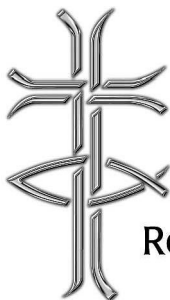


THAMES NORTH SYNOD

DEPLOYMENT

**REPORT FOR CONSULTATION
NOVEMBER 2010**



The
United
Reformed
Church

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Questions, comments and requests for clarification

In the first instance please address all queries to Sue Russell, PA to the Moderator and Synod Clerk; she will then forward them to the most appropriate person:

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Introduction:

The Synod Leadership Development Group commissioned a group of people to do detailed work on a deployment strategy for Thames North. This report is a summary of the findings from the series of five meetings from December 2009 to July 2010. The meetings were good natured and involved intensive discussion. What is now in this report is a result of the discussion, with a number of questions being raised in strategic areas. There was not enough time to address all the issues that were raised in terms of bringing resolutions, and it was felt to be helpful to have a wider discussion across the Synod before taking specific issues forward.

This report is being circulated to each church in the Synod.

Each church is:

- being asked to read the document and respond in particular to the issues and questions that are relevant in their situation
- free to have the report looked at by the Elders meeting or the Church meeting or by a designated smaller group of people
- invited to bring a written response to the March Synod, and to brief the minister and representative so that the views of the church can be put forward in a group discussion at Synod.

After the March Synod, more work will be done to finalise a deployment strategy, taking into account all the comments received.

Remit of the group:

Guidance was given to the group by the Leadership Development Group, from their meeting on 15th September 2009, minuted as follows:

09/58 *Deployment of Ministry*

The present situation was reviewed. It was agreed that LDG should not leave Area Committees to deal with difficult questions of the allocation of resources without any guidance. Among points mentioned were –

- *The possibility of declaring a moratorium on vacancies in an Area until there were enough to enable a comprehensive solution to be formulated*
- *Area boundaries should not be considered inviolable*
- *It was clear that Local Church Leadership would go ahead, and this must be an integral part of strategy*
- *TLS was very important, both as enabling lay leaders to emerge and as a potential source of candidates for ministry. It was important to nurture TLS “graduates”.*
- *Worship groups have a valuable contribution to make*

Creative schemes can only be achieved if there is co-operation between churches. TLS training enabled useful contacts to be made between students in different churches.

What is deployment about?

Deployment in the United Reformed Church has a specific meaning. It refers to the work of fairly sharing stipendiary ministers across the church as a whole. Each year there is a deployment consultation across the whole church, and numbers of ministers are allocated to each Synod on the same basis of calculation. (50% for number of members, 33% for number of churches, and 17% for population). In the Thames North Synod there are at present 53.71 full-time equivalent stipendiary ministers of word and sacrament and 2.5 full-time equivalent declared vacancies. The Synod's share of the national number of ministers available is 46 for 2010 and 44 for 2011. Each Synod then has responsibility for seeing that their allocation of ministers is shared fairly across the Synod.

This might seem a simple matter, but is in fact complicated. The complications come from a variety of factors:

- the changing situation in which the church finds herself, because of declining numbers of people in some local United Reformed Church congregations. This means that on average, ministers have less members per minister to look after, but are asked to be responsible for an increasing number of congregations.

- stipendiary ministers are now being shared between different congregations, instead of a congregation having their 'own' full-time minister. Many congregations still want their 'own' minister, even if only sharing part of a minister's time.
- Increasing stress levels experienced by ministers as they are asked to take on a wider range of responsibilities in settings which become more isolated from colleague ministers
- Expectations of churches and ministers have changed and new understandings of the church and ministry are still emerging.
- 'Mission' is a priority for the church, but there is not always an agreed understanding of what mission is about, and how mission relates to sustaining and growing the church.
- There are occasions when ministry and mission is seen as the primary work of the minister rather than the activity of the whole congregation.
- Ecumenical situations mean that ministry is shared with other churches and therefore the allocation of United Reformed Church ministry is not so straightforward
- Non-stipendiary ministers, Elders, local lay leaders and retired ministers provide valuable ministry which is essential to the well-being and development of the church, but there is a particular issue as to how these forms of ministry are counted in terms of the provision of stipendiary ministry.

