the local congregation in the wider councils of the church at synod, General Assembly and ecumenically.

3.3 As such, the United Reformed Church is required to have a process for those called to be elders comparable to the practice of safer recruitment for other roles within its life whilst acknowledging the need to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit by both the candidate and the church meeting. This paper sets out this process.

4. Safer Election of Elders in the URC

4.1 It is very strongly recommended that the step-by-step process below is followed by church meetings as the safest way to elect Elders:

4.1.1 A nomination process shall be agreed by Church Meeting at least two weeks before the church meeting during which the election will take place shall take place. Names of those nominated should be given in written form to the Minister and/or Church Secretary;

4.1.2 Those nominated should:

a) be a church member for at least one year before being nominated;

b) be given copies of the leaflet “They’ve asked me to be an Elder” (This is transcribed in this workbook, and also see below) which details the promises and functions of the elders meeting;

c) have a conversation with the minister/interim moderator plus a serving Elder including the responsibilities of an Elder with specific regard to:

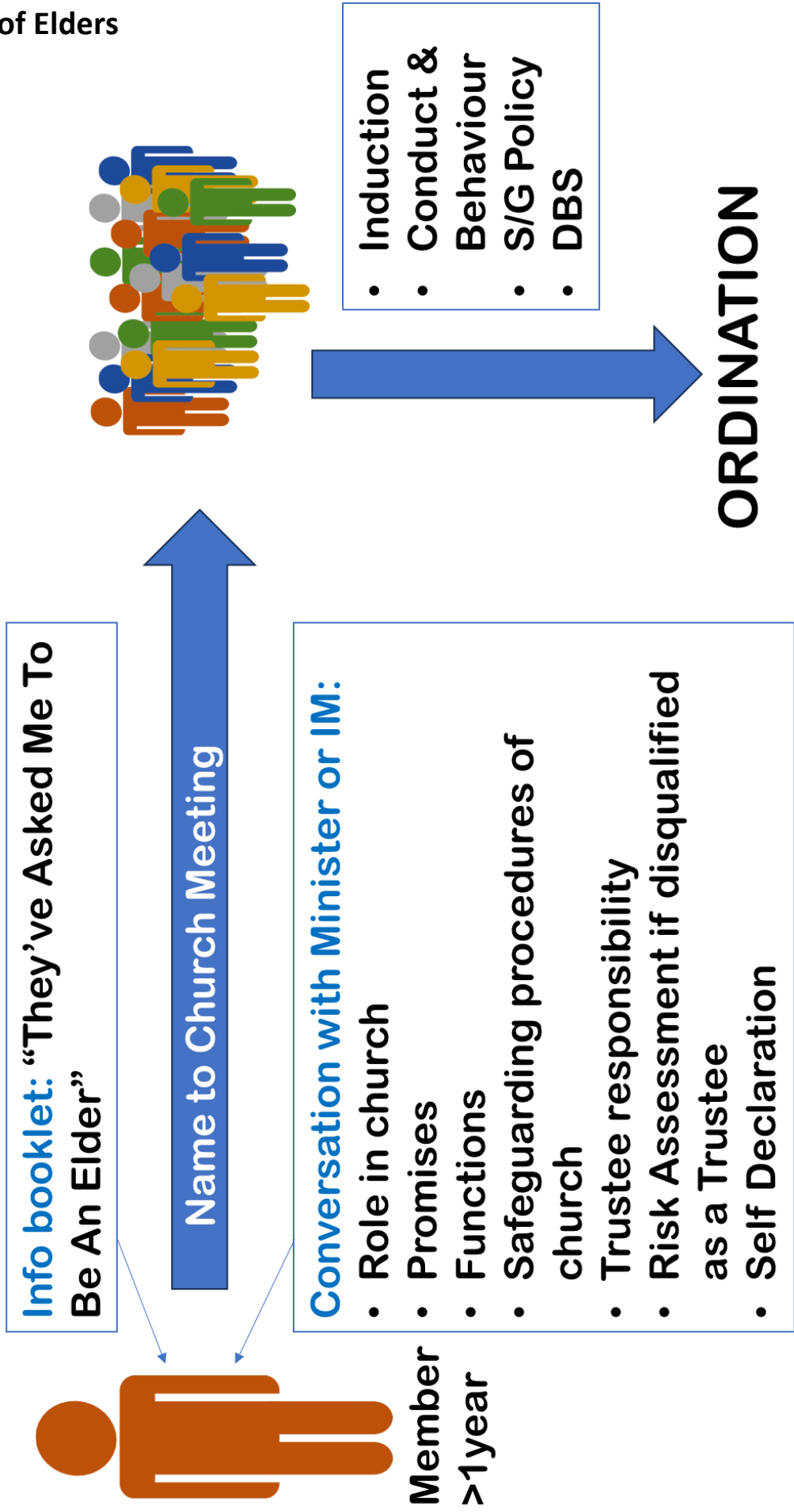
- the role within the local church including commitment of promises;
- functions as laid out in the Basis of Union;
- an overview of safeguarding procedures;
- responsibilities of trusteeship where the Elder is going to be a trustee (nb under 18s are not legally able to act as a trustee);
- where elders are unable to be a trustee because they are disqualified a risk assessment by the Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO) should be completed;
- a Self-Declaration form be completed

