

*Task Group on One Rite of Admission
to the Order of Ministry*

Ministry and Employment Policy and Services
The United Church of Canada
October 2002

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Background and Introduction

Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century, was presented to the 37th General Council by the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education (MPE) in August 2000. This comprehensive study contained a number of recommendations (See Appendix 1). The Ministry Study Group, the authors of the report, struggled hard to find a common service, or rite, to designate all forms of Christian leadership within the United Church. In the end, they identified several difficulties that prevented them from successfully describing one common rite. They concluded, however, that one common rite was needed to designate ordered ministry and that it ought to be by "prayer and laying on of hands." They decided that a new language of call and designation was needed.

The Division of Ministry Personnel and Education felt that no change from the language of ordination and commissioning was warranted at the present time. However, the Division recommended to the General Council that the United Church "commit itself to deliberate thought and consultation to find a new common rite to designate all forms of ordered ministry." (*Ministry Together*, pp. 37-38)

The 37th General Council decided:

"That a process be developed to ensure the 38th General Council be well informed to consider one common rite into Ordered Ministry."

Subsequently, the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education established a task group to review, consider and make recommendations related to the one rite and that the work should take particular note of the following concerns:

- a) implications for ecumenical relations
- b) implications for the United Church's understanding of ministry (ordered, designated lay, laity)

The final report was to be sent to MPE's successor body in sufficient time for placement on the agenda of the 38th General Council (2003).

A task group was formed in the fall of 2001 and has met 4 times. During this time the group has:

- engaged in free flowing discussion related to concepts and understanding of ministry
- researched ecumenical information
- brain stormed a 'pro and con' list for the status quo, one rite and multiple rites
- met with and interviewed some former members of the Ministry Study Group
- articulated our understanding about ordered ministry, and diaconal and ordained ethos
- developed this following report

Task Group Members

Committee members were regionally based in Winnipeg: Marilyn Anderson Corkum, Ted Dodd, Russell Wardell; included Gwen Nicol-MacDonald as chair of the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education; and was staffed by Joan McConnell (Sept.-March, 2002) and Steven Chambers, (April, 2002).

Initially this Task Group was connected to the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education. With the advent of the new structure, The Task Group understands that our work is to be submitted to the Ministry and Employment Policy and Services Unit for reporting to, and consideration by, the 38th General Council. It also seems important to us that we present our report to the Faith Formation and Education Unit (implications re: theological education) and the Support to Local Ministries Unit (implications re: liturgical celebration).

It our hope that this report will provide background information in a succinct and accessible manner. It is also our hope that the report will provide the various Units the opportunity to discuss this matter in a way that will determine the next steps in the consideration of one common rite for entry into ordered ministry.

Historical Review

Over recent decades, the United Church has engaged in lively and ongoing debate around the theology and practice of ministry. This has been manifested in several studies and reports including: the *Commission on Ministry in the Twentieth Century* (1968), *Task Force on Ministry* (1977), *Project Ministry* (1980), *Project Ministry Revisited* (ca. 1980) and, most recently, *Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century* (2000).¹ Our observation is that while each study group tried initially to focus on the ministry of all God's people, through their process of development, each has narrowed the focus to that of ordered ministry and how that particular expression is lived out within our church. A tension seems to live on through all the studies between the goal of celebrating the ministry of the whole people and recognizing the particular ministries of some. No report has been able, we feel, to map out a way for the church to resolve this tension that has proven acceptable to a General Council.

Embracing an alternative vision of ministry that is inclusive of the whole people of God would require work on many levels. Some of these would be: clericalism/affirmation for the order of ministry, professionalism/standards for those in accountable ministry positions, renewed understandings of vocation and leadership, and the role of the community and those in a particular office in terms of authority for the sacraments.

This report offers our reflections on some of these matters and encourages the General Council to discuss the merits and dangers of such a strategy.

Diaconal Ministry²

Part of the history of the diaconate is biblically rooted in ministry to "widows/orphans/poor." Within the United Church there is a long history of the diaconate in the deaconess movement. Since the 1980s diaconal ministers have been commissioned to ministries of Education, Service, and Pastoral Care as equal and full members within the ordered ministry of the United Church.

