Guidlines

for

DISTRICT MINISTRY

FREE CHURCH COUNCIL OF WALES

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DISTRICT MINISTRY

1. **What is District Ministry**?

A District Ministry exists when local congregations belonging to two or more of the denominations work together, with the agreement and support of the appropriate denominational bodies, in order to ensure a Ministry by a Minister who is recognized by his/her denomination and is open to recognition by all the denominations that share in the ministry. A number of creative outcomes can result from such a plan, as reported below, but this is what District Ministries is all about.

The main motive for forming a District Ministry is to revive and strengthen the mission of the churches in all its aspects within their community. The leadership of a Minister is key to giving direction and inspiration to the Christian testimony of all God's people in an area. Too often denominational requirements have meant the dispersion of Ministerial resources over a very wide area within a denominational pattern. A District Ministry enables the wealth of various resources in a specific area to be shared in order to strengthen the evidence. With time, such a plan can lead to a new and exciting pattern of Christian life and witness. In all the examples that exist there is considerable diversity, but the general evidence is that the mission of the churches has been strengthened through the steps taken.

District Ministries were started with the intention of enabling congregations belonging to two or more of the Welsh Nonconformist denominations to secure the service of a Minister from one of the denominations to minister in the neighborhood. Some of these plans have been in existence for years but District Ministries were given a special boost when a joint working group was formed between four Welsh denominations, under the auspices of the Free Church Council of Wales in 1984, with the intention of promoting them.

After that, an Interdenominational Advisory Committee on the Ministry was formed which included representatives from the four Welsh denominations as well as the English departments of these denominations and the following English-speaking denominations: The United Reformed Church, The Congregational Federation, the British Baptist Union and the Salvation Army, and the three co-church bodies, the Free Church Council of Wales, ENFYS and CYTÛN. Its main objective was to promote District Ministries and offer advice and support to churches and areas on matters relating to joint Ministry.

Now, with the passage of time and the increase of experience, the individual denominational offices have become able to provide the necessary advice and support.

2. Which denominations share in District Ministries?

By now congregations belonging to most of the denominations share either in District Ministries, or in similar local ecumenical partnerships.

These denominations have agreed to promote and support such plans through decisions in their church courts. They also encourage their respective regional bodies to consider forming District Ministries or similar partnerships when they consider Ministerial needs within their sphere of responsibility. This includes the Church in Wales as its ecumenical canons allow a priest from the Church in Wales to minister fully for a church of another denomination that confesses the trinitarian faith and administers the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Likewise, the canons allow a minister recognized by one of the other denominations to minister fully within a local congregation of the Church in Wales.

In the case of all denominations it is necessary to act within their denominational rules, but these developments can be a creative means of strengthening Christian witness in an area.

3. **What are the first steps with regard to the formation of a District Ministry?**

a) One or more of the local congregations, or denominational regional meetings, or the central offices of the various denominations can take the first steps when it is seen that the local churches are mature to move forward towards the establishment of a District Ministry. The crucial condition is desire and maturity among the local churches to take these steps. An increase in the number of District Ministries depends on local desire and on denominational leadership. When the denominations are discussing the pattern of ministry in an area the possibility of forming a District Ministry should be considered rather than first looking for a denominational solution that would call for ministry over a very wide area.

b) The first step is to convene a general meeting of representatives of all the churches in the area to consider the situation in the area and to consider possibilities for sharing the Ministry. It would be beneficial for denominational representatives (national and/or regional, as appropriate) to be present at this first meeting in order to give advice regarding the necessary steps to be taken if it is decided to move forward.

c) If it is decided to proceed to try to form a District Ministry it is recommended to establish a Pastoral Committee of representatives of the churches. Committee members can be members of the local churches and the regional and national denominational bodies.

d) In some communities there could be a Minister already serving a ministry and there would be a desire among some of the other churches to come under this ministry. In such a situation, it might be appropriate to first have informal discussions with the Minister and the appropriate denominational officials before discussing the matter publicly. If permission is granted to proceed then the matter can be raised in an open meeting as suggested in (b) above.

e} When a District Ministry is established in a particular area it is important to secure agreement to the plan from the appropriate denominational bodies, locally and nationally, before taking steps to call a Minister.

