

Highgate United Reformed Church

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To Ministers and Church Secretaries and Representatives of the Thames North Synod, United Reformed Church

Ministerial Deployment and the Ministry & Mission Fund

Over recent months you will have received proposals relating to the Re-Visioning process that is being progressed by Thames North Synod. We share, and are encouraged by, the recognition that much has to change in the Synod, and in our own local church, if the original vision of those who brought the United Reformed Church into being is to be fulfilled as part of God's purpose for his Church. We believe, however, that there are three significant factors that cannot be addressed in the current review because they are *nationwide* matters. These are: 1. Ministerial Deployment. 2. The total number of churches. 3. The relationship of the Ministry & Mission Fund to 1. and 2.

Although the Synod leadership is proposing a creative solution to share stipendiary ministry in teams within groups of churches, our Church Meeting believes that what is required is a comprehensive national review of both Ministerial Deployment Policy and the Ministry & Mission Fund. We believe neither is working in the best interests of our local church or of the United Reformed Church. As a result our Church Meeting has agreed the following resolution for consideration at the September Synod:

Synod believes that the current deployment of Stipendiary Ministry is generally negative both in its expectations and practical effect. It inhibits effective ministerial leadership and frustrates many local church initiatives and plans for growth. Synod calls for its immediate and radical review and replacement by General Assembly.

Local churches are frustrated by a lack of connection between their contributions to the Ministry and Mission Fund and the Stipendiary Ministry they receive. As a result some naturally take matters into their own hands in ways that are leading to the disintegration of the United Reformed Church. Synod calls for a review by General Assembly of the Ministry & Mission Fund and its connection to ministerial deployment policy.

The Pond Square Chapel would welcome the discussion of this resolution in your church and your active support for it at the meeting of Synod on the 19th of September. To understand some of the thinking that has motivated the resolution, see the accompanying paper by Robert Courtney. Additionally, if you have any comments you wish to convey to me by way of support or clarification or criticism before Synod meets, I would be pleased to receive them.

With thanks for your time and attention.

Julian Templeton

On behalf of a Working Group set up by Church Meeting including Robert Gorrie, Rev. Robert Courtney, Rev. Roger Orme, Rev. Roger Scopes, Dr John Thompson.

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Ministerial Deployment

The policy was born from a sense of numerical fairness and equality. But, as in similar political endeavours, this has often resulted in a general levelling down. In most cases it has not produced effective stimulus for struggling causes, but rather artificial groupings of Churches, unrelated socially, and lacking effective leadership. The aim has appeared to be the securing of an occasional ministerial presence, rather than securing effective pastoral leadership. Not only has it too often proved that tying two or three stones together doesn't make them float; but some of the stones have been little more than millstones round a harassed minister's neck.

Not only has this well nigh destroyed our belief in a genuine call by the Holy Spirit, discerned by a local congregation and by the minister, resulting in a strong Pastoral relationship; it has substituted fractional arithmetic. This is entirely to disregard what we learn from both Old and New Testaments about the way God has worked in history with his people.

The entire Old Testament rests in a belief that God chose Abraham, a single man and his family, to be a blessing to the whole world. This promise was secured and transmitted even through an objectionable crook like Jacob, and bore fruit when a small and despised slave people were liberated from slavery and were taught by Moses to regard themselves as a Chosen People. Moses himself in Deuteronomy 7 finds the choice inexplicable except in terms of God's free love for them. He asserts that arithmetic has nothing to do with it!

This assurance persists through the prophets. Even when Israel as whole is unfaithful, God will work through a small remnant. Finally God works through the Incarnation, a single human life, rather than through a shared multiple revelation.

Jesus' parables are as explicit as parables can be. Life with God is not a matter of equal distribution, but a responsibility to use gifts and seize on opportunities. Do you use your Talents? Do you turn up to the Feast? Do you sell up and secure the Treasure or the Pearl? More alarmingly: do you keep your Lamps Burning? and look what happens to the Barren Fig tree. If you are intent on "fair distribution", talk to the Labourers in the Vineyard or the Disinherited Brother in Luke 12. Read the Nazareth Manifesto!

With few exceptions the most productive Churches are those with strong lay leadership, and a desire to grow, who are blessed with a good minister. Churches need both. Where they have the one we should give them the other. Better to establish a strong, growing Church, with influence and eventual resources to reach out and encourage its neighbours, than to sprinkle ministry in short supply where the will or ability to change and grow is lacking.

Robert Courtney