d) agree for their names to go forward to Church Meeting;

4.1.3 Election shall normally be by secret ballot. Only church members are eligible to vote;

4.1.4 Upon election, the newly elected elder shall:

- a) undertake a suitable induction training programme. This shall normally include shadowing an established elder. Induction may include elders training. The Synod can support churches to deliver this training.
- b) be given a copy of *URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Elders* (see below)
- c) the church's safeguarding policy with knowledge of how to report concerns;
- d) apply for a relevant DBS/Disclosure Scotland check (as set out in in paper T6 General Assembly 2021) through the normal channels. (Where timing between election and ordination and/or induction does not allow a DBS self-declaration form should be completed*);
- e) safeguarding training is attended within 6 months of ordination and/or induction.



Assembly Executive 2021

‘They’ve asked me to be an Elder’: <https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/more-about-ministry/become-an-elder/>

Safer Election : <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/safer-election-of-elders/>

Conduct & Behaviour of Elders : <https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/guidelines-on-conduct-and-behaviour-for-elders/>

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/GP6-2023.pdf> (GP6)

*This wording is still on the URC website however, Good Practice 6 (November 2023), does not have this sentence. It is highly recommended that the Elders Meeting receives the DBS disclosure of new Elders before they are ordained. If in doubt, please seek further guidance from the Synod Safeguarding Officer.

Notes & Comments

The functions of the Elders' meeting (from The Basis of Union)

- (i) to foster in the congregation concern for witness and service to the community, evangelism at home and abroad, Christian education, ecumenical action, local inter-church relations and the wider responsibilities of the whole Church;
- (ii) to see that public worship is regularly offered and the sacraments are duly administered, and generally to promote the welfare of the congregation;
- (iii) to ensure pastoral care of the congregation, in which the Minister is joined by Elders having particular responsibility for groups of members;
- (iv) to nominate from among its members a church secretary (or secretaries), to be elected by the church meeting, to serve both the church meeting and the Elders' meeting;
- (v) to arrange for pulpit supply in a vacancy;
- (vi) to keep the roll of members (see paragraph 2 (1)) and (as an aid to the discharge of the congregation's pastoral and evangelistic responsibility) lists of names of adherents and children attached to the congregation, and in consultation with the church meeting
to maintain standards of membership and to advise on the admission of members on profession of faith and by transfer, on the suspension of members, and on the removal of names from the roll;
- (vii) to be responsible for the institution and oversight of work among children and young people and of all organisations within the congregation;
- (viii) to call for the election of Elders and advise on the number required;
- (ix) to consider the suitability of any applicant for recognition as a candidate for the ministry or for service as a CRCW and to advise the church meeting about its recommendation to the synod;
- (x) to recommend to the church meeting arrangements for the proper maintenance of buildings and the general oversight of all the financial responsibilities of the local church;

(xi) to act on behalf of the church meeting and bring concerns to the wider councils of the United Reformed Church;

(xii) to do such other things as may be necessary in pursuance of its responsibility for the common life of the Church.

