



# The United Reformed Church Northern Synod

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## *Guidelines and Procedures on the Care of Manses*



In recent years, many synods have introduced a variety of mense policies. In 2009, a task group was set up in Northern Synod to review the position and consider the options. Given the resources available, it quickly became clear that it would not be possible to set up a scheme of Synod-managed properties, as has been done in some places. Instead, the task group concentrated on bringing together existing and new guidelines and procedures into a single booklet, for ease of reference.

These guidelines and procedures are produced to help local churches, pastorates, mission partnerships, Synod and trustees in caring for manses in the coming decade. They will work best if all parties familiarise themselves with this booklet, and work together in providing good quality accommodation for our ministers and Church-Related Community Workers.

This booklet was formally adopted at the Synod meeting on 19 March 2011.

<b><i>Contents</i></b>	<b><i>Page</i></b>
Aims	3
Objectives	3
Scope	3
Synod Support	4
Manse Properties	5
Manse Funds	7
Grants & Loans	7
Manse Responsibilities	7
Letting and Maintaining Manses	8
Conclusion	11

## ***Aims***

Our aims are to ensure that manse assets, including rent income, are used to sustain a core number (30-35) of manses that are appropriately positioned, of good quality and well maintained for use by URC and other ministers<sup>1</sup> serving in the Northern Synod.

This will also ensure that the Synod as a whole has well-housed ministers, and takes care of the capital investment in its manse stock to enable full engagement in the Synod Mission Strategy that is being established during 2010, based on the Vision 2020 framework<sup>2</sup>.

## ***Objectives***

We have 5 objectives.

1. Manses should be fit for purpose.
2. There should be good quality provision for ministers at least equal to that in other Synods, as an attractive part of recruitment to the Synod.
3. Manses should be in the right place for today, with greater flexibility to achieve this result.
4. Investment value should be preserved through proper repair and maintenance.
5. Local churches and Mission Partnerships should be supported where they do not have the skills base to ensure good management of manses.

## ***Scope***

These guidelines and procedures are intended to apply to all manses in the Northern Synod.

## ***Definition of a Manse***

A manse is defined in the United Reformed Church Acts as a residence for the minister or any caretaker, church worker or employee of a local church, and it is held in trust for that purpose. The Synod recognises that a number of other properties are held by local churches as sources of income, and uses two tests to distinguish between the two. Firstly, if at the date of union (1972), a property which had formerly been used as a manse was being used as an investment property or if secondly, after the date of union, it was

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<sup>1</sup> Ministers of other denominations may occupy URC manses where there is some form of Local Ecumenical Partnership and a formal sharing agreement under the Sharing of Church Buildings Act 1969

<sup>2</sup> The Vision 2020 framework was adopted by General Assembly in 2010, and encourages local churches to develop their life and mission with reference to some of 10 statements of mission purpose, with support from the wider church. Further information can be found at [www.urc.org.uk/mission/vision2020-our-mission-strategy.html](http://www.urc.org.uk/mission/vision2020-our-mission-strategy.html), [http://urc-northernsynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pp-v2020\\_and\\_lmmr.pdf](http://urc-northernsynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pp-v2020_and_lmmr.pdf) and <http://urc-northernsynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pp-deployment.pdf>

acquired to be used as a source of income and had never been used as a manse, then in either case it will be treated as an investment property and thus excluded from consideration as a manse.

These guidelines and procedures only concern properties purchased with the intention of housing ministers of Word and Sacrament and Church-Related Community Workers, and are not intended to cover caretakers' houses or other properties held under the statutory trusts. Where a manse shares a site with other church buildings, it would not normally be sold separately. In addition, manse accommodation that forms part of another church building<sup>3</sup> would be treated as a church hall for grants and loans purposes, and would not be included in the procedure for visiting manses.

Manses are currently held on trusts as described above. When a manse is sold and another bought with those proceeds then the trust continues, retaining the requirement to house a minister, CRCW or church worker for that particular congregation. There may be greater flexibility if manses could be held for a larger area such as a group of churches, mission partnership or indeed for the whole Synod.

### ***Synod Support***

A Manse Subgroup has been established by the Trust to work alongside the Trust Officer in implementing these guidelines and procedures, and supporting local churches.

