

United Reformed Church West Midlands Synod
Policy on Authorised Elders for Lay Presidency at the Sacraments (Adopted Oct 2018)

SUMMARY

Following the introduction of “Authorised Elder” status for Lay Presidency at the sacraments, West Midlands Synod amends its policy of how lay presidents are to be authorised as follows. (This summary guidance is to aid understanding of the full detail of the policy, and it is the full detail that takes precedence in interpreting this policy. References in square brackets are to the relevant sections of the full policy.)

1. Ordained Ministers of Word and Sacraments are preferred as presidents at the Sacraments. Retired and visiting ministers are not obliged to “stand in” as presidents, especially at short notice. [See Authorised Elders Policy (“AEP”) Introduction]
2. If the previously arranged president becomes unavailable at short notice, the church may choose someone suitable to cover, or to postpone celebration of the Sacraments. [AEP 1]
3. Normally those lay people allowed to preside at the Sacraments (“Authorised Elders”) will be Elders of the United Reformed Church (Serving or Non-Serving) and/or accredited lay preachers. The Synod interprets the latter to mean Assembly Accredited or Synod Recognised Lay Preachers who are members of the United Reformed Church (whether or not they have been ordained as Elders.) [AEP 2, Basis of Union 25]
4. Churches will not have lay people authorised “just in case” the previously arranged president is not available. Those appointed as Authorised Elders will be expected to preside. [AEP 2.2a]
5. In order to authorise lay presidency, a church must establish that there is “pastoral necessity.” During a time of ministerial vacancy or sabbatical or long-term sick leave, Pastoral Committee will normally recognise that this pastoral necessity exists. [AEP 2.2a]
6. For all other occasions, including if the church’s Minister is on annual leave, a church will need to explain why they believe it is appropriate for a Lay President to be appointed rather than postponing celebration of the Sacrament. [AEP 2.2a]
7. Where a Minister is serving a church but on a limited scoping that might affect their availability to preside, a case for “pastoral necessity” might exist – all cases will be considered on their merits. The onus is on the local church to explain why they believe they need a Lay President. [AEP 2.2a]
8. When a case of pastoral necessity has been recognised by the Pastoral Committee, usually not more than three Authorised Elders may be appointed for a church. [AEP 2.2a]
9. Appointment follows approved training to a common standard, and lasts for up to three years. There are situations (such as a Minister being called) which might remove the pastoral necessity within the three year period. [AEP 2.2c]
10. An Authorised Elder may be appointed for more than one church, but in each case there must be an established pastoral necessity for someone other than a Minister of Word and Sacraments to preside. [AEP 2.2d]

Appointment as an Authorised Elder may be extended to second and subsequent periods of three years, providing the pastoral necessity still exists, and providing the Authorised Elder undergoes appropriate and approved refresher training. [AEP 2.2d]

The full policy is available at <https://urcwestmidlands.org.uk/resources/policies/> or from the Synod Office.