

‘Better at being Church in every Community’
A Strategy for Ministry

A Document from the United Reformed, Methodist and Anglican Churches in Cumbria

March 2013

1. What are the foundations on which this 'Strategy for Ministry' is based?

It builds on two simple but profound convictions: "God is for all" and "Church is by all".

"God is for all"; not just for us. So as Christian disciples we are called not just to worship God, but also to witness to everyone about God's Good News in Jesus. Our Strategy for Ministry must be shaped by our wider commitment to mission, outreach and witness. (This is why the 'Strategy for Outreach' is being produced alongside and in dialogue with the 'Strategy for Ministry').

"Church is by all". We don't just 'go to church' – we are Church! Every Christian disciple is called to active ministry, by serving God through the Church in the world. Ministry is not something done by a special elite. So a 'Strategy for Ministry' must put forward better ways of enabling every Christian to grow in discipleship and ministry.

A Strategy has to be practical. It's about things we want to do, influence or change.

However, most ministry happens 'out there' in the world, as Christians serve God in their workplaces, their communities etc. The Churches do not control those contexts, so inevitably this 'Strategy for Ministry' will focus mainly on the other ministry contexts where the Churches can make changes happen. This means that many of the strategic proposals below, are to do with how we provide some ministry which is authorised and trained (e.g. clergy, ministers, Readers, Local Preachers, Local Lay Ministers, Elders, leaders of Network Youth Churches and other 'fresh expressions' of Church).

However, the focus on authorised ministries does not mean that we believe these are the only kinds of ministry, or even the most important kinds. In fact authorised forms of ministry exist primarily in order to enable the ministry of the whole Body of Christ.

2. Background and Context: Why Are We Doing This?

We believe that our existing patterns of ministry and mission are not enabling the Church to be fully effective in proclaiming the Gospel and Lordship of Christ. We see this in our own churches and in annual church statistics showing continued, widespread decline in Church attendance (most acutely among the young), numbers of baptisms and weddings, numbers of clergy (continuing a trend seen since 1900) and financial resources. We question whether most people under the age of 50 now see the Christian faith and the Church as relevant to their day-to-day lives.

In spite of efforts in recent decades, these statistics show little sign of improving. All three denominations have recently made responses to this situation. In 2011 the Carlisle Diocese launched a new Vision and Strategy titled 'Growing Disciples'¹. The Vision recognised that while the Gospel's life-changing message remains true for successive generations, there was a need for the church to reconnect with the population of Cumbria. In June 2009 the Cumbria Methodist District launched 'A Way Forward for Mission,' and the United Reformed Church its 'Vision 2020 strategy'².

¹ See <http://www.carlisediocese.org.uk/discipleship/discipleship-2.html> for more details

² See <http://www.urc.org.uk/mission/mission-development-and-evangelism/vision2020.html> for more details

Following discussions the three denominations committed themselves to work towards becoming an “ecumenical county”. This was expressed in the Ecumenical County of Cumbria Declaration of Intent:

“to work together to equip both lay and ordained ministry wherever possible, and to share that ministry wherever appropriate.”

Within the overall situation, a number of indicators and trends specific to Ministry give cause for concern, including:

- A 20% reduction in stipendiary clergy numbers within the Carlisle diocese in the last 10 years. A similar pattern can be seen in both Methodist and United Reformed ministerial numbers.
- An anticipated further 20% reduction in the number of stipendiary clergy by 2020 as ordinations fail to keep pace with retirements.
- Increasingly stretched Church finances with many congregations struggling to maintain their financial contributions towards the cost of ministry and the upkeep of buildings. The majority of time and resource spent on ministering to the small minority already within the church community.
- Relatively little investment in outreach to the majority of people who are not regular churchgoers.
- Continued growth of the number of multi-church groupings with clergy and ministers spread evermore thinly, in both rural and urban areas.
- Unchanging expectations (on the part both of churchgoers and clergy/ministers) of the role of stipendiary clergy/ministers leading to stress and burn-out.