<https://urc.org.uk/your-faith/more-about-ministry/become-an-elder/>

Notes & Comments

Guidelines on conduct and behaviour for Elders

1. Introduction

This information sets down expectations of Elders in relation to Ministers of Word and Sacrament and Church Related Community Workers (CRCWs) within the United Reformed Church. Parallel papers about the expectations of ministers and CRCWs are to be read alongside this information.

2. Basis of Union

The foundation for the conduct of ministers is in the Basis Of The Union <https://urc.org.uk/general-assembly-executive-assembly-committees/general-assembly/the-manual/>, summarised in Schedule E paragraph 2:

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

The relevant promises in Schedule C are:

- a) “to live a holy life and to maintain the truth of the Gospel whatever trouble or persecution may arise”,
- b) “to fulfil the duties of your charge faithfully, to lead the church in worship, to preach the Word and administer the Sacraments, to exercise pastoral care and oversight, to take your part in the councils of the Church, and to give leadership to the church in its mission to the world”, and
- c) as a minister of the United Reformed Church “to seek its well-being, purity and peace, to cherish love towards all other churches and to endeavour always to build up the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church”.

Elders “share with Ministers of the Word and Sacrament in the pastoral oversight and leadership of the local churches, taking counsel together in the

elders' meeting for the whole church and having severally groups of members particularly entrusted to their pastoral care". They are "associated with ministers in all the councils of the Church". Elders promise at their ordination to "accept the office of elder of the United Reformed Church" and promise "to perform its duties faithfully".

Elders and members receive ministers at their induction or CRCWs at their commissioning "as from God" to serve among them and with them in the world. They promise to pray for the Minister/CRCW, to seek together the will of God and "give due honour, consideration and encouragement, building one another up in faith, hope and love".

Members promise, "in dependence on God's grace, to be faithful in private and public worship, to live in the fellowship of the church and to share in its work", and to give and serve, as God enables them, "for the advancement of his kingdom throughout the world". They also promise "by that same grace, to follow Christ and to seek to do and to bear his will" all the days of their life".

3. Standards of Christian Behaviour

3a Personal integrity and health

- To live a Christian life as persons of prayer and integrity.
- To be committed to growing in faith and discipleship and developing the gifts each has been given.
- To be aware of the need of Ministers, Elders and members to have appropriate boundaries that safeguard personal and spiritual health and welfare, to promote healthy relationships with others and not to do anything to undermine the spiritual health of another.
- To undertake URC safeguarding training as appropriate and have a working knowledge of the URC's <https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/>.
- To recognise the need for Ministers, Elders and Members to have a healthy lifestyle and to balance demands on Ministers'/CRCWs' availability and accessibility with respect for Ministers'/CRCWs' time for family and friends, personal renewal and rest and spiritual growth.

- To maintain strict confidentiality of all matters shared in confidence, except when required by law to do otherwise, eg with regard to the safety of children and adults at risk, and to respect Ministers' needs to maintain that same confidentiality.
- To exercise care and sensitivity when seeking counsel from others and in discussion about pastoral concerns, in order that the identity of any person shall not be revealed unless permission has been granted.
- To refrain from using privilege or power for personal advantage or gain, whether financial, emotional, sexual or material (<https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/> Section 3.3.10).

3b Relationships with Ministers

- To work collaboratively with Ministers/CRCWs and Elders and members in all aspects of the life of the pastorate.
- To support the Ministers/CRCWs, through prayer, encouragement and partnership, including honouring the terms of settlement with regard to holidays, financial benefits and continuing training.
- To regard all persons with equal respect and concern and not discriminate against anyone on the basis of gender, race, age, disability or sexual orientation, including Ministers/CRCWs.
- To honour the Ministers/CRCWs currently called to serve and not invite or encourage other ministers to be involved in the life of the church or to offer pastoral care without the Ministers'/CRCWs' consent.
- To refrain from raising pastoral issues with a previous Minister/CRCW.
- To respect the work of previous Ministers/CRCWs and deal honourably with their record.
- To welcome retired Ministers/CRCWs as members and worshippers in the pastorate.

3c Relationship with Elders, members and others

- To regard all persons with equal love and concern.
- To uphold values of faithfulness, trust and respect.