4. **The Pastorate Committee**

It is strongly suggested that it would be beneficial to have a standing committee for the pastorate, with representation on it from among the officers and members of all the churches. This committee could be an extension of the committee formed to discuss the establishment of the pastorate. While a number of issues are still the responsibility of the individual churches, there are other issues, such as financial issues, joint meetings, testimony to the community, that the churches should consider together, in order to promote the cooperation of the churches in Ministry and mission. All this could be done in the Pastorate Committee.

5. **Guidelines for District Ministries**

i . Diversity. District Ministries vary greatly from area to area and no one pattern is suitable for all cases. This diversity is, indeed, part of the richness of such Ministries and a means of strengthening the Christian witness. There are often great expectations at the start of such an experiment and care should be taken not to put too much pressure on either the Minister or the churches.

II. Constitution. It is necessary to agree on a constitution for the new pastorate. A model constitution is available from the denominational offices, and this could be used as a starting point when developing a local document. But it should be remembered that it is only a starting point; it will have to be adapted and developed

for local purposes. Naturally, it will be necessary to obtain the agreement of all the churches, as well as the appropriate denominations, to the constitution.

III. Review. It must also be remembered that the pattern of any plan is not established forever and should be reviewed regularly. In fact, it is suggested to establish a pattern of reviewing the pastoral arrangements from the beginning as that would enable the local churches to benefit from the lessons that would be learned as the new ministry develops.

IV. Worship. Patterns of worship in a District Ministry will vary greatly and depend mainly on what is appropriate locally. A Minister should not be overloaded and hold a service in each of the churches on every Sunday, but ensure a pattern that makes the best use of local talents to assist in leading worship.

Joint worship between all the churches in the pastorate should be considered a constant element of the pattern from the very beginning. That would enrich worship and deepen the Christian community within the pastorate.

V. Sacraments / Ordinances. All the denominations have their special rules regarding who should administer the sacraments and these rules should be respected within the District Ministry. The Service Books of the different denominations contain the order of service for baptism and communion and these can be used as appropriate, but there would be great benefits from following a unified pattern from time to time. For example, the Covenanted Churches Commission has published a procedure for Baptism and Communion and it could be considered to use them occasionally.

Some Ministers from among the Baptists will find it impossible to administer the baptism of children, on grounds of conscience. This should be remembered when discussing the establishment of a District Ministry and if this arises within a District Ministry the Pastorate Committee should consider ways of administering children baptism, e.g. by inviting a nearby Minister to administer the sacrament/ordination.

When preparing to establish a District Ministry, chapel trustees should ensure that the conditions of the Declaration of Trust in the Acts of their chapels do not limit their choice of Minister. If the conditions restrict them (for example, with the issue of baptism), the trustees will be required to obtain the permission of the Charity Commission to proceed with the arrangements for the District Ministry.

VI. Education. The education of all God's people is central in any ministry and the District Ministry offers an excellent opportunity to do this together. For example, Bible classes can be held, either on Sundays or on a week night; classes could be held for children and young people, either as part of a family service on a Sunday morning or in a Sunday School; classes could be held to prepare parents or youth (and sometimes others) for baptism. Preparation classes for membership could be held; meditation and prayer circles could be held, or discussion circles, say during Advent or Lent. It would be beneficial to carry out such activities jointly between the churches in the pastorate. Where there is a need for specific guidance on denominational matters (e.g. when preparing for baptism or membership) there is no need to limit it to those of the individual church as everyone could benefit greatly by getting to better understand each other's traditions.

VII. Pastoral Care. Pastoral care for a numerous pastorate can place a great burden on a Minister if the Minister alone is expected to do this work. Consideration should be given to developing a pattern of pastoral care where deacons, elders and members share this responsibility with the Minister. In some pastorates, the formation of a Ministerial team, including a Minister and lay people, would be an effective means of strengthening the witness of the churches within the neighbourhood.

VIII. Testimony in the Community. One of the main motivations for establishing a District Ministry is to strengthen the testimony of the churches within the community. Therefore, the churches within the pastorate

should give careful consideration to the needs of the community and how they could work together to meet these needs. Many areas have benefited from doing such a survey. Churches in a number of areas have also carried out visits to all the homes in the area in order to bear witness to the Gospel, to share information about what is happening within the churches and to try to find out what the needs of people in the area are. The result of such activities has been the establishment of youth clubs, centers for older people, and so on.