Criteria for deployment:

It was noted that the United Reformed Church Assembly policy is to provide ordained ministerial oversight for each congregation of the United Reformed Church. This can take many forms, including working in teams, and the development of local leaders under the oversight of an ordained minister. The challenge of this policy is to ensure that there is in practice ordained oversight for each congregation and that ways of working are developed that do not lead to higher levels of stress amongst ordained ministers.

The group had an extensive discussion about criteria for the deployment of ordained ministers, covering the following areas:

- i. pastoral needs – giving weight to the diverse pastoral needs of different congregations in the deployment of minister*
- ii. relationship between numbers of members and the deployment of a minister – giving weight to an equitable distribution of ministers to members, alongside making the case for ministry being available when there is only a handful of members. Taking account of the number of churches to a minister – there are now less members per minister than there have ever been, but a growing number of churches per minister.*
- iii. Geographical issues re linking churches together, including questions of groups and teams*
- iv. Whether evidence of a ‘mission strategy’ should be the main criterion for deployment*
- v. The role of non-stipendiary ministers, Elders, lay preachers, and Local Church Leaders.*

The following issues were raised:

A Developing a mission strategy

A top priority for deployment is the sense of mission in each local church. There is a need for churches to have a sense of their own mission in their locality, demonstrated both by a statement of this and a strategy for carrying this out. This mission can vary widely from place to place, depending on the nature of the community and the congregation. It was felt that the deployment of stipendiary ministry should be in support of churches in which there is a vibrant approach to church life and outreach. Being vibrant does not just mean being busy and views of vibrancy can vary depending on the theology of the local church. The vibrancy of a local congregation is a reflection of the presence of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Synod, Areas and local churches will need to work together to discern the marks of vibrancy. It was recognised that there needs to be a balance between a Synod Mission Strategy (held on behalf of the Synod as a whole, and in the separate Areas) and the mission strategies of local churches, with the two helping and supporting each other.

This will mean looking at and discussing at Synod

- whether there are some churches which offer more mission possibilities than others,
- whether the Thames North Synod of the United Reformed Church wants to commit to all existing churches as part of the Synod mission strategy, and if so, how the church would help churches which seem less viable, to grow and develop.
- whether to adopt a strategy which meant the closure of some churches
- how to identify where to plant new churches where there are new mission opportunities
- whether there is a need for a strategy which looks at the realistic support that can be given to seemingly less viable churches

A: Developing a Mission Strategy

Questions for discussion,

for local Churches, Areas and Synod

1. Should the Synod be asking each church to articulate their approach to mission realistically (i.e. looking at both what is said by the church and what is being done to implement what is being said) before a minister is deployed in that church?
2. What are the criteria for a viable church, if vibrancy, liveliness and being filled by the Spirit are marks of the church?
3. Should the Synod be looking to close some churches?
4. Should the Synod be exercising a hospice ministry towards declining churches (i.e. discerning whether a congregation is drawing near to the end of its natural life and needs help to die courageously, giving thanks for all that has been)

B Going for growth v managing decline

These two need to be balanced in a creative way.

The group identified the basic issue as what we believe about God and what God has in store for the United Reformed Church. Are

we propping up what we have been rather than investing in what we might need to be? But we need to know what God is calling us to be.

There is a need to identify the positive aspects of the United Reformed Church and what our church has to offer our local communities, as a basis for growth.

There is a need to manage decline so that it will lead to growth – .i.e. have a base that we might grow from, which means being realistic, but looking to something more hopeful.

Some members of the group felt that greatest risk is that we get to a point when the management structure is dragging the churches back – i.e. maintaining the structure is the drain on the local church. Other members of the group recognised that maintaining the structure was necessary to provide the resources to support the local churches. We need to face up realistically to the causes of decline in the church and be able to articulate these so that they can be addressed, and factors leading to decline can be turned around into causes for growth. The group held various views as to what was meant by growth – from seeing the significance of an increase in numbers, to identifying a range of signs of growth, including local community involvement, greater activity of the congregation, and development of the spiritual life of the congregation.