- To share leadership and pastoral care with others called to these purposes.
- To work collaboratively and safeguard the contribution of the whole church in decision-making processes.
- To seek advice from others if in doubt about one's competence to deal with any issue or situation.
- To consider very carefully taking any position of responsibility and to support the direction of church life initiated through the Ministers/CRCWs, Elders and Church Meetings.
- To observe proper boundaries in relationships and not to enter a sexual relationship with anyone in their care.
- Not to be alone with a child or children or young people or adult at risk in a place quite separate from others. If a child or young person wants to discuss a personal matter, follow <https://urc.org.uk/safeguarding/safeguarding-good-practice/> Guidance on Lone Working 8.3.7.

3d Relationship with councils of the Church

- To recognise that the pastorate is part of the wider United Reformed Church and that the Ministers/CRCWs are committed to play their part in the wider councils of the Church and in ecumenical relationships.
- To engage positively with all the councils of the church.
- To participate in synod's consultation and review of the pastorate as appropriate.

Date of last revision: Mission Council November 2020

<https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/guidelines-on-conduct-and-behaviour-for-elders/>

Titus 1: 6-9 *Qualities Required in Elders*

⁶An elder must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷Since an overseer manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. ⁸Rather, he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined. ⁹He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

Notes & Comments

Marks of Ministry of an Elder

Elders are called to share responsibility, with the Minister of the Word and Sacraments, for the spiritual oversight of the congregation. They are ordained into the whole United Reformed Church and inducted to exercise their ministry through their local church. The Elders' meeting is intended to be a distinctive and vital part of every URC congregation with the Elders collectively possessing the abilities, skills and spiritual gifts of leadership.

The following is a description of what the United Reformed Church can reasonably expect of people who are called to be an Elder. It is expected that anyone called to the office of eldership will exhibit the following four marks:

An Elder in the United Reformed Church should be:

A faithful disciple of Jesus Christ: caught up in the joy and wonder of God's will and work; seeking always to live a holy life in public and in private; to be committed to growing in faith and discipleship and developing the gifts each has been given and open to journeying as a disciple with others.

A person of integrity and prayer: self-aware and committed to their own lifelong learning (especially through the URC's provision for elders); aware of their own limitations and thus willing to seek support; sustained by their own rhythm of prayer, Bible reading and worship; upholding values of faithfulness, trust and respect.

A person who cares for others: sharing with others including the minister in offering and sustaining pastoral care; regarding all persons with equal love and concern; rejoicing and grieving with others through listening deeply and offering prayerful support; wise in knowing their limits and boundaries when more specialised help is needed; reliably dealing with issues of safeguarding and confidentiality.

A person of accountability: committed to serving as an Elder within the conciliar oversight of the church; willing to engage in systems of support for elders; observing proper boundaries in relationships; willing to engage in mandatory training including safeguarding; understands their role as a Trustee

(where appropriate) in administering the assets of the church; committed to the United Reformed Church and ready to collaborate with others for its mission in God's World.

Marks of Ministry of an Elders Meeting*

The following is a concise and comprehensive description of what the United Reformed Church can reasonably expect of people who are called collectively to be an Elders Meeting. It is expected that every elder will be committed to ensuring the following marks of ministry are in place although it is acknowledged that not all elders will embody all of these marks to the same extent:

Pastorally Caring for others: sharing with others in offering and sustaining pastoral care; regarding all persons with equal love and concern; 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.

Leadership and collaboration: working collaboratively with Ministers/CRCWs in a team ministry and safeguarding the contribution of the whole church in decision-making processes; sharing in spiritual leadership by praying through and discussing key issues in the life of the church and empowering church members to own and develop the ministry and mission of the fellowship; ensuring that the key functions of the local and wider church are fulfilled.

A focus upon mission and evangelism: fostering in the congregation concern for witness and service to the community and evangelism at home and abroad; alive to the significance of contexts and cultures in shaping mission to live God's Kingdom of justice and peace to the full.

A commitment to participation in the councils of the Church: responsive to God's call as gift and blessing to be lived out within the discipline and accountability of the denomination which ordains them and the pastorates into which they are inducted to serve.

A commitment to the church always being renewed: able to help 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.