“Growing Disciples” called for a new strategy for Ministry to be drawn up in response to these issues. A Way Forward for Mission looked for ways to re-engage with local communities. Specifically, an ecumenical group was convened with a remit to “develop a Strategy for Ministry and an associated implementation plan covering:

- a. patterns and models of ordained and lay ministry to address both the current context and future trends including the anticipated reduction in stipendiary clergy/ministers.
- b. the discipling, calling, identification and growth of potential ministers.
- c. structures and resources through which ordained and lay ministers will be trained and developed, equipped, supported and overseen.
- d. identifying the financial and other resources required to implement the strategy.”

The group was asked to look towards the year 2020, while recognising that there would never be a permanent solution and that the context would continue to evolve and change. The group’s recommendations (contained below) may be regarded as radical and far-reaching and if implemented will require very significant change in Ministry patterns and practice. Furthermore, they would be introduced on a gradual basis over the next few years with a view to full application across the county by 2020.

3. Beliefs

In developing these proposals, the group has attempted to avoid a sense of denial about the current situation and the outlook for the future. Equally, it has not drawn up a plan to manage on-going decline. Consultation events with local church members in summer 2012 clearly showed a consensus that “doing nothing is not a viable option”.

Instead, we believe God is speaking to us through the decline in the Church and we believe He wants His Church to grow, to serve and to minister to His world. So we must respond in faith to this prompting, approaching whatever changes it may require in confidence that God is with us and aware that His vision is bigger than ours.

We believe God wishes to see a thriving Christian presence in every community, growing disciples of all ages, while recognising that in many places this may look quite different from our current churches. So we must increasingly envisage and enable a 'mixed economy' – embracing both traditional and fresh expressions of church.

We believe God wants people – ordained and lay – to be fulfilled in ministry. Therefore, we must tackle the underlying causes of overload and unrealised potential and must change our attitudes and practices in ministry.

We believe God has created a wonderful diversity in our churches but also calls us to unity. So we must work together better and apply the principles and aims of the 'Ecumenical County' to our ministry. We must take opportunities to come together through shared worship, prayer and resources, joint training and serving our communities, while also valuing and celebrating diversity and avoiding uniformity.

Accordingly, we believe God is prompting us to re-think our models of ministry and look forward to a future in which:

- every member of the church exercises an active ministry
- our ministry serves our communities better by:
 - providing a full expression of church in every place
 - equipping and inspiring us to reach out beyond our current congregations.
- is truly collaborative between lay and ordained people.
- embodies true partnership across the three denominations, and remains open to wider inter-denominational partnership.

4. Vision

Our vision is that by 2020 we will see our ministry reshaped, renewed and revitalised. What emerges must do so in response to the different needs and contexts experienced across Cumbria, must inspire and channel the energies of the people in each place and must acknowledge the complexity of our different understandings of Church.

In 2020 we expect that local congregations will continue to be the fundamental building block of the church. Those congregations will display the best hallmarks of our existing churches but will have evolved over time so that they remain relevant to their local communities. They may continue to meet as now in traditional church buildings but will be more likely to share buildings with partners or have improved and adapted them to provide multi-purpose space.

Alongside these evolved local churches, we envisage numerous new congregations – fresh expressions of church or emerging churches – whose ways of being church will emerge from their cultural contexts. These may have been planted from existing congregations or may be ground-breaking in their nature and practice. Many of the ministers leading the emergence of these fresh expressions of church will have specialist skills in church planting, evangelism, project work, community development and engaging with networks.

Each congregation – whether traditional or fresh expression – will have a recognised leader, who may be ordained or lay, and may come from any of the three partner denominations. Many of these will be self-supporting (ie: unpaid). There will be far more of these leaders than currently – we assume at least an extra 150 self-supporting ordained and lay ministers who would be leading congregations.

Congregations will be grouped together into ecumenical Mission Communities³ – perhaps around 50-60 across Cumbria, usually with clear geographical boundaries but recognising that fresh expressions of church are likely to be based as much on networks as places. Section 5 below described the norms and hallmarks of Mission Communities in more detail.

