

A Way Forward

Thank you to everyone who has either participated in the consultation events, or sent questions to us. As you would expect, there were many questions raised and some surfaced at every event. You will find responses to your Frequently Asked Questions below, and we will continue to add to them, as more questions are asked. We are keen that every question raised receives a response, so we have prepared Less Frequently Asked Questions too! If you are looking for an answer to your question, you may find it there, if not below!

Frequently Asked Questions	
General questions about a <i>Way Forward</i>	
1. What is the difference between this and Mission Partnerships?	A changing shift of where ministry lies. A <i>Way Forward</i> is not about structures in the way that Mission Partnerships were when we moved on from district councils, the motivation and reasoning is different. Congregations which have positive experiences of Mission Partnerships which have worked well, can build on already established relationships. Where relationships are not so embedded, a <i>Way Forward</i> offers an opportunity to build links between churches. The extent and nature of these links will vary.
2. Will people see the difference?	The differences people see, will depend greatly upon the life and situation of the churches they belong to. All churches will, in time, see their stipendiary minister being one of a team of people supporting a group of churches. The life and mission of the churches will follow the vision of those within them. We hope for a sharing of gifts that can strengthen the life of the Church.
Questions about church groups and how they might work	
3. Could the term an 'association' of churches help for those who feel unrelated to the other URCs in their group?	Yes. The terms used to describe the relationship between churches, will be entirely up to the churches involved. Some churches prefer the word 'team', others like 'partnership' and some are using the term 'cluster'. For consistency and ease of reference, synod communications will always use the term 'group'.
4. Groupings will need to agree on the use of shared resources – this could bring	It is good to be honest about the fact that forming a group could involve some difficult conversations. The synod will offer facilitation and a neutral friend to walk

difficulties; how will these be facilitated/resolved?	alongside churches to help ease the way.
5. Can we suggest changes in groupings?	Yes. All proposed groups are open to consultation and change. Once groups have been agreed by Synod, subsequent changes will require agreement from the churches involved, Pastoral Committee and Synod.
6. Does the group prevent sharing with ecumenical partners?	No. The concept of a group of churches is to develop ways to make good use of the resources we have. Churches with strong ecumenical ties, are warmly encouraged to continue with these, in the knowledge that synod resources will become available to assist with placing a team around the churches. It could be helpful to consider the gifts and resources available within a LEP/ecumenical friends and discern how best synod resources might support the church community to flourish locally.
7. Where do LEPs fit in as part of the team?	Churches which are LEPs can be included in the church groups and are welcome to comment during the consultation. These churches can potentially be included in the design of a team placed around the churches, where this feels right and helpful (see above). <i>A Way Forward</i> seeks to offer flexible support for churches to be strengthened, that they may share God's love in their communities.
8. How can we ensure the size of a group is future proof – e.g. if the groupings are too small, will we end up aggregating them in to larger groups in the future?	Gauging the size of a group requires balancing the number of churches, the geography and practicalities, as well as looking ahead as best we can. Developing strong, local lay leadership could be an effective way of bringing sustainability to a group or churches in their local setting.
9. What will be the process for agreeing groups?	We have received many comments about the composition of groups including suggestions about specific churches or groups (see Q19-30 below). The process to follow will depend upon whether the church group is acceptable or not. Where the consultation suggests a group is broadly accepted the process is: 1. Pastoral Committee will write to the churches, inviting them to meet up (if they

haven't already), with a view to forming a church group. There may be several meetings held, or it might be more straightforward. Such meetings can be facilitated, if that is easier.

2. When churches are ready to proceed and formally agree to put the group in place, each church can decide to do so in the church meeting.
3. The church meeting decisions are then shared with Pastoral Committee and Mel (Synod Clerk).
4. If everything is in order, the church meeting decisions will be confirmed by Synod Executive so a resolution can be taken to the next synod meeting.