#### *Remit of the Manse Subgroup*

The function of the subgroup is to oversee and monitor the good stewardship of manses in the Synod. Its remit is:

- To oversee and monitor the implementation of the *Guidelines and procedures for the care of manses in Northern Synod* as agreed by Synod (19 March 2011).
- To oversee manse visits during the declaration of vacancies, when lease renewals are due and on other occasions as appropriate.
- To support churches in bringing their manses up to standard by overseeing schedules of work as appropriate.
- To approve grants and loans from the Synod Manse Fund up to £10,000 each, after which these would be referred to the Trust. (Emergency applications within this limit may be agreed by 3 members of the subgroup, at least 2 of whom must be directors of the Trust.)
- To bring recommendations with regard to changes and improvements to the *Guidelines and procedures for the care of manses in Northern Synod*, when appropriate.

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<sup>3</sup> Houses integral to church buildings include those at Widdrington and Jesmond.

- To report regularly to the Trust, and through the Trust to the Synod, in relation to this remit.

### ***Manse Properties***

Our third objective was that manses should be in the right place for today, with greater flexibility to achieve this result.

The Northern Synod is very well endowed with manse properties, for which we give thanks to our forebears. There is a need to release some of these properties for sale to provide funds which can enable the remaining properties to be properly repaired and maintained, good quality, and fit for purpose.

Manses are held on terms of trust set out in the United Reformed Church Acts<sup>4</sup>. All church property is owned by trustees who hold it for specific purposes. These trustees are guided and governed in their actions by the terms of those trusts. Prior to 1972, there were several different sets of rules for what are now URC properties, but the United Reformed Church Acts created a single set of rules, generally referred to as the statutory trusts. The management of all church properties, whether the trustees are the URC Trust, one of the Synod Trusts or private individuals, is now governed by these rules. However, the situation of the Church today is very different to that of the 1970's, and in particular the assumption of "one church, one minister" which guided the drafters of the statutory trusts no longer applies to the extent that it did. Currently most manses are still held for the use of the minister of a single church, and under the Acts the trustees are bound by the decisions of that Church Meeting. Other than in the most minor of matters, the decision of the Church Meeting requires to be approved by the Synod, but the trustees may not alter or amend this decision. They are allowed to refuse to implement a decision but that is the limit of their power. The recent development of mission partnerships, groups and joint pastorates has led us to consider how best to manage manses for larger pastorates. It is possible, with the consent of the relevant Church Meetings, to change the terms on which manses are held. For example, in a pastorate of more than one local church, all of the Church Meetings would be consulted before a decision about whether to buy or sell a Manse was made.

Therefore, local churches, pastorates and mission partnerships are encouraged carefully to consider how many manses are required in their area to house ministers and how best to make use of the available resource for God's mission. These guidelines seek to encourage a generous and giving spirit between the churches of the Synod, its ecumenical partners and the wider church.

In particular, these issues will come to the fore when mission priorities are considered, ministerial transitions occur, or churches engage in the routine stewardship of all their

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<sup>4</sup> The wording of the model statutory trusts contained in schedule 2, part II of the URC Act 1972 as amended, can be found at [www.urch.org.uk/images/the\\_manual/D.The\\_United\\_Reformed\\_Church\\_Acts\\_1972\\_1981\\_and\\_2000.pdf](http://www.urch.org.uk/images/the_manual/D.The_United_Reformed_Church_Acts_1972_1981_and_2000.pdf).

assets. The Synod will support local churches, pastorates and mission partnerships in careful and open discussion about the number, location and suitability of the manses held. Formal decisions will then be made in accordance with these discussions.

At the Synod Meeting on 20 March 2010, a paper was tabled for discussion in churches, pastorates and mission partnerships, indicating those pastorates where there appeared to be more manses than the number of forecast deployed ministers. This paper can be read at:

[http://urc-northern-synod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pp-deployment\\_principles.pdf](http://urc-northern-synod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pp-deployment_principles.pdf).

Although the Synod does have the authority to declare a manse redundant, it would be hoped that this would only be used when a congregation had ceased to exist and had not made appropriate decisions beforehand, or as a last resort in other exceptional circumstances<sup>5</sup>.

### *Manse Capital Sales Policy*

Synod affirmed a policy on the allocation of the proceeds of capital sales on 20 March 2010. This has been revised slightly to improve clarity, as follows:

First, all legal and estate agency fees and other costs connected with the cost of the sale will be met. Secondly, all loans and outstanding debts owed to the wider United Reformed Church by the church to which the property related shall be met.

If it is intended to purchase a replacement property, then the net proceeds will be held in a separately identified fund by the trustees.

Thereafter, 10% of the net proceeds will be paid to the United Reformed Church Ministers' Pension Trust Limited, 15% to the United Reformed Church Retired Ministers' Housing Society Limited, 15% to the Mission Fund and 60% to the Manse Fund.