A stipendiary, ordained “leader in mission” will usually oversee a Mission Community. Each Mission Community will be served by a ministry team typically consisting of the stipendiary ordained leader and a number of other paid or self-supporting lay and ordained ministers, including the leaders of each congregation within the Mission Community. Although some Mission Communities may have only one stipendiary ordained minister, no Mission Community should be so small that its minister would be working in isolation.

A Mission Community may be led by a minister from either the URC, Methodist or Anglican Church. However, in order to satisfy Anglican ecclesiastical law, there will always need to be at least one stipendiary or non-stipendiary Anglican priest in each Mission Community.

The leaders of Mission Communities will have significantly different roles from those of many current local clergy/ministers. Their role will emphasise identifying potential among church members, establishing a ministry team and maintaining and developing that team and its work.

³ A Mission Community could be based upon or incorporate any of the following: Anglican parish(es) or Benefices, Team or Group Ministry, Methodist Circuit, URC local congregation, single, joint or group pastorate, Minister Model, Cell/Celebrate groups, Network Church, Celtic Community, ‘fellowship’ church or other form of Fresh Expression.

Significant Aspects of Ministry in 2020

Individual congregations – traditional and fresh expressions – remain the building blocks of the church

Each “congregation” has a recognised leader/pastor, who could be lay or ordained

A number of congregations are grouped into a Mission Community

Each Mission Community is under the leadership of a stipendiary, ordained minister

Mission Community leaders have a role that is more strategic, providing oversight across the Mission Community

A very significant expansion of ministry to serve local congregations, both lay and ordained, and largely self-supporting

Every member of the church exercises an active ministry

Ecumenical deployment of ministers

Patterns of ministry worked out in response to the local context, needs and opportunities

A greater variety of roles for both lay and ordained and more scope to move between roles

The ultimate shape of local ministry and number of ministers will depend on what makes sense in each local context. For the purposes of illustrating the future and to enable initial planning, the following gives an idea of possible scenarios:

Future Ministry	Existing Ministry
110 stipendiary ministers in total across the three denominations.....	145 stipendiary ministers in total across the three denominations....
...of which 70-80 in traditional but evolved local ministry	...of which 140 in traditional local ministry
...and 30-40 full-time equivalent stipendiary ministers in pioneering work	...and 5 full-time stipendiary ministers in pioneering work
50-60 Mission Communities	120 benefices, 15 Methodist circuits, 17 URC congregations
150 self-supporting ordained ministers	50 self-supporting ordained ministers
400-500 lay ministers, some authorised or commissioned, serving local churches and congregations in a diversity of ministries	350+ other authorised ministers (including approx. 90 URC Elders ⁴ , 125 Anglican Readers, 170 Methodist Local Preachers)
35-40 Mission Communities led by CofE ministers 15-20 Mission Communities led by URC or Methodist ministers	Benefices, Circuits and URC pastorates predominantly led by ministers from their own denominations, with some local exceptions ⁵

4. Mission Communities: Hallmarks and Norms

Each congregation should be encouraged to work out what it means to be the people of God in their place. Our commitment to diversity and subsidiarity means that we should encourage and expect a rich pattern of church and ministry to emerge.

However, we believe that each Mission Community, wherever and however it is configured, should show the following **Hallmarks**:

⁴ Eldership in the United Reformed Church is a form of ordained ministry

⁵ there are some URC & Methodist churches in the South West Cumbria United Area who currently receive ecumenical ministry

- a missionary DNA and mind-set, while recognising the continuing importance of pastoral ministry:
- a commitment to the five marks of discipleship
 - Expectant prayer and lively worship
 - Outreach and evangelism
 - Maturity in faith
 - Quality of relationships
 - Community service and engagement
- a willingness to take risks
- ecumenical ministry and ways of working.