The comment was made that commitment to Christ leads to the commitment of each person to the Christian life and that this lies at the heart of growth.

B: Going for growth v managing decline

Questions for discussion

for local Churches, Areas and Synod:

1. What do people understand by growth?
2. What weight should be given to seeking growth and what weight needs to be given to managing decline?

C Expectations of stipendiary ministers

Churches and ministers have a range of expectations about the stipendiary ministry. (This report is looking in particular at stipendiary ministers, as a resource for the whole church, to be fairly shared between each church. The excellent work undertaken by non-stipendiary ministers is a great asset to the church, but is not available for deployment across the whole church in the same way as stipendiary ministers)

The group did some work on the expectations that are placed on ministers, looking at the expectations of the congregation, the elders, ministers themselves, the wider church, and the local community. In order to be clear about the need for ministry, we need to address the theology of ministry, the sense of calling, and the expectations that people have.

We were reminded that ministers are not employed – a stipend is paid to stipendiary ministers to release them from having to earn an income. *(for the role and work of a minister, it is helpful to look again at the promises that a minister makes in the ordination/induction service)*

Some of the words and phrases used in terms of expectations placed on stipendiary ministers are as follows:

- **by the congregation** – figurehead for or representative of the church in the community; enabler; spiritual leader; presider at the sacraments; superman or woman; person of God; someone to care; entitlement to have one; the minister's fault if the congregation is not growing
- **by the Elders** – chair or leading of meetings (with questions raised as to whether ministers are expected to chair more and more meetings, whether different people could chair meetings and whether different styles of chairing could be explored); leadership and support; pastoral role; co-ordinator (overseer), training Elders, helping elders in their pastoral role
- **by the minister** – pushing boundaries (including relating to new people and looking at difficult issues); some seen as lazy, others seen as overworked; a person of God rather than a manager or a functional person; are ministers doing the wrong things? envisioning people; theologian in residence; pastoral,

vision keeper, being available to people when they are in need; being stressed; being more pro-active than re-active; moving from chaplaincy to mission; ministers too often are invited in to situations of stress and not of joy (e.g. being invited to take funerals, but not to join in birthday celebrations)

- **by the wider church** – representative on various community roles; multi-tasking; being asked to take on more and more churches; being involved in committees, responding to management issues e.g. reviews; balancing the books; turning decline into growth
- **by the community** – a representative role with community organisations, schools, police etc

C: Expectations of stipendiary ministers

Questions for discussion

for local Churches, Areas and Synod:

1. What is the nature of stipendiary ministry in the changing contemporary context?
2. How are particular ministry skills for particular situations identified and taken forward?
3. Where is stipendiary ministry effective and what creates that effectiveness?
4. Can the Synod do more to address churches' and ministers' expectations of the ministry?

D The work of lay leaders/Local Church Leaders (LCL)

Valuable work is undertaken by lay leaders/Local Church Leaders. This work is being looked at separately in the paper on Local Church Leaders, which will also come to Synod.

E The role of Interim moderator (IM):

More discussion needs to take place about this role. It used to be that Interim Moderator's gave ministerial oversight, but due to the pressures on time, IM's tend to only give time to the work needed in filling the vacancy. Can more Local Church Leader's be equipped to be IM's? Can more work be done to train up the Elders in a vacancy?

F Lay Preachers

The role of lay preachers within the Synod in places of vacancy needs particular attention. Lay Preachers are being increasingly stretched as the number of churches looking for worship leaders grows. One question that has been raised is to whether Lay Preachers could be attached to particular churches on an ongoing basis.

G Teams

We need to explore the place of team ministry that supports a group of congregations and uses skills from within such a team across the churches. It will not be possible to make the present numbers of ordained ministers' work without such team work. Each church already has a team of minister and Elders. Wider teams can involve a mix of ordained ministers, local church leaders and elders. There will be a different balance possible in each place.