Those called into this expression of ministry remain few in number, a reality which impacts on the ethos of diaconal ministry. The work of diaconal ministers remains on the edge of the institutional church. Frontier ministry, education programming, administration, leadership development programming, social services, overseas mission are all areas of work to which diaconal ministers have been called.

¹ A complete list of United Church studies on ministry is found in *Ministry Together*, p. 49 or 37th General Council (2000) *Record of Proceedings*, pp. 625-626.

² For further discussion of the history of Diaconal Ministry within the United Church, see *Ministry Together* (p. 24) or *Record of Proceedings* (2000), p. 601-602.

It is important for the church to find ways to honour and celebrate diaconal ministry. For some, one rite of admission to the Order of Ministry would send a message that ordained and diaconal ministry are equal expressions of ministry. A more frequent reaction to the one rite proposal is that it could result in a blending with ordained ministry where the essence of diaconal ministry would be overwhelmed.

In 1992, Diakonia – an organization of Diaconal Ministers in The United Church of Canada – adopted the following statement of belief:

We are called with all God's people to
be responsible agents of creative transformation
support and caring
liberation and reconciliation
justice and mercy
inviting all into a pilgrimage of
dignity and well-being,
and a ministry of accompaniment.
And we are called with all God's people
into a life of discernment and risk.
Our roots are within the church's earliest traditions,
and we exist today within a world-wide
expression of diaconal ministry.
Diaconal ministry exists within the ministry
of the whole community and is the
responsibility of that community.
The primary task of diaconal ministry
is mutual empowerment
through education, service and pastoral care.
This includes working together
to maintain relationships that are life-giving
and sustaining of community
to meet immediate needs
and to work to create a just and loving world.
We offer an intentional commitment
to stand and be with others on the periphery.
Seeking to be faithful to the gospel,
diaconal ministry remains flexible and
responsive to the needs of the Church and the world,
wherever that may lead.

Ordained Ministry³

People who are ordained to Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care most often live out the expression of their ministry in the context of a United Church pastoral charge. Emerging from roots in the Reformed Tradition, ordination has historically emphasized academic preparation. Within ecumenical documents such as "Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry" (the historic document of the World Council of Churches 1982) definitions of ordained ministry seem relatively clear. However in our specific context people in ordained ministry often comment on the erosion of a clear role. Tasks once seen as the ordained minister's (such as preaching, worship leadership, celebration of sacraments) are increasingly shared (a reality celebrated by most). The ordained minister's role within the wider community has shifted in task, prestige, and status; again a reality embraced by some but grieved by others.

In the midst of cultural change, church communities and ordained ministers are adapting with creativity. Some are rediscovering the "basics" or "roots" of what it means to be called into ordination, others are moving in new directions. For all the words, "Word, Sacrament, and Pastoral Care" continue to be defining. Any rite designating people into this stream of ministry needs to take these multiple realities into consideration.

Ecumenical

Expressions of ministry across the church are diverse. Few denominations have an immediate recognition of each other's orders of ministry. (A notable exception being the recent agreement of the Lutheran and Anglican churches in Canada.) Most churches, like our own, require additional training and supervision before being willing to transfer orders to their specific denomination.

If one rite does not change the existence of a designated, ordered ministry then the impact on our ecumenical relations would be minimal. The most common word used in the ecumenical community to describe ordered ministry is "ordination" and so the use of another term would create the need for some translation at shared events.

Since the current proposal for one rite only involves our existing Order of Ministry, an order that is accepted in the wider church community, a decision on whether or not to proceed is not impacted by "ecumenical concerns."

The ecumenical impact is more clearly seen within the diaconal stream of ministry. Connections that have been established between United Church Diaconal Ministers and the world *diakonia* would be complicated and more difficult to maintain if one common rite meant an amalgamation of the two streams.

The issue of sacraments may have a significant impact on our ecumenical relations and, therefore, we await the follow up action to the *Ministry Together* report on lay presidency at the sacraments.

Action to Describe One Common Rite

As part of our task, we considered the action that might be employed to mark the entry into the Order of Ministry. In establishing criteria, we articulated the following hopes:

- that a new vision of ordered ministry within the ministry of the whole people of God would be encouraged
- that there would be a rooted-ness in tradition and scripture
- that a non-hierarchical posture would be affirmed

³ For a further discussion of the history of ordained ministry within the United Church, see: *Ministry Together* (p. 25) or the *Record of Proceedings* (2000), p. 602-603.