For churches in vacancy and in groups which have been broadly accepted: -

5. Pastoral Committee will write to the churches, inviting them to meet up (if they haven't already), with a view to consider forming a church group. There may be several meetings held, or it might be more straightforward.
6. When churches are ready to proceed with deciding to form a group, each church can agree to do so in the church meeting.
7. The decisions are then shared with Pastoral Committee and Mel (Synod Clerk).
8. If everything is in order, the church meeting decisions will be confirmed by Synod Executive so that the church group can be presented in a resolution for the next synod meeting
9. During this time, churches can prepare information about their church for inclusion in a joint profile
10. When the church meetings have agreed their grouping, a group profile can be finalised any time after then, for agreement by the Pastoral Committee. It may help to see other URC group profiles, summary profiles can be found on the Eastern Synod website <http://www.urch-eastern.org.uk/> Synod office can also share existing group profiles from across the URC.

11. Note: The synod will seek to find a Pastoral Friend to support churches which are in

	<p>vacancy, and a Group Facilitator to assist churches to build relationships and form groups together. An Interim Moderator will support church groups to put in place a single vacancy committee, complete a group profile and call a stipendiary minister/s of word and sacraments</p> <p>12. *Some church groups may be formed quickly; if any group wishes to be agreed at the October 17 synod, Pastoral Committee will be glad to receive details in time for their meeting on Friday 8th September.</p> <p>Where churches are unable to agree with the proposed grouping: - There are quite a few churches in this position.</p> <p>13. Pastoral Committee will write to each church in a proposed group suggesting a date for meeting with a member of the synod team, with a view to facilitating discussions. In some cases, you may find this has already taken place.</p> <p>14. When a group arrangement becomes acceptable to all the churches involved in a proposal the process proceeds as above.</p> <p>15. When a group arrangement is <i>not</i> acceptable to all the churches involved, for example a group is acceptable to five out of six churches, we will do all we can to facilitate a successful outcome for each church involved.</p> <p>16. We do not wish to force a grouping upon any church. Yet, we are aware there may be some constraints which provide few alternatives for some and where this is the case, we will openly share these with you.</p>
<p>10. What happens where churches don't want to come alongside/work together?</p>	<p>This will depend upon the individual circumstances. Wherever there are difficulties, support and facilitation will be offered. Churches which decide not to be part of a church group, will be invited to meet with Pastoral Committee to explore their circumstances. Since all stipendiary ministry will be group-based, it is possible that churches which elect not to participate in group ministry are unable to access stipendiary ministry.</p>
<p>11. Will the synod dedicate time to learn from</p>	<p>Yes,</p>

emerging and existing models?	Initially, church groups will be invited to share their experiences with friends from the Pastoral Committee. To deepen our knowledge and understanding, the learning of church groups will be shared more widely, as appropriate. In the meanwhile, we are learning from the work taking place elsewhere in the denomination.
12. Will the synod build in review periods – standing back and appraising what is working, what can be stopped and what could make things better?	Yes, Churches will form groups over some time; we will build in opportunities to reflect upon what is working well and will warmly invite any feedback and comments from churches, as we begin to make these changes.
13. Please clarify the role of the cluster; churches are still not sure whether this means churches independent of one another or all together.	<p>The church group will operate as an entity of individual churches which agree some aspects of their church life together. The churches will share a stipendiary minister of words and sacraments who works within a 'team around the churches'.</p> <p>Churches in a group will be making joint decisions upon how the team works and other shared responsibilities, such as matters relating to ministers of word and sacraments. A group treasury for any joint interests can run alongside churches retaining their individual treasurer functions.</p> <p>It is up to the churches involved, to agree in which other ways they share tasks and the ministry of their gifts between them. Whilst there are options for a group of churches to become an entity, more often churches remain as separate charities.</p>
14. Will the synod consult with churches about style of group? Some prefer a looser group rather than tight pastorate	See above.
Questions about 'teams around the churches' will be formed	
15. How do we ensure we retain the emphasis upon discipleship?	Refusing to be distracted from our discipleship, calls for vigilance from us all. At its best, a <i>Way Forward</i> will help to release the time and energy to focus upon discipleship and discipling one another. Perhaps one thing we can do, to avoid being so focused upon organising church life, is to recognise this is an ever-present diversion.