*Or the Council fulfilling the functions of an Elders Meeting in an LEP

November 2022

<https://urc.org.uk/urc-ministries/marks-of-ministry-of-an-elder/>

Notes & Comments

Going Further: Resources for Answering God's Call

Activities

1. Speak with other elders about their call and how it has been affirmed over the years.
2. Share your call with others and ask them how they feel about your calling.
3. Ask others what skills and gifts they perceive in you. Are these gifts ones they feel are needed within the church?
4. Challenge your own perception of who should be an elder.
5. Consider sharing with a minister of word and sacraments to gain something of their perceptions about eldership.

Books and Articles

David G. Cornick, 1998, *Under God's Good Hand: History of the Traditions Which Have Come Together in the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom*, published by The United Reformed Church

Diarmaid MacCulloch, 2004, *Reformation: Europe's House Divided 1490-1700*. published by Penguin (also available as an ebook)

David Peel, 2002, *Reforming Theology: Explorations in the Theological Traditions of the United Reformed Church* published by The United Reformed Church

Tony Tucker, 2003, *Reformed Ministry: Traditions of Ministry and Ordination in the United Reformed Church* published by The United Reformed Church

Andrew Roberts – Holy Habits <https://www.holyhabits.org.uk/> – BRF

The London Institute for Contemporary Christianity <https://licc.org.uk/>

Shoreline Conversations <https://www.shorelineconversations.com/> - Breathing Spiritual Conversations

Going Further: Resources for Elders as Team

123 Team Roles – Definitions

Team player

The team player is caring, avoids conflicts, and fosters harmony. Being someone who likes to help other people, the team player is generally considered agreeable and friendly. He or she is diplomatic and emphasizes solidarity and team cohesion.

Chairperson

The chairperson has a strong coordinating role. With an emphasis on procedures, the chairperson will try to bring and keep the team together. He or she is communicative and deals with the members of the team in a respectful and open-minded way.

Completer

The completer is very conscientious and feels responsible for the team's achievements. Completers are concerned when errors are made and they tend to worry because of their controlling nature. The completer is also known as the finisher because they are most effectively used at the end of a task, to polish and scrutinize the work for errors, subjecting it to the highest standards of quality control.

Explorer

The explorer is generally an extrovert by nature. He or she is cheerful, gregarious. The explorer is also investigative, interested and curious about things. Because explorers like to improvise and communicate with others, they will have little problem presenting ideas to the team and developing new contacts.

Analyst

The analyst has a tendency to be reserved and critical. The analyst will also react to plans and ideas in a rational and sensible way. He or she will favour a prudent approach to matters and will evaluate them according to their accuracy before acting.

Innovator

The innovator is often the creative generator of a team. He or she has a strong imagination and a desire to be original. The innovator prefers to be independent and tends to approach tasks in a scientific way. As a creative individual the innovator may play a crucial role in the way a team approaches tasks and solves problems.

Driver

The driver is generally very ambitious and energetic. He or she may appear as impatient and impulsive. The driver is a strong motivator and will challenge others at crucial times. Although the actions of the driver may sometimes seem somewhat emotional, they do play a crucial role in pushing the team forward to succeed.

Expert

The expert has the skills and expertise required for the specific task at hand. He or she has a strong focus on the task and may get defensive when others interfere with his or her work. The expert prefers to work alone and team members often have a great deal of trust and confidence in him or her.

Executive

The executive is sometimes also referred to as the organizer. The executive is generally disciplined and eager to get the job done. He or she is efficient, practical, and systematic. Executives are well organized and diligent, and quickly turn the ideas of a team into concrete actions and practical plans.

Team Roles Test www.123test.com/team-roles-test/

Take the test and find what part of the Team you are.

8 Values of Teamwork that keep a Church Healthy

<https://ministrytodaymag.com/leadership/administration/21667-8-values-of-teamwork-that-keep-a-church-healthy>

This article provides an interesting read in relation to teamwork in the Church.

Going Further: Resources for Governance of Eldership

The Safeguarding Policy and Good Practice Guidance in Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk (or Good Practice 6) can be found here:

<https://urc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/GP6-2023.pdf>

As an Elder (or Trustee) you are not expected to know everything about this, but you should be aware of it and be able to refer to it if required.

