

Could this be you?



The Church needs Lay Preachers

Lay Preachers are an integral part of the United Reformed Church. Along with the other recognised ministries in the United Reformed Church, Lay Preaching affirms that ministry is the work of the whole people of God.

"The Lord Jesus Christ continues his ministry in and through the Church, the whole people of God called and committed to his service. For the equipment of his people for this total ministry, the Lord Jesus Christ gives particular gifts, and calls some of his servants to exercise them in offices duly recognised within his Church".

Among the offices so recognised by the United Reformed Church is that of lay preacher.

"The worship of the local church is an expression of the worship of the whole people of God. In order that this may be clearly seen the United Reformed Church shall provide for the training of suitable men and women from among its members to be accredited by General Assembly as lay preachers."

[Extracts from the Manual of the United Reformed Church]

Is God calling you?

Lay Preachers in the United Reformed Church are drawn from a variety of backgrounds, situations and ages. Some of them belonged to the church for many years before becoming lay preachers; others were more recent members. Some felt a specific 'call' to lay preaching; others drifted into it because of a need in their local congregation.

About one third of the services held throughout the United Reformed Church each Sunday are led by lay preachers. In part this is due to the fact that there are fewer ministers than there are churches, but lay preachers are a valued resource and play an important role in the public ministry of the church. The lay person is in a unique position alongside the 'person in the pew' to reflect the needs of the congregation. Often their daily work is outside the church, mixing with people who are not associated with the church, and because of this the Lay Preacher can bring a different perspective to worship and has a rich course of experience to use for illustration. When Jesus taught people about God he used everyday work situations to make the message real for his listeners.

Together the Minister of Word and Sacraments and the Lay Preacher bring their varied experiences into their conduct of worship to give praise to God and to build up and encourage their fellow Christians. In the same way that the church needs ministers, the church needs Lay Preachers of all ages to offer themselves in this way.

What the United Reformed Church expects of Lay Preachers

- To have a real sense of calling and commitment to preach the Word of God.
- To have a good grasp of the Gospel to be proclaimed.
- To be in sympathy with the Basis of Union and the ethos of the United Reformed Church.
- To show a willingness not only to make use of the opportunities for initial training, but also to continue that training throughout their lay-preaching ministry.
- To show a willingness to lead worship with reasonable regularity as far as the demands of the other areas of their lives allow, whilst bearing in mind the need to take an active part in the life and work of their own church.
- To have the ability to reflect, in worship, the experiences of their own world of work and leisure.
- To show a willingness to become involved in forms of 'team ministry' as churches group together in teams or clusters, etc. This ability will become more important as the proportion of stipendiary ministers to churches falls.

How to take the first steps

So you have been encouraged to become a lay preacher! Perhaps the suggestion came from your minister or a church member whose opinion you respect and who has seen (and heard) you taking part in the leading of worship.

The most important thing is DO NOT PANIC. Give it some thought, and prayer. It may surprise you to know that only a small proportion of those who serve God as lay preachers in our churches actually welcomed the initial suggestion, and caution in seeking the way forward is a good thing.

The first step is to talk to your minister, or Interim Moderator/Pastoral Link in a vacancy. They can be most supportive and can give you opportunities to explore your gifts, without taking things too quickly. It is also a good idea to have a talk with the Lay Preaching Commissioner, who is in a good position to give further advice.

Take advantage of any opportunity to attend an **Enquirer's Conference/Vocations Fair**. There will be information and people present who can help you on your way, as well as others in a similar situation.

The United Reformed Church offers training to those who would serve our congregations as lay preachers, as it seeks a high standard of worship leadership from those who seek to give this service. Ongoing training for lay preachers is also offered, as further personal development is necessary for a fruitful and satisfying lay preaching ministry.

"Anyone feeling a call from God to lead Worship and to preach his Word will want to go further than following good technique. They will want to do so from their heart. They will be committed to pour out God's love and care into the worship."