16. How can we design teams around church groups which can have a 'real impact'?	The design of the teams will follow the context, vision and creativity of the churches. Where the churches have discerned a path, we can pray for the changes the Spirit is prompting.
17. How can we encourage every congregation to have its own worship group if possible or shared?	Many consultation responses pointed to the value of churches having their own worship groups and many have requested training to help with this. In response, the synod is arranging worship leading courses – the details will be posted in the e-news and on the website.
18. How can we nurture the gifts that are revealed when a church is in vacancy?	An integral part of a <i>Way Forward</i> is to see the gifts we have amongst us and to share these with one another. We encourage churches to look around them at the gifts they have and where you recognise a gift in someone, tell them, it can make all the difference!
Questions about specific church groups	
19. Could East Cleveland and Teesside explore links with the Dales group?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, this could be explored, if it is agreed by the churches
20. Can Hexham and Horsley maintain their close links?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, if this is agreed by both churches
21. Can Ponteland and St John's consider linking with Hexham and Horsley?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, if this is agreed by the churches
22. Can Ponteland consider other links e.g. St Andrew's Kenton?	<input type="checkbox"/> This could be explored. It is an option which would enlarge the Central Group further.
23. Can Great Bavington stay with Morpeth?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, if this is agreed by the churches.
24. Clarify situation regarding Bavington joining Morpeth and Widdrington, both of which are in SENEА-how will this be progressed?	<input type="checkbox"/> Dave Herbert will follow up this with the Chair of the District.
25. Can Gateshead churches be part of the Durham group?	<input type="checkbox"/> Potentially! Discussions are being held with the Gateshead churches to ascertain their views.
26. Can Gateshead churches be part of the Central team?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, this was the initial proposal.

27. Can Gateshead churches join churches in South Shields?	<input type="checkbox"/> Potentially! Discussions are being held with the Gateshead churches to ascertain their views.
28. Could St Columba's/St Andrew's develop links with East Newcastle? A shared ministry would not be unreasonable	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, this could be explored. It would enlarge the Central group further.
29. If the Central team feels too big, could it be divided into smaller areas?	<input type="checkbox"/> Possibly. A synod visit to Sheffield is planned for June, and we will specifically ask how they have overcome the worries of churches which feel the team is too large.
30. What was the rationale for the large team, what benefits did you hope to see?	<input type="checkbox"/> The rationale for the large city team was that it could offer a greater resource in a specific area, than would be available to churches separately, and potentially could have a greater impact. This is being kept under review, see above.
Questions about implementation, how will all this happen?	
31. What help will we have to change the expectations of local congregations?	<p>The synod website will hold communication materials, presentations, clips and other information that can be used for sharing with others. There will be information provided in e-news as it becomes available, as well as Facebook and Twitter.</p> <p>The synod team are also very happy to visit churches to explain more about what a <i>Way Forward</i> might mean for them.</p>
32. How do we prepare the congregation for change?	<p>Explaining and giving information about a <i>Way Forward</i> is a first step. Some churches have held meetings dedicated to this subject, others are writing about it in church magazines and some are finding ways to talk about it on Sundays too.</p> <p>Some churches have requested visits from the synod team or Moderator, which have been helpful. The offer is always open for someone to spend time with your church, if that would be of value to you.</p> <p>Change can be difficult, as well as positive. For this reason, we are doing all we can to provide a facilitator to each church group. If it would help to talk through the changes ahead with someone who can walk alongside the church, please get in</p>