Charity Commission <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/charity-commission-guidance> This gives lots of information about what is expected of a trustee and advice on how to fulfil your role. (This covers England and Wales only).

In the Isle of Man this website <https://www.gov.im/charities> gives guidance and advice.

Mersey Synod

The people at Mersey Synod office are always happy to support churches. See the table below with key contacts. Phone Synod Office 0151 7226590 or contact via email.

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Lay Preaching Commissioner	Pat Cansfield	Laypreachingcommissioner@urcmerseysynod.org.uk

Going Further: Resources for Elders and Pastoral Care

Guidelines for Good Practice in Pastoral Care, revised 20/09/16, Association of Christian Counsellors:

[https://www.pastoralcareuk.org/public/docs/pastoral-care/PCUK Guidelines for Good Practice in PC Rev 20.09.pdf](https://www.pastoralcareuk.org/public/docs/pastoral-care/PCUK_Guidelines_for_Good_Practice_in_PC_Rev_20.09.pdf)

Book:

Derek Tidball, 1997, 'Skillful shepherds: explorations in pastoral theology' IVP

A prayer to share:

Let there be love and understanding among us;
Let peace and friendship be our shelter from life's storms,
And may we always hear the voice of the other person.
Eternal God, help us to walk with good companions
So that we may live with hope in our hearts,
Love enough to share with others,
And desire to do your will.
Amen

A Prayer to Release Someone To God's Care

<https://www.elizabethgrayking.com/blog/rpdkmezatkdewdfnfwrt76yfxl8y2k>

The History of Eldership within the United Reformed Church

Roots in Judaism

The role of Elder and the functions of Eldership have evolved from their roots in scripture and continued through the history of the United Reformed Church. References to Elders in the Old Testament tend to emphasise the leadership and authority which they exercised. In Exodus 12. 21 it is the Elders who can be trusted to implement God's instructions given through the prophet Moses, in order that the whole community is held together at a time of urgency.

As the Israelites settled down in Palestine, especially later under the Kings, the solidarity of the family or clan broke down as groups diffused into villages and cities. So, it is likely that the Elders in each local area became appointed bodies. As well as local Elders, there was a national body of Elders referred to as "the Elders of Israel", which later became the Sanhedrin or Jewish Council. This is the body which Jesus encounters in the Gospel accounts such as Matthew 21:23.

The Early Christian Church

From earliest times, the Christian churches had Elders. This was probably because the model was already present in Judaism. Some of the Elders in the early Church clearly brought their Jewish traditions with them. Acts 15 tells of the Council of Jerusalem in which the potential conflict between Jewish and Gentile culture within the Church was averted by the collective wisdom of the Apostles and Elders. This chapter shows how the Church had to wrestle with new ways of living faithfully from its earliest days, and the important role that Elders had in leadership. In Acts 20:17-35 Paul is talking to the Elders from the Ephesus Church and gives them charge as "overseers" (Greek word *episcopes*) and "shepherds" who should keep the people in line with the true message of Jesus Christ. Elders had a role in administration in those days, such as being responsible for receiving collections of aid at a time of famine as given in Acts 11:27-30. The part they played in pastoral care is indicated by James 5:14 in which Elders are asked to visit the sick and pray with them.

By the time of the second generation of Christians, the role of the Elders had become established, and they seem to have been given a certain amount of authority, as suggested in 1 Timothy 5:17-19. Some Elders engaged in preaching

and teaching, and this passage is often cited when Ministers of Word and Sacraments are referred to as the “teaching Elders”.

There is another New Testament term describing a form of ministry: *diakonia*. This means “service” and is used of all kinds of service from waiting on tables (Acts 6:1-6) to the ministry of the Apostles to Paul’s collection for the Church in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8 & 9). Towards the end of the New Testament times *diakonos* comes to be used for the office of “Deacon”. This term was universally used within Congregational Churches, where the term Elder was not usually to be found before the United Reformed Church came into being.