There is a need to look at how we prepare and support our ministers for team work. – thus thinking about team work means looking at wider issues of how ministers are trained, how ministers are helped to retrain, how churches view ministry and relate to their ministers.

Elders also need help and support to develop their role of team ministry.

There are a range of issues that need to be addressed for teams to work well:

- - Taking account of theological diversity and how much diversity is possible within a given team. If teams are developing creative mission then theological diversity can become a bar. There are also situations in which some ministers would not be acceptable to some churches. This means that creating team or group ministry is very difficult. Is there an ethos in the URC of 'like-mindedness'?
- - Team size – Teams that are too big become unworkable and teams that are too small are unviable. The question of a reasonable workable size of a team needs addressing in each place.

- - Work needs to be done in the following areas in the setting up of teams
 - The role of each team member
 - The purpose of the team
 - Who are the members of a team
- - Is our current model still looking at team ministry as keeping churches going rather than looking at developing creative mission focussed ministry? - Team ministry is better when it is about finding ways forward for ministry.
- - There is a dilemma when trying to divide ministers up into fractions e.g. 50% or 25% in terms of the allocation of their

G Teams

Questions for discussion

for local Churches, Areas and Synod:

1. What are the positive aspects of team ministry? (both teams of ordained ministers, and teams of ministers and Elders)?
2. What are the issues that need to be taken into consideration in order for teams to be developed?
3. What more encouragement and training is needed for Elders to develop their spiritual and leadership gifts?

time.

H Groups

A 'group' refers to a number of churches which have agreed to work together. Groups can be helpful for churches, in terms of enabling good deployment of ministers, effective working together, sharing of the resources that are held differently in different congregations. (e.g. one congregation having a strong emphasis on youth work and another congregation having a developed evangelism strategy) There are a variety of different kinds of groups, depending on the context and the number of churches involved. There are also theological issues to be borne in mind. There can be difficulties with regard to theological diversity when theology is put above United Reformed identity. Ways of working

with theological diversity need to be developed. Mutual sharing can be either highly developed (e.g. a regular joint Elders meeting for the group as a whole) or more limited (e.g. an occasional joint Elders, as circumstances require).

As part of the ongoing deployment strategy, with ministers being asked to take responsibility for greater numbers of churches, it would be helpful to look at developing more 'groups' of churches. However, it was felt that individual congregations can have a more insular understanding, which doesn't lead to working happily as a group. (the question was asked 'Why don't churches like each other?')

As with teams, so groups need to be defined, as to their membership, role and purpose. E.g. are churches linked by ministry a 'group'? It would be helpful to assess in what way groups are good for churches.

H Groups

Questions for discussion by the local church

1. Are there possibilities for your church to work in a group?
2. What are the issues that need to be taken into account in order to look at setting up viable groups?
3. What steps could you take to working together with other churches?

I Ecumenical Issues

The United Reformed Church is committed to working ecumenically. One result of this commitment is the growing number of Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEP's) across the Synod. Account needs to be taken of this growing number of partnerships and more work needs to be done to identify what God is saying in this local level of ecumenical co-operation. There is much to be learnt from the experience of other churches, (e.g. Methodist experience of Lay Preachers) although a note of caution was sounded in terms of whether deployment strategies were working better in other churches. Often ecumenical partners are looking to

work together because they are also looking at leadership problems.

It was identified that working ecumenically locally can be easier because of a common mission area, giving a unity of purpose and mission. It was also noted that ecumenical working can be patchy, with some places having a higher level of ecumenical co-operation than others. One possibility is to bring in expertise from outside a local area to help develop ecumenical relationships. However it was noted that there are also issues as to whether ecumenical partners can provide ministry on a long term basis.

It was noted that some LEP's are always served by ministry from a non-URC partner (i.e. they are not included in the scoping for URC deployment figures) In practical terms, it was agreed that LEP's count as $\frac{1}{2}$ URC if there's an alternating ministry between the URC and one other denomination and $\frac{1}{3}$ URC if the ministry alternates between the URC and two other denominations.

