

Collated Responses from breakout groups at Synod, held on March 13th, 2021.

[Not all groups directly answered the questions]

As there are fewer ministers in the Synod in future, and as they need to work more flexibly:

Question 1: What three things does your church most need from a leader?

Pastoral Care

Responsive to circumstances (rather than locked in our 'boxes' of existing patterns).

Understanding the neighbourhood

Wisdom

Spiritual Wisdom

Discipling (Encouraging and Pushing one another.)

Strong sense that big changes will come post pandemic, which we don't know yet so mustn't lock ourselves into our present ways and be open to meeting needs where we see them.

Also, the sense that 'Ministers' should always have been about 'equipping' the whole people of God. There was frustration that this hasn't always happened... and the reality that something like 'companion elders' actually gives the freedom for that equipping to be the focus, rather than actually doing the stuff ourselves.

It is important to discover the talents of the congregation, that contribute to the whole; a welcoming group, that is alert to new comers, and their needs, people who can reach out to the wider community in respect and love, members who can get involved in such things as Messy Church, or read the Bible or a poem during a service, lay preachers. All this is important to recognise and be grateful for.

1. Direction – Different views of what this means – To provide an answer to the question "Where are we going?" and enable a team to discern God's will through the Holy Spirit's leading

2. To Encourage, equip, and challenge the church members

3. To hold everything together in tension – different theologies, views, visions, hopes, fears, needs, ...

We didn't decide on 3....

- Inspiration
 - Encouraging volunteers
 - Public persona
 - Pastoral relationship provides theological lead
 - Symbol of unity
 - Provide input from the wider church
 - Place the buck stops
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Spiritual guidance and leadership

Knowledge of the denomination

Knowledge of scripture

Confidence in leadership

Enabling and empowering of Elders and the whole congregation

Having vision and/or enabling others to express their vision

Pastoral leadership and support of members, especially those in need

Training

The role of a leaders is to facilitate and encourage others to fulfil their potential, not to do everything themselves.

More than three on the list as came from various members of the group.

- Support
- Discernment

- Preaching / Teaching
- Theological reflection
- Vision

The affirmation of others – being like the ‘mother’ of the church and watching out for people on the edge. Churches and leaders need a development plan towards growth.

The use of technology, speeded up by the pandemic, has been an issue but is not impossible. The Elders are competent in vacancy.

1. Leaders role is not to do everything but energise and encourage – Note effect of vacancy can be enabling or engender panic – presence of minister can disable membership rather than inject energy and ice the cake. Moravian model differs from ours: ministers serve ten years and then moved on often into team ministries serving groups of churches and ministering according to their gifts. As a denomination they have annual service encouraging vocation of every member. We would do well to recover this sense of ‘every member ministry’ as all are called to serve God as Christians.
2. Although there is an understanding that ministers conduct services, others can lead worship with encouragement & training – in fact there is very little that is ‘only doable’ by a minister. It is more a matter of imbuing confidence & overcoming stereotype of our past experience of ministry. Minister needs to encourage others to share in the ministry of whole people of God. What is unique on stipendiary minister is their calling to move to minister where they are needed – ministry can be provided by others with deeper local knowledge.

Question posed: Was lack of ministers a direct consequence of Yardley Hastings closing and lack of young people in churches? Or was it the lack of people on middle years in our congregations which was more likely source of vocations - when did synod last review the age structure of its churches?

Leadership and Encouragement

Teaching and Pastoral care

Outreach and securing links to the community

Question 2. Which of those things are only doable by a minister of Word and Sacrament?

We didn’t really get to this one, but in truth we had discussed the reality that whilst Stipendiary ministers have sometimes been wonderful, we didn’t feel that they had an exclusive monopoly on really any of the above areas. (Even communion, it was noted that local church leaders and local elders have been given authorisation.)

None

Even when making the list it was clear that you don’t necessarily need a minister for these but MWS are set apart for ministry “Some aspects of the role others may do but a minister must do”. Where MWS are useful is for training and support

We decided that there was very little that could only be done by a Minister of Word and Sacrament. We did not want to see Ministers to become Communion machines and so a wider acceptance of lay people presiding at communion would help, recognizing there are denominational sensitivities here.

Support

Encouragement / enablement

Vision

Inspiration

Spiritual development

To be able to inspire, the Minister needs to take people with them and to walk with them.

Some element of teaching is also involved.