IX. Representation on Denominational Bodies. All the denominations that share in District Ministries allow a recognized Minister from another denomination to represent the District Ministry on their regional bodies, namely, presbytery, association and assembly, and while it can be demanding to be present at all these meetings it is very important that the District Ministry fosters a relationship with all the denominations. Because of that, it is suggested that representatives other than the Minister are appointed from the beginning of the District Ministry to lighten the Minister's burden when necessary.

X. Financial Matters.

a. Normally, each church within the pastorate will be responsible for the maintenance, lighting and heating of its own buildings.

b. The rest of the District Ministry costs are shared between the churches in the pastorate in accordance with an average to be agreed in each case. The denominations have rules and guidelines in relation to this and the appropriate denominational officers should be carefully consulted before reaching final decisions on these matters. These costs will include the following:

i. Remuneration: The Minister's remuneration is paid according to the method of the denomination to which the Minister belongs.

ii. Minister's Expenses: Appropriate expenses should be paid to the Minister for travel, telephone, computer equipment, and so on, in accordance with denominational guidelines.

iii. Manse: A manse should be provided in the area or an adequate housing allowance given, again in accordance with the denominations' guidelines.

iv. Denominational and missionary contributions: The churches will continue with these contributions either individually or jointly in accordance with a pattern to be agreed.

v. Special plans: When a ministry decides on a special missionary or social plan to be implemented jointly it should be ensured that all the churches agree in advance to bear the financial responsibility for it.

vi. Language. Most District Ministries have been established between churches that operate through the medium of Welsh, and in such a situation it would be natural that worship and the activity of the pastorate also continue to be through the medium of Welsh. Where there are Welsh speaking churches and English speaking churches in the same pastorate, it would be natural for the worship and activity of the individual churches to take place in the usual language, but it would be wise for the Pastoral Committee to consider how to organize joint services and meetings. When a bilingual service is held it would be helpful if the hymns and at least some of the readings and prayers were printed bilingually, where possible. Such decisions are a local responsibility. This is a matter that requires great sensitivity and the situation should be constantly reviewed. Advice on this difficult issue can be obtained from the denominations.

vii. Sundays. It is recognized that the Ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, due to the pattern of their remuneration, give Sundays to their Presbytery. This is not required by the Ministers of the Baptist Union of Wales or the Union of Welsh Independents.

6. Where is the authority in relation to District Ministries?

The main authority in joint pastorates is still in the hands of the individual churches and the denominations in accordance with the constitution of the different denominations. The exact location of this authority varies from denomination to denomination and according to the subject in question.

Presbyterian Church of Wales: In the area of Ministry, the General Assembly is the main authority body of the church but in some matters the associations and presbyteries are entrusted to implement the authority of the Assembly in special situations. Advice on special matters can be obtained from the General Secretary.

The Methodist Church: [to be checked] The Conference (British) is the highest court of the church, but the Provincial Synod or the Circuit is entrusted to exercise the authority of the Conference. The Methodist Assembly in Wales has the responsibility.

Welsh Baptist Union: The local church has authority to act with a view to securing a Ministry, but in relation to District Ministries it is expected that a church will act in close consultation with the officers of the Assembly and the Union.

The Union of Welsh Independents: The local church has authority to act with a view to securing a Ministry but in relation to District Ministries it is expected that a church will act in close consultation with the officials of the District Council and the Union.

The Salvation Army: The Regional Major is responsible for ministry in the Region in consultation with British Army headquarters officers. The first step in relation to joint Ministry would be to consult with the Regional Major.

The Congregational Federation: The local church has the authority to act with regard to joint ministries but it would be appropriate to ensure the guidance of the denominational officers when starting local discussions, and before reaching final decisions.

The United Reformed Church: The District Council in partnership with the local church has the authority to recommend Ministerial patterns to be confirmed by the Provincial Synod. The Regional Moderator should be contacted.

British Baptist Union: The local church has authority to act with a view to securing a Ministry, but a local church is expected to act in full consultation with the regional superintendents and the Assembly.

The Church in Wales: Within the Church, the Bishop of the relevant diocese has responsibility for the ministry in the parishes. Because of that, the diocese office should be contacted in the first instance.

7. What rules govern District Ministries?

Rules were drawn up by each denomination regarding District Ministries, including rules regarding the recognition (i.e. accreditation) of Ministers. The chief officers of the denominations can be contacted for further information.