	touch with either Dave (Moderator) or Mel (Clerk) at the synod office.
33. What is the timescale for forming in to groups?	<p>We hope the first groups will be formed in North Northumberland and North/West County Durham.</p> <p>There is no set timescale for groups to form, although those in vacancy may wish to progress quickly.</p> <p>Timescales for forming a 'team around the churches' of a group, will be at the discretion of the churches involved.</p>
34. What are the next steps?	<p>The consultation phase is ending and comments have been reviewed by Synod Executive.</p> <p>We hope to bring some agreed groupings possibly to the October synod with more to follow in March 2018.</p> <p>Any church which wishes to explore forming a group is welcome to do so. Materials about the steps to follow for forming a group will be available on the website and the synod team are available to arrange for facilitators and people to walk alongside the churches, if this is helpful.</p>
35. How can we separate the worship leadership from the management?	<p>In smaller congregations, this can prove practically difficult.</p> <p><i>A Way Forward</i> offers potential for churches to share tasks, and help one another. It could be possible for the 'team around the churches' to include administrators or caretakers if these would free time for churches to develop their mission.</p> <p>There is a Growing Leaders course running from September across the synod, designed to help people discover their gifts and calling for leadership in churches.</p>
36. What will be the process for groups to iron out issues with synod?	<p>Where issues are proving difficult to resolve locally, the synod will provide support and assistance. Any specific problems for which a synod response is required can be shared with either Dave (Moderator) or Mel (Clerk).</p>
37. If we want help from synod, who do we contact?	<p>Please contact the relevant people at the synod office if you would like specific advice: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For technical or legal assistance - Andrew Atkinson - For help with financial matters when forming a group - Tony Haws - To request facilitation or help with a meeting - Mel or Dave

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To request help or support with forming a group - Help or advice relating to calling a minister - Help with developing mission - Help with arranging or sourcing training - Help with ecumenical matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dave or Mel - Dave or Grant Wilson - Jane Rowell - Hilary Collinson, Peter Rand - Andy Lie
38. If we want help from synod to facilitate a meeting, who will do this?	There are some options here. It could be that a member of the synod team comes to meet with you, particularly in the early stages and if they are familiar with the issues involved. Alternatively, a member of Synod Executive could offer the support requested or a facilitator from a team we are putting in to place.	
Questions about who can be in 'teams around churches'		
39. What exactly would be the role of the local leader?	The local leader is envisioned to be someone who has been trained in supporting the leadership of the church.	
40. Will synod liaise with churches to understand which roles would be most helpful to churches when developing teams around the churches? Team roles churches have suggested so far, are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Lay people to undertake funerals, baptisms, weddings, communions o Worship teams in every church – or shared o A paid administrator o A local co-ordinator to organise pastoral care o Someone responsible for technical support, web support, health and safety..... o A director to assist with gaining resources o Group training officers o Group communications officers o Someone paid to help with running the 	<p>Yes, we will be glad to receive any comments you may have about what could be helpful, and other church groups may find your ideas helpful too.</p> <p>The roles within a team may depend upon how churches wish to draw upon and complement the strengths of their ordained ministry, and the gifts of others in their community, as appropriate.</p> <p>Churches will be free to directly employ people, or request the synod Trust to do so. Alternatively, it is possible to partner with another organisation. For example, some churches employ children and family workers through Scripture Union, rather than take on the responsibility themselves. Other potential such partners include Northumberland Industrial Mission (chaplainscy roles), and Faith in Communities for community outreach.</p>	