It would be good to share some good news stories about ecumenical working.

I: Ecumenical Issues

Questions for discussion by the local church:

1. Should congregations look at links with other United Reformed Churches or with ecumenical partners? What would be the pros and cons of each of these approaches?

Questions for discussion by the Synod:

2. Should the Synod be working with UR churches who are actively working ecumenically to explore how ministry might evolve ecumenically rather than encouraging them to be linked with other URC's?
3. Could the Synod look at an ecumenical deployment strategy with other churches?

J Relation between the parts and the whole of the Synod

Discussion focussed on changes that might need to be made regarding who is responsible for deployment in the Synod. The group considered the following:

- a. We noted that deployment could take place across Area boundaries. Each Area would need to look at the churches on the edge of their Area and whether there are possible links to be made with neighbouring areas.
- b. It was felt that the Synod was the right arena for considering deployment questions with regard to the allocation of stipendiary ministry, as Synod receives an allocation of numbers of ministers from the church nationally and then has to help Areas and local churches discern the most equitable way of sharing these resources. Thus far there has been no rigorously enforced 'capping' in terms of allocation of stipendiary ministers within each Area. Each Area has had its own strategy with regard to deployment, on the basis of historical figures, which have not necessarily been regularly updated. This has resulted in some Areas having more than their 'fair share' of stipendiary ministers, without agreement by other Areas to reduce their numbers, in order to keep within the overall Synod target.
- c. Areas are helpful for pastoral support and can engage more closely with pastorates in the issues about deployment.
- d. Discussion in each Area with ecumenical partners would be helpful
- e. Vacancy arrangements: There is a review in the Areas when a vacancy happens, but it was thought it would be more helpful to be pro-active about deployment and develop a strategy that plans for future needs rather than responds to immediate situations. The development of the Local Mission and Ministry Review in each congregation will help this to be taken forward. (see separate paper) It would also be helpful to work on the strategies for churches when ministers' leave. However a cautionary

note was sounded that this is not an exact science and it won't be possible to pin numbers down conclusively.

- f. It would be helpful to look at the wider picture of how ministers are used in the areas/Synod, with a view to prioritising between local churches and the wider church.

J: Relation between the parts and the whole of the Synod

Questions to be discussed by the local church and Area:

1. How do the structures energise the people in the churches? Are there some structures which are more energising than others?

Questions to be discussed by the Areas

2. How do you see the function of the Area Committee in the deployment discussion?

Questions to be discussed by Areas and Synod

3. In what ways could the co-operation between the Synod as a whole, and the Synod work that takes place in Areas, be developed?
4. What process and/or group would best ensure that numbers of stipendiary ordained ministers are shared fairly across the Synod and kept within the nationally allocated number?

K Financial issues

We give thanks to God for the Mission and Ministry Fund and for the United Reformed church's strategy of raising money from churches according to their ability to give and using this money to support stipendiary ministry across the whole church, where it is needed.

There are a range of financial issues which emerge, but it was felt that these are not within the remit of the Deployment Group.

L Practical ways forward, some possibilities

There are a range of possibilities in front of the United Reformed Church with regard to deployment. Comments are invited on the pros and cons of the following:

- ✧ We could give attention to churches in turn in terms of provision of ordained ministry. This would be instead of ministers running around trying to give all they think they are called to do and (and possibly failing) and actually focus on one for a bounded period of time.
- ✧ We could adopt a 'business model' where, say, churches below a membership of 20 look after themselves
 - The risk of this is that small churches might end up 'losers'
 - Should small churches not supplied with ministry have to pay M&M?
 - It could be argued that the other way round: resources to small churches to build them up, larger churches have resources within them
- ✧ We could close more churches
 - Does this limit the growth of the URC?
 - Is this a strategy for managing decline?
 - What about the URC ethos that churches need to decide for themselves whether or not to close?
 - A problem can arise that closure of churches means the Synod gets the money, rather than income from investments being used for M&M (as it sometimes is) and thus benefit the denomination centrally.
 - It was pointed out that money going to the Synod does actually get used to support the work of the Synod and the provision of staff that support churches in different ways.
 - There is a wider question of what we do with the assets from the closure of churches: can the Synod be challenged to use such assets to support new work sometimes.
- ✧ We could review the numbers of members vis a vis number of churches looked after by a minister:
 - At present it is around 120 members per minister