Where the church to which the property related is continuing, application would be considered for a grant out of the 60% towards development or major repair works to an equivalent property within the same pastorate<sup>6</sup>, subject to the following provisos:

- The church should give notice at the time of sale that such an application is envisaged;
- The work should normally be completed within a year after the sale;

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<sup>5</sup> Further information about how properties can be declared redundant can be found at <http://urc-northern-synod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Redundant-Property-Policy.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> This would include situations where a new pastorate is in the process of formation

- An adjustment may be necessary to the sum available to fulfil a potential obligation on the Trust to make a payment into the inter-Synod resource sharing scheme.

This policy shall be reviewed by the Trust in 2012.

### ***Manse Funds***

With the amalgamation of multiple District and Synod funds in 2009 a Synod Manse Fund has been established. This fund is available for grants for improvements and maintenance work on manses where local churches or pastorates do not have sufficient funds to do such work otherwise. It may also be used occasionally for capital needs, such as bridging loans during sales and purchases, and for the purchase of new manses in areas of church extension or where they are needed owing to reorganisation of pastorates.

To build up this Synod-wide fund, churches are therefore encouraged to resolve to pass existing manse capital funds or the money from future sales of manses to the Synod. While most of the money invested in manses was originally raised for a specific church's needs, once it becomes clear that such money is not likely to be needed for this purpose in the foreseeable future, then churches are asked to consider releasing these funds for the support of other churches. The aim is to release monies tied up in funds into a common pool for the benefit of the wider church.

### ***Grants & Loans***

Guidelines and application forms for grants and loans from the Manse Fund are available from the Synod Office or from the website

<http://urc-northernsynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/grants-manse-151231.pdf>.

### ***Manse Responsibilities***

Where a minister or CRCW is in a deployed post, or a manse is let or vacant, then the pastorate will be responsible for the costs set out below. If the minister is in a part or full time non-deployed post (such as a Special Category Minister, or an ecumenical, Synod, or Mission Fund-supported post) then these costs are paid pro-rotta between the pastorate, the Synod and other relevant bodies. This would be agreed alongside a projected budget, as part of the pre-vacancy procedures for such a ministry. In the case of Synod responsibility for a manse, its maintenance would be overseen by the Manse Subgroup.

The manse costs for which the pastorate will usually be responsible are:

- Rent or ground rent if manse is leasehold
- Property Insurance
- Council Tax
- Water and sewage charges
- Internal and external decoration
- Property maintenance and repairs

- Servicing of main appliances and boilers

Fuller details are given in the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration: [www.urch.org.uk/images/Finance/PlanRev2015\\_January\\_2015.pdf](http://www.urch.org.uk/images/Finance/PlanRev2015_January_2015.pdf) in particular at paragraph 6.3.2, and appendices B and D.

### ***Letting and Maintaining Manses***

Guidelines and procedures were agreed at the Synod meeting on 20 March 2010, and details are given below.

#### *Introduction*

A manse is defined in the United Reformed Church Acts (as detailed above).

In all cases, the trustees (whether they be private trustees, the United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited, or some other corporate trustee body) are constrained to act under the direction of the Church Meeting of the relevant local church, but in most cases this will also require the consent of the Synod. There are two exceptions to this rule. Firstly, where a vacant manse is needed for a limited and temporary use that does not require the creation of a lease or tenancy, the trustees may act solely on the authority of a Church Meeting resolution. Secondly, where the Synod, after due consultation, has determined that a property is redundant, the trustees then act on the direction of the Synod in selling or leasing the property and apply the income therefrom as the Synod directs.

This section is intended to assist local churches, Synod committees and trustees by setting out the Synod's understanding of how decisions should be managed in relation both to manses not needed for housing ministers, and to manses still needed for their primary purpose.

Except in contentious cases, the Synod will normally act through its Synod Executive Committee, which has delegated powers for this purpose. This enables decisions to be made between meetings of the full Synod.

#### *Identifying redundant manses*

- When it is known that a minister is moving, Synod Pastoral Committee will assess, in consultation with the churches and mission partnership, whether the manse that becomes vacant might be redundant.
- When there is a change of circumstances, Synod Pastoral Committee may, in consultation with the pastorate, agree to initiate a formal enquiry into the potential redundant status of the manse. This will be carried out by the body appointed for that purpose: either the North East District Council, or the relevant Ecumenical Area



Council. That body will report to the Synod Executive Committee, which after consulting with any relevant partner denominations, will make a decision, under delegated powers as non-controversial business. Where the pastorate, local church or any member thereof wishes to dispute this decision, it will be subject to a resolution and decision of the Synod itself.

