

Paper H4

Safer Election of Elders

Ministries Committee

Basic information

Contact name and email address	The Revd Paul Whittle moderator@urcscotland.org.uk
Action required	Decision.
Draft resolution(s)	Assembly Executive strongly recommends local churches to use the process for the Safer Election of Elders.

Summary of content

Subject and aim(s)	<p>The office of the elder is a calling of God and a ministry of the Church and elders are ordained (prayerfully set apart to this public office in the church). Elders share with the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the pastoral care and spiritual leadership of the local church. They also represent the local congregation in the wider councils of the church at synod, General Assembly and ecumenically.</p> <p>As such, the United Reformed Church is required to have a process for those called to be elders comparable to the practice of safer recruitment for other roles within its life whilst acknowledging the need to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit by both the candidate and the church meeting. This paper sets out this process.</p>
Main points	The paper seeks to assist local churches in best practice when electing Elders and sets out a simple process for ensuring safer election including simple nomination and election processes.
Previous relevant documents	Good Practice 5.
Consultation has taken place with...	Synod Safeguarding Officers, Clerk to General Assembly.

Summary of impact

Financial	None.
External (e.g. ecumenical)	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In the United Reformed Church, the office of Elder within a local congregation is a significant ministry. Elders share responsibility, with the Minister of the Word and Sacraments (where possible), for the spiritual oversight of the congregation.
- 1.2 The elders' meeting is intended to be a distinctive and vital part of every URC congregation with the Elders collectively possessing the abilities, skills and spiritual gifts of leadership to serve the local church actively and creatively as it seeks to respond to the needs and circumstances of the 21st century.
- 1.3 At its best, the elders' meeting is at the heart of every local congregation, providing impetus and positive influence on the mission, witness and service of the church. In short, Elders play an essential role in enabling the congregation to live fruitful lives as God's people.

2. The ministry of the Elder

- 2.1 The United Reformed Church recognises the ministry of the Elder is a calling rather than a job for which the church recruits personnel.
- 2.2 Elders are called into ministry by the church meeting which recognises that calling through the charisms (or gifts) they display in their Christian living and ordains and inducts them.
- 2.3 This is a ministry acknowledged by the whole United Reformed Church and exercised on its behalf as well as on behalf of the local church.
- 2.4 However, the United Reformed Church acknowledges that those who are in positions of trust within its life, and who show they have gifts appropriate for their office, should be properly equipped for the ministry to which they are called.
- 2.5 The Basis of Union and The Manual detail the role, promises and functions of an Elder.
 - a) Schedule A paragraph 23 (page 6) of The Basis of Union sets out the ministry of Elder within the United Reformed Church:
https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/A_The_Basis_of_union_23_01_2020.pdf
 - b) Schedule B (page 21) of the Basis of Union details the promise and Elder makes, with God's grace, at their ordination to:
https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/A_The_Basis_of_union_23_01_2020.pdf
 - accept the office of Elder of the United Reformed Church and to perform its duties faithfully
 - pray for the Minister/CRCW they will be working with (or interim moderator if no minister or CRCW is in place)
 - seek together with the Minister/CRCW and each other, the will of God
 - give due honour, consideration and encouragement
 - build one another up in faith, hope and love
 - in dependence on God's grace, to be faithful in private and public worship
 - live in the fellowship of the church and to share in its work

- give and serve, as God enables them, for the advancement of his kingdom throughout the world
 - follow Christ and to seek to do and to bear his will all the days of their life.
- c) Schedule B (page 4) of the Manual Details the functions of the elders' meeting which can be found at https://urc.org.uk/images/the_manual/B-The_Manual_-_Section_B-2019.pdf

3. Why safer election and not recruitment?

- 3.1 The United Reformed Church is committed to the safeguarding and protection of all within our church communities. The United Reformed Church recognises the importance of carefully selecting, training and supporting all those with any responsibility within the Church.
- 3.2 Elders are ordained (prayerfully set apart to this public office in the church). They are inducted to serve in a particular congregation, sometimes for a fixed period of time. Elders share with the Minister of the Word and Sacraments in the pastoral care and spiritual leadership of the local church. They also represent the local congregation in the wider councils of the church at synod, General Assembly and ecumenically.
- 3.3 As such, the United Reformed Church is required to have a process for those called to be elders comparable to the practice of safer recruitment for other roles within its life whilst acknowledging the need to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit by both the candidate and the church meeting. This paper sets out this process.

4. Safer election of Elders in the URC

- 4.1 It is very strongly recommended that the step by step process below is followed by church meetings as the safest way to elect Elders:
- 4.1.1 **A nomination** process shall be agreed by Church Meeting at least two weeks before the church meeting during which the election will take place shall take place. Names of those nominated should be given in written form to the Minister and/or Church Secretary;
- 4.1.2 **Those nominated should**
- a) be a church member for at least one year before being nominated;
 - b) be given copies of the leaflet *They've asked me to be an Elder* which details the promises and functions of the elders meeting (see https://urc.org.uk/images/Churches/Theyve_asked_Elder.pdf);
 - c) have a conversation with the minister/interim moderator plus a serving Elder including the responsibilities of an Elder with specific regard to
 - the role within the local church including commitment of promises
 - functions as laid out in the Basis of Union
 - an overview of safeguarding procedures
 - responsibilities of trusteeship where the Elder is going to be a trustee
 - where elders are unable to be a trustee because they are disqualified a risk assessment by the Synod Safeguarding Officer (SSO) should be completed

- a Self-Declaration form be completed.
- d) agree for their names to go forward to Church Meeting;
- 4.1.3 Election shall normally by secret ballot. Only church members are eligible to vote;
- 4.1.4 Upon election, the newly elected elder shall
- a) undertake a suitable induction training programme. This shall normally include shadowing an established elder. Induction may include elders training. The synod can support churches to deliver this training. Online elders training material can also be found at: **https://urc.org.uk/images/Elders_2014/Resourcing-our-Elders-8-areas-for-development.pdf**
 - b) be given a copy of
 - URC Guidelines for the Conduct and Behaviour of Elders
 - the church's safeguarding policy with knowledge of how to report concerns.
 - c) apply for a relevant DBS/PVG (where appropriate) through the normal channels. Where timing between election and ordination and/or induction does not allow a DBS self-declaration form should be completed;
 - d) safeguarding training is attended within six months of ordination and or induction.