

Interim moderators, pastoral representatives and pastoral care of churches in times of ministerial transition.

These guidelines issued by Pastoral Committee are intended for Mission Partnerships, pastorates and congregations within Northern Synod who are undergoing *ministerial transition*. This is the process of discussion and discernment following the departure of a minister that determines what ministerial resources will now be available and how they might best be used.

Introduction

The deployment policy guidelines presented to synod (p9 Synod papers October 13th 2007) show the way in which decisions about deployment are now to be made.

When a minister moves or there is a vacancy that needs reviewing Pastoral Committee will discuss with the Mission Partnership leadership team the options for ministerial deployment. However, the leadership team is not a decision making body of the Church. Therefore the discussion and the options that are being explored must be communicated by representatives to their elders' and church meetings. At the end of each discussion the Pastoral Committee representatives will clarify what can be shared more widely and what is confidential.

Members of the Mission Partnership leadership team should then ensure that full discussion takes place in their local churches and that positive and negative issues are fed into this wider discussion. Particular concerns may be raised through the MP leadership meeting, the MP ministers, or with members of Designated Group. Designated Group acts as the executive of the Pastoral Committee, and its members are ready to visit elders and church meetings to discuss the ministerial transition at any time during the process.

After this initial discussion a preferred option is normally identified by the Mission Partnership leadership team and Designated Group for how ministry (stipendiary and possibly non stipendiary) will be deployed. Full discussion should now take place in the local churches and among the ministers, who will then feed back concerns, hopes and anxieties to the Mission Partnership leadership team and to the Designated Group. This will lead to refinements in the preferred option, and may entail a further cycle of meetings until an acceptable way forward is found. It is essential that we are open to one another and recognise that we are in a very difficult place at this time in regard to the sustainability of the number of stipendiary ministers we have. Each directly affected church meeting will need to agree the way forward in relation to ministry posts before the appropriate call can be made to stipendiary ministers and synod placements of non stipendiary ministers can be confirmed.

Key roles during a ministerial transition

Elders and church meetings: these meetings should discuss the process openly and be kept fully informed at each stage of it. Inserts into church magazines or pastoral letters at key times may be valuable. An extended notices period at Sunday worship to pass on information may also be useful in addition to formal meetings. If matters are not clear then members of Designated Group, the pastoral representative or interim moderator can be consulted.

The local church is responsible for maintaining its own life and mission. It is to disciple people and develop their gifts at all times; but at a time of ministerial transition it is important that this responsibility be recognised, rather than ministers be expected to do more and more. This can provide a creative opportunity for people to recognise the gifts they have to offer to God in new ways. Many people have recognised their call - to lead worship, to preach or to offer themselves for ordained ministry of word and sacrament at such times.

Mission Partnership Ministers: It is assumed that churches in vacancy will call on the other ministers in the Mission Partnership, both serving and also active retired, as well as ministers of ecumenical partners, to cover particular pastoral needs. These might include funerals, crisis visiting, and the chairing of sensitive meetings where an external person may be more appropriate than a local elder.

Pastoral representative: Designated group will appoint a pastoral representative in situations where there is a ministerial transition but not a declared vacancy. This is the most likely first step when a Mission Partnership is looking at how best to use a decreasing number of stipendiary ministry posts or when there are proposals to extend a minister's current pastorate.

The role involves

- 1) Standing alongside the Mission Partnership, ministers and churches to ensure that the process allows all realistic options to be discussed and all voices concerned to be heard.
- 2) Being the communication channel between the MP / churches / ministers and Pastoral Committee through the Moderator and Designated Group.
- 3) Drawing up the agreement and terms of settlement when an NSM is placed, or a stipendiary minister's pastorate changes. Taking part in the induction service which will be planned by the ministers in consultation with the Moderator.
- 4) Identifying when it is appropriate for an interim moderator to be appointed as the nature of the vacancy is clarified.

Interim moderator: Pastoral Committee in consultation with the 'calling' churches will appoint an interim moderator whose role is to:

- 1) Guide the churches in the drawing up of the pastorate profile and terms of settlement.
- 2) Communicate with the Moderator and Pastoral Committee on progress.
- 3) Oversee the introduction of a candidate in conjunction with the Moderator.

4) Oversee the induction of the incoming minister and ensure the signing of agreed terms of settlement.

5) The day to day pastoral work of the churches would not normally be part of this role.

Synod Pastoral Committee acting with the Synod Moderator: The Committee will decide the amount of stipendiary ministry that can be made available to churches / Mission Partnerships (MPs) from figures given to each synod. These figures enable the URC to fulfil the current General Assembly policy on the allocation of stipendiary ministers. These figures also control the number of stipends being paid out of the Mission and Ministry Fund, thus providing sensible financial stewardship and care of ministers who are dependent on the church for their housing and livelihood.

The Synod Pastoral Committee is also responsible for placing Non Stipendiary Ministers (NSMs) in consultation and with the agreement of church meetings.

It is important that SPC is aware of hopes and concerns around the Synod to enable creative thinking and the effective use of synod resources. For instance, these might be seen in the development of Special Category Ministries, which do not count on deployment figures but enable new patterns of mission. There are two SCM posts currently in the synod in industrial mission and rural ministry.

Conclusion

This is a complex process that is dependent on the openness and prayer of all those involved. It demands we be understanding of one another and sympathetic to the needs of churches and ministers other than our own, while at the same time sharing our concerns. Then we may hear what God is saying to us about our ongoing engagement in God's mission in the world, of which ministerial deployment is but one small part.