

## ***Procedure for Authorisation for Lay Presidency in Northern Synod***

1. The procedure outlined here is intended to comply with the advice of General Assembly and specifically the conclusion (clause 5.1.5) of the 1995 Report, which is published in Section F of the Manual, concerning Lay Presidency at the Sacraments:-
  - (a) *a Minister of Word and Sacraments should preside when available;*
  - (b) *in situations of pastoral necessity where no minister is available, the district council should make provision for lay presidency; Moderating Elders and Lay Preachers should be considered first;*
  - (c) *authorisation for lay presidency should not cover a period longer than a year without consultation and review of the needs of the congregations concerned.*
2. Following the demise of district councils, the responsible body for granting authorisation is now the Synod.
3. For guidance and reflection on what may constitute “pastoral necessity”, see Section F of the Manual. Within Northern Synod are to be found congregations from all three of our uniting traditions. This variety of backgrounds, and subsequent histories, makes it likely that there will be differing understandings of the term within each Mission Partnership.
4. Lay people may be authorised to preside at the sacraments so that a congregation is not deprived of the opportunity of sacramental worship. However, lay presidency is not to be forced on a congregation that does not request it; nor is lay presidency to be chosen merely as a means of asserting the “validity” of such a ministry.
5. As we work closely alongside ecumenical partners, including Churches for whom lay presidency is an impossibility, it is important that our process of authorisation is seen to be both transparent and robust. Sensitivities about lay presidency should be noted especially within Local Ecumenical Partnerships, where it is unlikely to be acceptable to a proportion of members on the common roll. Lay preachers who hold extended membership in LEPs are reminded that authorisation extends only to sacramental services at which they preside as a member of the United Reformed Church. Synod is not able to offer authorisation to members of other Churches.
6. Because first-hand knowledge of those who may be called to such a ministry, as well as of local needs, is most likely to be found within Mission Partnerships, Synod Pastoral Committee will continue to rely on those Partnerships to make recommendations regarding authorisation. Each autumn Mission Partnerships will be invited to submit names of those seeking authorisation to preside at sacramental services within the Partnership for the following calendar year. Pastoral Committee will keep a list of those who are authorised by synod to preside.
7. Normally authorisation will be granted where requested to accredited or recognised lay preachers, and to elders who have been nominated as “moderating elders” within their congregation.
8. Because we believe it most appropriate that in cases of pastoral necessity a lay person called upon should have a pastoral relationship with congregation, authorisation is normally granted only within the Mission Partnership. However, if a Mission Partnership calls regularly on the services of a lay preacher from a neighbouring Partnership, their authorisation may be extended.
9. Before authorisation is granted, individuals concerned must be both willing to preside, and also equipped to do so. A training course will be offered early each year: individuals for whom authorisation is sought for the first time will be required to undergo this course before authorisation is granted. The course may also be offered to those who have previously been authorised.
10. Re-authorisation when requested shall normally be granted through Synod Pastoral Committee, but new names shall always be brought to a full meeting of Synod.
11. Extra names may be submitted at other times of the year only when circumstances demand it.
12. These guidelines replace those agreed by Synod meeting at Ashington in March 2005.