Leadership teams find it more difficult and challenging without the focus provided by a Minister

- A minister needs the skill of enabling the Elders.
 - Need a minister for – help with growth – sacraments – continuity of preaching, teaching, developing the vision for the church – vision and inspiration – ‘we’re all trying to walk towards God together and be outward facing’ the minister is there to help us do that.
 - The movement of Ministers is important – as in a new place a Minister can bring new insight, impetus, and energy – and the prompt to look outwards.
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The value of the stipendiary minister is bringing deeper theological reflection to local situation from experience elsewhere. However, this can also be provided by engaging with Stepwise or in fact the Church Leadership Programme now being revamped for hybrid engagement - next one will run Sept 2020 to June 2021 as open to anyone exercising a leadership role ie not just ministers.

We felt that a minister is essential for ‘holding the threads together and providing a sense of direction,’ fundamentally a leadership role that forms the foundations on which other essential outcomes can flourish.

Pastoral care / in-depth theological and biblical teaching / enabling / leading the church family

Question 3. What ‘other’ forms of leadership has your church experienced

Local Church Leader (although not recognised as such)

Mixture of Children’s workers/ Community Workers (sort of lay social workers!)

½ time minister plus retired ministers

Local Church Leaders officially recognised

Companion Elders

Most of the group have experience of sharing ministers, so the task of inviting ministers to lead worship helps, as the styles are always different

Recognise a hard year, with its sense of loss and discover the place of Lament – not moving on too quickly, as none of us have gone through something like this before. And the role of prayer in our life now. Question raised: how do we lament decline?

Remember all those people who are facing hard decisions, and those who lead us, in congregation, in Area, in the Synod and Nationally.

By Eldership and individual Elders during vacancy.

Help and support from Moravian head office - the Moravian Church has been facing the same issue of provision of ministers for many years

Local Church Leader (not ordained) from non-URC tradition

Leadership by lots of others in the church, both as individuals and in groups

A member of a church in vacancy and without an Interim Moderator feels desperate for leadership; the church "feels rudderless", without direction.

Had an unpaid Local Church Leader [LCL] and now a paid one 22 hours p/w.

Former LCL felt there was not much the church could not do without MWS. Having an oversight minister did help.

Elders have stepped up – it is a small church.

A former Moderator noted that there is a difference between churches who always have MWS and those who have one from time to time (mostly smaller churches) – it is a real culture difference and the former can have a shock when there is no ministry.

An Elder talked about the value of interregnum when the Elders and worship group stepped up – but they did become insular and did not serve the community as well as before

- Volunteer Chaplain
- Lay Preacher
- Retired Ministers
- Elders
- Oversight Minister
- Companion Elders

**** all models of Ministry should be available to all.**

- Local leadership – works 2 days for the church (paid by the church, helped by a Synod grant) and 3 days in secular employment –this is a good sustainable model, and likened to Paul and tentmaking. Likes that he is involved in the world, and not just the church. Also stated that decline is not inevitable – we need hope and vision for the future.
 - Companion elders as developed at Mangotsfield and Castle Green URC.
 - NSM, and lay preachers
 - Elders need to join in leadership and how churches need to use the gifts of elders and church members.
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1. *Ministry from retired ministers in the congregation:*

Retired Ministers are sometimes seen as being able to help keep things going. It was commented that this may or may not be helpful as modern ways were not always the same as those of 30 years ago. However, the presence of retired ministers did provide some additional leadership.

2. *Family Workers: These were engaged for a particular area of work to encourage families, and in particular children, to participate and enable the church to grow. The results had not necessarily been as hoped or expected.*

3. *Local church leaders with certain responsibilities: e.g. worship and pastoral care and involving local membership. It was felt that maybe not enough credit is given to Elders for all they do. Elders definitely have a leadership role within the church.*

NSM ministry, maximising role of elders - encouraging them to take on full responsibilities as leaders.

- Functioning without a minister where it was felt that the church ‘trod water’ and lacked focus
- A presiding elder
- An interim moderator providing a ‘light hand’ to support a well-functioning eldership when it was felt that the church continued to maintain its position but did not advance.
- A 40% part time pastor funded directly by the church out with the SW Synod ministerial allocation. After an extended period without a minister, it has revitalised the local church, in particular in teaching for the congregation and in leadership.

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Family worker / cafe manager / admin assistant / children’s worker / community pioneer - all respondents were positive about the experience they had had with these forms of lay workers.