### *Agreement to rent*

Synod, will only agree to a proposal from a local church permitting a manse to be let in cases where it is not redundant. Synod approval will also take account of any consultation between the Pastoral Committee, the Trust and the pastorate as to the appropriateness of sustaining the manse, in line with the paper *Deployment and Manses*<sup>7</sup>, received by Synod on 20 March 2010.

In most cases this agreement will only be forthcoming if the Church Meeting agrees to:

- best rental value being ascertained by a recognised letting agency
- the net income from the letting being paid into a Manse Maintenance Fund and used only for maintaining manses in the pastorate/mission partnership
- an annual receipts and payments account for the Manse Maintenance Fund being submitted to the Synod Treasurer within three months of the accounts year end
- the letting being reviewed by the Trust at the change of any tenancy and at least every 5 years

At the end of each tenancy, the Synod will inspect the manse, and agree essential works with the local church, which must be completed prior to further letting, to be covered by rent income in the first instance.

Any variations in this agreement must be agreed between the Synod and the local church, and reported to the trustees. The trustees have no authority to act without, or to vary the terms of, a Church Meeting resolution. Where no other form of words has been agreed, any letting must be on the basis of the above terms.

Churches are requested to inform the Synod Office of any change of tenancy as soon as it is known, and to inform the office of the dates for renewal of tenancy agreements.

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<sup>7</sup> The document can be found on the Synod's website  
<http://urc-northernynod.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/pp-deployment.pdf>

### *Funding maintenance and repairs*

All works on manses are to be paid from local Manse Maintenance Funds where available, and thereafter by the general funds of the local churches for whose use the manses are held. Where these funds are insufficient, grants and loans are available from the Synod Manse Fund.

All applications will be considered in accordance with the Manse Fund grants and loans guidelines. Where a manse has been let, it should have been in accordance with the guidelines and procedures above. To be eligible, the applicant church must be up to date with its M&M and Synod levies and annual church accounts submissions to the Synod Treasurer.

Priority will be given for those manses that are regarded as part of the core stock of 30-35 manses that are for the good provision of manses for the Synod, referred to on page 1.

### *Ministerial vacancies*

Prior to the declaration of a vacancy, Synod Pastoral Group will consult with a pastorate or mission partnership (normally through the Interim Moderator) to ascertain which manse will be included in the pastorate profile and offered to an incoming minister. An assessment of its general state of repair will be made at this time.

Where a pastorate has more than one manse available, it may be appropriate to offer a choice of manses or the purchase of a new manse. In some circumstances, it may be appropriate to offer a housing allowance<sup>8</sup> rather than any property formerly used as a manse. This will be a matter for agreement between the Synod Pastoral Committee, the minister and the pastorate.

When appropriate and before concurrence is granted to a Call, the manse will be visited by a representative of the Synod together with a representative of the responsible church. The Synod representative will not be in a position to give professional advice, but will help the church in exercising its responsibilities for repair, maintenance and safety issues. The purpose of the visit will be:

- to check that all repairs and improvements previously considered have been implemented;
- to consider the need for any further repairs or improvements to maintain the manse in a good quality, fit for purpose condition, and agree a schedule of essential and desirable works;
- to consider whether funding is available to finance the works, either from local church or Synod funds;

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<sup>8</sup> Guidance on agreeing a housing allowance are given in the Plan for Partnership in Ministerial Remuneration: [http://www.urc.org.uk/images/Finance/PlanRev2015\\_January\\_2015.pdf](http://www.urc.org.uk/images/Finance/PlanRev2015_January_2015.pdf) in particular at paragraphs 6.2.1.1, 6.3.2.1, and appendix B

- to prepare a joint report for the Synod, the Trust and the pastorate.

It is the responsibility of the pastorate to consult with the incoming minister and family as to their requirements and preferences in regard to works to be completed.

### **Conclusion**

It is hoped that the establishment of these procedures and guidelines, supported by the Trust Officer and the Manse Subgroup, and financed by the Manse Fund, will enable the Synod to move towards effectively realising the aims by 2020.

Note: It is intended to update this information from time to time, so please check on the Synod website for the latest version.

Manse Policy Task Group

20 January 2011

(revised with minor updates 31 December 2015)

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**The United Reformed Church (Northern Province) Trust Limited**

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Formerly known as the Durham and Northumberland Congregational Union (Inc)

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