Throughout the New Testament there are different words for different sorts of ministry, but it is not always clear to what exactly they refer, and they have been translated in various ways in different times, places, and church traditions. A term used to describe one function of ministry within the early Church is episcopo, which means oversight. Within the New Testament the word *episcopos* is sometimes used of an Elder and sometimes applied to the Eldership as a group. The title is also used for a role which differs from that of Elder and implies a more individual form of oversight. Then it is usually translated “bishop”, and it is from this that the office of Bishop has developed within the so-called “Episcopal” churches such as the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches. Another word used for forms of ministry in the New Testament is *presbuteros*. From it we derive the word ‘Presbyter’ (as in Presbyterian), but this can be translated as Presbyter, Elder, Minister or Priest and in the New Testament period does not seem to have had an exact definition. Another term again is ‘*Diaconos*’ – Deacon. This normally refers to the ministry of service. There is no one fixed pattern for different forms of ministry in the New Testament. Over the first couple of centuries of the life of the Church these various forms and titles for different sorts of ministry eventually settled into a three-fold pattern: **bishop, priest and deacon**. Within Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican churches, they understand this pattern of ministry to be central to the Church as they understand it.

The Reformed Tradition

John Calvin is a foundational figure in the reformed tradition and ministered in the church in Geneva. He believed that the New Testament did not explicitly

teach that ministry had to be in the 3-fold pattern. Through his reading of scripture, and to meet the needs of the new reformed Church in Geneva, he developed a four-fold pattern: **Pastor, Teacher, Deacon** and **Elder**. It is from this tradition that we receive the gift of Eldership in the URC.

In many reformed churches this became a two-fold pattern.

1. Pastors and Teachers became Ministers of Word and Sacrament,
2. Elders and Deacons become URC Elders.

In some parts of the Reformed family Elders are ordained, and in others they are not. The URC has received Eldership as an ordained ministry from the Scottish and English Presbyterian tradition. In Calvin's Geneva, Elders and Ministers worked together in the Councils of the Church to exercise oversight of the life of the Church. This is why URC Synods, and the General Assembly are still made up of a mixture of Elders and Ministers.

The Reformation in Scotland

The Reformation in Scotland owes much to John Knox (1514 – 1572), who exercised both political influence and religious leadership in the formation of Presbyterianism there. In August 1560, after the passing of Acts to bring about the disestablishment of the Roman Catholic church in Scotland, Knox and five other ministers were given the task by the Scottish Parliament of organising the newly reformed church (the Kirk). They worked for several months on the 1st Book of Discipline as the document describing the organisation of the new church. The Parliament did not approve the plan for financial reasons, but the intention for the role of the Elders can be seen. Elders were elected every year with the primary function of exercising discipline of the people and the ministers.

In the 1570s the Kirk had to deal with a shortage of clergy, a lack of income and the threat of a Catholic Counter Reformation or ('Re-formation'). The Second Book of Discipline (1578) set out the vision of a Presbyterian Kirk. The text was consistent with the ideas of Andrew Melville (1545-1622), who was a scholar, theologian and religious reformer. He was not the only influence on its creation as it was produced by a committee of over 30 members. Elders are now elected for life. The 2nd Book of Discipline lays out the functions of Elders in ways

which are not dissimilar to those described in the United Reformed Church Manual, although possibly with greater fierceness and attention to the role of the Kirk in line with its place in local and national governance.

Congregational Deacons

The Church meeting was the primary place of oversight and discipline. Deacons were elected to serve at the Lord's Table and conduct the business of the church. Towards the end of the sixteenth century, as part of the Reformation in England, Presbyterians and Congregationalists rejected the idea of the Local Church as a diocese under the authority of the bishop and departed from the Roman Catholic and Anglican form of the three-fold ministry. Instead, local congregations called a Minister of Word and Sacraments who was surrounded by a group of Elders or deacons. In congregationalism Deacons were not ordained.

Within Congregationalist community or polity, every local church congregation is independent, ecclesiastically sovereign or “autonomous” in contrast to Presbyterian polity in which higher assemblies of representatives can exercise authority over individual congregations. When it was formed in 1972 the United Reformed Church brought these two polities together within four Councils of the church – Church Meeting, District Council, Provincial Synod, and General Assembly. This was subsequently reshaped into three Councils – **Church Meeting, Synod, and General Assembly.**