The **Norms** through which these Hallmarks will be realised will be:

- a local Ministry team, with an agreed number of hours per week of appointed ministry, paid and voluntary.
- every member ministry, with associated training and local vocations discerned and fostered.
- an organic Mission Action Plan.
- at least one fresh expression of church.
- ecumenical partnership.
- a financially sustainable model, ie: making a realistic and generous contribution towards the cost of local ministry, and meeting the costs of local mission and maintaining buildings.
- the provision of administrative support.
- the creative, efficient and effective use of available buildings.

5 Structure and Decision-Making

Our three denominations have very different traditions and legal requirements in relation to subsidiarity, authority and decision-making structures. As we come to plan and implement new patterns of ministry we must respect these traditions, combining the foundation of local autonomy and decision-making found in all three denominations with an appropriate degree of oversight and challenge from the wider church.

Over time new, innovative structures that enable mission and facilitate ecumenical working will be needed to prevent valuable time and energy being absorbed by additional layers of governance. These structures should be as integrated as possible, combining local decision-making bodies across all three denominations and have a few 'layers' as possible; ideally with no more than one level of decision-making between a Mission Community and structures (such as the Diocese, District or URC Synod).

In an Anglican context this will require at least one of the existing levels – Parish, Benefice, Deanery, Archdeaconry and Diocese – to be removed or merged.

For the United Reformed Church, this means that the current Cumbria Area will most likely be administered via ecumenical structures that are put in place at county level. Such a change would require the agreement of the local churches in the Cumbria Area and by the Synod. All URC congregations and ministers will continue to be full members of the North Western Synod, as will ministers of ecumenical partners who have pastoral responsibility for URC congregations. Ownership of United Reformed Church property will continue to be held by the Synod Trust on the same basis (or any successive basis agreed by the councils of the church) as at present.

The Methodist Church would need to examine the relationship between local church, circuit and district in relation to Mission Communities and what changes in governance might be required.

If we are to overcome legal impediments and make “permissions” work in our favour we will need to be flexible and prepared to focus determinedly on outcomes rather than process. In some areas we are likely to be operating on the margins of existing ecclesiastical law and all those involved will need to exhibit goodwill and a desire to find innovative solutions that work.

Although no single structural solution should be imposed on partner churches in any particular location, it is likely to be helpful if a number of possible models of governance and decision-making can be identified and developed for use in different contexts. Input from national church authorities will help with this work.

6. Making the Change

The consultation events that informed this report showed a clear recognition that the status-quo is not an option and a strong desire for change. We believe there are five areas where this report implies substantial changes:

a. cultural/church DNA:

- Continued shift from an inward-looking focus to an outward-looking one

b. ministry numbers:

- a significant reduction in the number of stipendiary, ordained ministers in traditional roles.
- significant increases in:
 - the number of self-supporting ministers leading churches and congregations
 - the number of lay ministers
 - the number of ‘specialist’ ministries leading an increased number of fresh expressions of church

c. role of Stipendiary Ordained Ministers

- while the stipendiary clergy/ministers leading Mission Communities will continue to devote considerable time to leading and pastoring particular congregations, the balance of their time will shift towards more:
 - oversight of the Mission Community as a whole.
 - identifying potential among church members.
 - establishing a ministry team.
 - maintaining and developing the ministry team.
- there will be other stipendiary clergy/ministers who lead particular congregations or churches as opposed to Mission Communities. The emphasis in their role will be determined by the needs of their particular congregations; in some cases focusing on pastoring their congregations and growing disciples and in others, evangelism and outreach.

d. structural/organisational:

- fewer denominationally-specific governance structures and more shared arrangements.
- merger of layers of decision-making.
- different expressions of church within each Mission Community.

e. resourcing/financial

- resources shift in response to changes in the patterns of church – eg shifting resource into fresh expressions of church
- training/development for new roles, both lay and ordained
- expansion of training and development to meet demands arising from the expansion of ministry
- identifying and supporting vocation

Some changes envisaged by this strategy could be managed on a practical, administrative and financial level. However, the implementation of this vision is a long-term and major work in which we aim to change culture as well as structures and patterns of deployment.