- i. The number of separate congregations is also important – how many congregations can a minister relate to
 - ii. Geography of congregations is important – travel etc
 - iii. The reality of whether joint ministry can be seen to work
- The issue is how we share ministry round.
- i. The nature of how we currently do deployment can lead to carving ministers up into ever smaller percentages.

(A discussion was also had about the way in which existing terms of settlement do not always allow for ministers' job descriptions to be changed while ministers are in post, in order that ministers may take on additional churches. The Leadership Development is now undertaking a review of Terms of Settlement)

L Practical ways forward, some possibilities

Questions for discussion

1. what are the pros and cons of looking to close churches?
2. is there an ideal number of members to a minister? If so, how many?
3. Clarification was needed as to whether the detail of figures was the task of the deployment group – if not, who takes this on?
4. Please share your comments with regard to any other practical ways forward.

M Learning from the Areas

There is much experience that can be helpfully shared across the Areas.

- a. Roding have taken deployment away from being to do with the specific churches and are starting to make it more to do with the ministry in the four groups. Churches then use ministry as they are able.
- b. Churches need help to work on this: is this one of the roles of the Training and Development Officer?
- c. How do we assess mission potential? This is being worked on in different ways in the Areas..... eg Roding; St Albans

M: Learning from the Areas

Questions for Synod and Areas:

1. How can examples of good practice be better shared around the Synod?

Work the group has done

'the group did a considerable mapping exercise of the churches on the Synod, Area by Area, outlining the numbers of ministers, both stipendiary and non-stipendiary, and ministers of other churches. At the date of writing this report, (the figures are in constant flux) the figures Area by Area for URC stipendiary ministers are as follows, in brackets is the 'fair share' allocation of numbers:

➤ Central & North London (A)	10.5	(8.25)
➤ West London (B)	8.75	(8)
➤ Chiltern (C)	6.71	(5.75)
➤ St Albans (D)	9.0	(10)
➤ Lea Valley (E)	9.75	(7)
➤ Roding (F)	9.25	(7)

Membership of the group:

The group was comprised of members of each Area committee, the Synod Moderator, the Synod Training Officer, the Lay Preaching Officer and Revd Elizabeth Welch as chair.

Recommendations:

1. That a Synod deployment group be set up

- ✧ ***Remit:*** to draw up a Synod deployment strategy, to monitor deployment across the Synod and advise Synod on an annual basis of any changes that are needed, working primarily in close conjunction with Area Committees and ecumenical committee
- ✧ ***membership:*** 1 representative from each area; Moderator; LDG chair, Synod Ecumenical Officer, any others? The chair could either come from within the group

or to be appointed as an additional member. There will need to be flexibility about membership in order to respond to emerging needs. The group can ask people to come to share expertise from time to time.

- ✧ **Frequency of meetings:** an annual meeting, with meetings in between as necessary. The frequency of meetings and the remit will evolve in relation to the work that needs doing.
- ✧ **Liaison with Areas:** On the ground work needs to be in the hands on the Area Committees. The relationship between the deployment group and the Area Committees needs to be healthy in order for this to work.
- ✧ **Reporting:** to Synod, through the Leadership Development Group
- ✧ **Mandate:** Synod will need to agree the mandate for a Deployment group

2. ***That Areas be encouraged to look creatively at the possibility of developing different groups across existing Area boundaries***
3. ***That emphasis is given to the place and work of teams and groups in our churches. (Teams of ministers, elders, lay leaders....)***
4. ***That a Deployment strategy be developed for the Thames North Synod after the March 2011 Synod, based on the discussions that will be held with churches, Areas and Synod between the November 2010 and March 2011 Synods.***