building would make a difference	
41. Clarify the role of synod and what it will do to support churches in respect of employing staff and payroll	<p>The synod will either provide, outsource or signpost churches to a payroll function.</p> <p>We can arrange for support with writing contracts of employment, recruitment and selection, and any other employment queries you may have. Please note for legal reasons Synod will need to check documentation relating to recruiting and employing staff.</p> <p>It could be possible for the Trust to be an employer as well, although line management of team members is more successful at the local level. The synod could also assist by putting churches in touch with potential partnering organisations (see Q39 above).</p>
Questions about stipendiary ministers	
42. What will be the process for calling a minister in a group?	<p>There are currently three ways in which a minister can be called: -</p> <p>1 – A single church makes the call</p> <p>2 – The churches in a group all call the minister individually. (This has the difficulty that if one church does not call the minister, then the call is not valid to any of the churches).</p> <p>3 – The church group calls the minister to the group. As with joint pastorates, the minister is asked to preach with a view at a morning service and there is an open afternoon meeting that all members can attend, and at which a vote is taken. The local church constitution will explain the majority vote on which a call can proceed.</p>
43. Can ministers be called by synod?	There is work taking place denominationally on this. Our synod resolved in October 2016 that future ministers' Terms of Settlement will offer greater flexibility.
44. What will be the expectations of ministers in future and what is the role of minister of word and sacraments envisioned to be?	The role of stipendiary ministers will be changing, with more emphasis upon being teacher, guide and spiritual enabler. Some churches have said they are looking for the minister to be an inspiration and guide, something that they couldn't do themselves.
45. What happens to ministers in situ?	This will depend upon the minister and the group involved, and each situation will be looked at individually.

46. How will ministers work together in such groups?	Instead of being allocated a percentage of time to a specific church, the ministers will work across all the churches in the group. As with any team, the potential for it to work well, will be realised, when people can work to their strengths
47. How will ministers be allocated?	This will depend upon the size of the group, and which ministers are in which place at the time. We seek to ensure a good fit between geography, the number of churches, the number of members and the nature of the churches involved. We anticipate ministers Terms of Settlement will be revised when this occurs.
48. Will ministers have a say [in where they are allocated]?	Yes, every situation will be looked at separately, as individual circumstances will vary.
49. Will ministers be redistributed to other groups which have no minister?	See above
50. Clarify whether existing ministers will 'look after' the same churches or would they become a more flexible 'team' and take services at the other churches in the group?	Once a group is formed, the minister will be become part of a 'flexible' team, taking services at other churches in the group
Questions about lay and local leadership	
51. What is the nature of the role of local lay leadership?	A local lay leader is an elder who undertakes some worship and leadership activities on behalf of the church
52. Will there be guidelines on the boundaries between lay leadership and ordained ministry?	Yes, guidance will be made available.
Questions about training	
53. Can we have local based training asap on...?	We have been greatly encouraged by your requests for training – watch this space!!

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Discipleship ○ Lay leadership ○ Funerals ○ Baptisms ○ Weddings ○ Safeguarding ○ Lay preaching ○ Communications and IT ○ Leading worship ○ Evangelism 	
<p>Training also requested for:-</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ministers and others who wish to develop further skills in team working. ○ Encouraging lay people to use skills and talents regardless of their age ○ Giving members confidence in undertaking tasks which ministers usually do 	
<p>Questions about buildings</p>	
<p>54. Will synod provide support with buildings? They are becoming harder to deal with especially in smaller congregations.</p>	<p>Yes, we are going to establish 'building buddies' to help churches – more news to follow</p>
<p>55. Will there be guidance and support available to churches as they commence building developments?</p>	<p>There is a range of advice and support available including a new URC website about buildings www.urcbuildingsforum.co.uk is expected to go live shortly.</p>
<p>Communications</p>	
<p>56. Can the presentation be given to church meetings?</p>	<p>Yes, it can be downloaded from the synod website.</p>
<p>57. Could there be a suite of resources that can be accessed by churches?</p>	<p>Yes, we are working to provide resources that may be of help. If you have any specific requests, please get in touch.</p>

<p>58. Will communications be considered when resourcing church groups including digital domains?</p>	<p>This will depend upon the roles created in the team developed around your churches.</p>
<p>59. Will synod put in place a communications plan to help deliver <i>Way Forward</i>?</p>	<p>Yes, we will be doing this.</p>
<p>60. How can churches hold regular conversations with synod during this process?</p>	<p>We are open to all ideas! Please let us know what will work best for you. To date, we have used church secretary networks as well as consultation events.</p>