For the strategy to make a difference, there will need to be a willingness to change, particularly:

- willingness to give up some of what we hold dear.
- willingness both corporately and as individuals to embrace a missional mind-set.
- willingness to accept new understandings of ministry; what it is, who does it, and how it should be exercised.
- willingness to learn new skills and ways of ministering.
- willingness to fund new expressions of mission/church that may serve people we do not have any real connections with.
- willingness to work flexibly with ecumenical structures and avoid being overly rule-bound.

This will require courageous and determined leadership that is not vested in individual leaders but has to be owned by the majority of the community of faith. It will not happen unless there is a willingness not only to face up to the truth of the cross but a desire for resurrection.

In spite of, or perhaps because of the extent of change envisaged, the implementation of this strategy will take a number of years. While there must be an intentional and coherent plan to develop ministry across the denominations, at the same time we must start from where our churches and structures currently are and not expect to be able to move rapidly to the '2020' position.

1. Anglican parochial

An Anglican parish is an area under the spiritual care of a Church of England clergy person to whose religious ministrations all the inhabitants are entitled. The clergy person may have responsibility for more than one parish.

2. Methodist Circuit

The Methodist Circuit is the unit for Mission and Ministry under which local churches relate. The Superintendent Minister is responsible for the life of the Circuit.

3. United Reformed Church Pastorate

Local congregations of The United Reformed Church are organised by the Area Pastoral Committee (APCs), acting on behalf of the Synod, into pastorates.

The Cumbria Area of The United Reformed Church is currently overseen by the Cumbria Area Pastoral Committee of the North Western Synod.

A local church is usually understood as being the community of people who have covenanted to live together under a common discipline and to belong to a particular congregation that is governed by the councils of The United Reformed Church (Elders and Church Meetings, Synod and General Assembly) according to the Basis of Union. This is worked out on a day to day basis via oversight by its Elders' meeting and governed by its Church Meeting. Occasionally a local church might meet on more than one site but has taken the decision to have a single membership, Elders and Church meetings and set of officers.

There are a number of different types of pastorate:

- Single pastorate - one local church that either has or has been defined by the APC as suitable to have its own minister(s) of word and sacraments.
- Joint pastorate - two or more local churches who share the ministry of one or more ministers of word and sacraments. Joint pastorates sometimes share in further acts of worship, witness and service.
- Group pastorate - two or more local churches who share the ministry of one or more ministers of word and sacraments and who have agreed to share further resources and elements of their life, witness and service together. Group pastorates normally have some form of group council to oversee such shared work.

4. Team Ministry

A team ministry is a formal Anglican collaborative ministry established by a pastoral scheme and formed by union or other reorganisation of existing benefices, in which the cure of souls and pastoral care of those in the benefice are shared by a team of clergy.

5. Group Ministry

The vicars of each parish church community in the group have authority to minister throughout the group and to carry out those offices and services which may be performed by a minister in all the parishes.

6. Minster Model

A minster model is usually a group of parishes with a strong central church acting as a focus and supporting outlying churches. It need not consist only of adjoining parishes.

7. Mission Community

A mission community is a group of churches or congregations who work together, usually with one or more paid minister and administrative provision. They have a shared Mission Action Plan, a leadership team and “they aim do what is better together, share resources and support one another,”

8. Cell/Celebrate groups

Cell churches are small groups, often of 2-8 people who meet together for informal worship and prayer, study and fellowship. The cells come together regularly for worship – often once a month.

9. Network Church

Network churches express incarnational mission by focusing on a common interest e.g. surfing church, walking church, knitting church.

10. Celtic Community

e.g. Iona community, Northumbrian Community. Based on the monastic tradition, a group of Christians who either meet together regularly or live in community. They have a rule of life which includes:

1. daily prayer and bible-reading
2. sharing and accounting for the use of our money
3. planning and accounting for the use of our time
4. action for justice and peace in society