

Moving to an area where there is no local United Reformed Church

Purpose

The purpose of these guidelines is to offer help to those people who move to an area where there is no local United Reformed Church, who are both concerned to be involved as a Christian locally, and who wish to retain their United Reformed Church membership, identity and links.

Guidelines

With the aid of prayer and careful reflection, you should seek to discern what God wants you to do in this place; how you may be used in God's service here; what potential may be released and what possibilities open up if you identify yourself with the local church and its community.

The Christian presence in the community may be weak, in which case your gifts, insights and experience might be an invaluable resource.

If the church is thriving, you might equally want to add your strength and enthusiasm to theirs.

The potential needs to be there for fruitful interchange and reciprocity, so your sense of welcome in this place is crucial.

Just as you have riches to share from the United Reformed Church, so you can also be enriched through other traditions. This two-way process should be a source of mutual blessing.

However, if, after a period of time, you feel unable to settle, then you may decide to seek an alternative church.

Some questions to ask:

- ◆ Do you feel a sense of belonging within the life of the church as it now stands, with regard to its worship, its preaching, its study life, and its role within the life of the community?
- ◆ What would you gain/lose if you continued to worship in a United Reformed Church some miles away?
- ◆ What would the community and God's mission in it gain/lose if you did so?
- ◆ Is a dual allegiance to the wider United Reformed Church and the local worshipping community a possibility? How would this work out in practice?

Notes

1 The following denominations have agreed policies for local churches to use whereby a person may be involved in the local church whilst retaining their links to another denomination:

The Church of England
The Methodist Church
The Baptist Union of Great Britain
The Roman Catholic Church

Copies of these are available from the Ecumenical Relations Department at URC Church House: ecumenical@urc.org.uk

2 Resolution 25 from the United Reformed Church General Assembly in 2018 recognises that 'some people who wish to continue as members of the United Reformed Church are unable to do so in the normal way, often because they live at a great distance from any local church of the URC, or their circumstances require a greater degree of mobility than enables them to be church members in the normal way'. In every United Reformed Church Synod there is likely to be one or more local churches willing to hold your membership, recognising that you may never contribute to the life of that local church. The General Assembly resolution also asked that Synods should not financially penalise such local churches for holding your membership. You should contact your Synod Office who will identify the local churches involved.

3. Links with the United Reformed Church can be retained by subscribing to Reform Magazine <https://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/subscribe/> , registering to receive Synod newsletters and the Denomination's regular news service, 'URC News Update' <https://urc.org.uk/latest-news/182-forms/1586-subscribe-to-news-update.html>

Becoming part of a Church of England congregation

In many cases, the Church of England will be present in an area where there is no local United Reformed Church. The following are extracts from relevant Church of England Canons which you may find useful.

They explain what, as a United Reformed Church member, you are entitled to in any Church of England church:

1 Canon B15A (1972) enables the admission to Holy Communion of "baptised persons who are communicant members of other Churches which subscribe to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, and who are in good standing in their own Church..."

If anyone by virtue of this provision "regularly receives the Holy Communion over a long period which appears likely to continue indefinitely, the minister shall set before him the normal requirements of the Church of England for communicant status of that Church."

2 The Church Representation Rules 1995 enable a person to be enrolled if she/he is baptised, sixteen years or upwards and declares themselves to be a member in good standing of a Church which subscribes to the doctrine of the Holy Trinity ... and also prepared to declare themselves to be a member of the Church of England having habitually attended public worship in the parish during a period of six months prior to enrolment. Making this declaration also confers eligibility to stand for election to the decision making bodies of the Church of England.

3 Canon B43 (1989) says

1.-(1)) A minister or lay person who is a member in good standing of a Church to which this Canon applies and is a baptised person may, subject to the provisions of this Canon, be invited to perform all or any of the following duties -

- a) to say or sing Morning or Evening Prayer
- b) to read the Holy Scripture at any service
- c) to preach at any service
- d) to lead the Intercessions at the Holy Communion and to lead prayers at other services
- e) to assist at Baptism or the Solemnisation of Matrimony or conduct a Funeral Service
- f) to assist in the distribution of the holy sacrament of the Lord's Supper to the people at the Holy Communion if the minister or lay person is authorised to perform a similar duty in his or her own Church."