- that the functional aspects of vocation would be recognized
- that ecumenical relationships would be considered
- that clarity would be valued

The following verbs emerged as we 'brain stormed' about how to name a possible new rite:

covenant	designate	chosen
commission	reaffirm	admit
ordain	name	order
confirm	adopt	recognize
call	authorize	charge
set apart	inspire	affirm
appoint	consecrate	profess
confess	empower	anoint

In our minds, the two verbs considered to be most adequate were **Ordered** and **Called**.

Consecrated and **anointed** were next in acceptance. If one common rite incorporated multiple streams of ministry, presumably the options and functions would need to be carefully considered. We did not spend a great deal of time imagining what those functions might be.

Advantages and Disadvantages Table

Throughout the task group's work, the definition of one rite was a challenge. In our discussion we looked at many possible ways to describe the action of one rite of entry into ordered ministry. In the end we felt there were four main directions that the church might take in relation to one common rite. We offer the following table in an attempt to provide a simple and accessible focus for discussion. We categorized advantages and disadvantages of the four approaches in as succinct and direct a fashion as possible. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list or to limit conversation or debate.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Status Quo (one order of ministry with two streams and two rites of entry - Ordination and Commissioning)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -no change, provides stability in a time of upheaval (example: discernment processes could be maintained as they are now) -would not require polity changes -upholds the uniqueness of two expressions (example: diaconate would be able to maintain community identity within the United Church and beyond) -two equal parts to the Order of Ministry has a short history, may need a longer time -not a "front burner" issue at this time -familiar ecumenical connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -does not address the misunderstandings or the lack of clarity around order of ministry streams -does not risk the possibility of embracing a new vision
One Rite a) Amalgamation of Streams (one order of ministry, designation to be determined, with one rite of entry - to be determined)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -possibility of embracing a new vision of ministry -affirms the equality of different expressions of ministry -would initiate conversation around the nature and theology of ministry -would remove the misunderstandings or lack of clarity between the order of ministry streams -probably would not be a major obstacle for ecumenical relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -significant change might be stressful in a time of upheaval -would require polity changes -consensus around presiding at the sacraments does not exist -danger of diaconal identity being lost -danger of increased clericalism -implications for theological education would be unclear -no clear choice of verb to describe the action of the rite
One Rite b) 2 Streams (diaconal) ("Education, Service and Pastoral Care) and ordained ("Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care) - one rite of entry to be determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -continuity with status quo -affirms the equality of different expressions of ministry -familiar ecumenical connections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -seems like a minor superficial change -could be perceived as an attempt to change the language of the ordination/commissioning service -does not address the misunderstandings or the lack of clarity around order of ministry streams -might require polity changes -does not risk the possibility of embracing a new vision -no clear choice of verb to describe the action of the rite
One Rite c) Multiple Streams (all recognized ministries - a variety of streams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -breaks the continuity with the status quo -affirms and broadens the equality of many different expressions of ministry -might increase flexibility within the order of ministry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -significant change might be stressful in a time of upheaval -might be perceived as disorderly -would require polity changes -consensus around presiding over sacraments does not exist

- designated in one common rite)	-affirms a variety of methodologies for theological education -would initiate conversation around the nature and theology of ministry	-danger of diaconal identity being lost -no clear choice of verb to describe the action of the rite -might be an obstacle for ecumenical relations
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Summary

While the members of the task group thank the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education for the opportunity to reflect on and learn about our church's understanding of ministry, it must be noted that throughout our meetings we struggled with the "why" of this task. In this report, we have discussed our task as "not a front burner issue." Our church has a great-spirit led vision, "Mending God's World." Our church is engaged in renewal processes at all levels. Our church is seeking to be faithful in our context. This particular task does not seem to fit into these more important processes and directions. Therefore, It is the considered recommendation of this task group that no change is warranted or desired in the present situation. The current climate of uncertainty surrounding General Council offices and the church's restructuring indicates that any proposed change to the two streams of the order of ministry would be unwise and disruptive. Without a ground swell of support and without clear enthusiasm for the idea, we envision little prophetic or pastoral worth in attempting these changes at this time.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn Anderson Corkum
Ted Dodd
Russell Wardell
Gwen Nicol-MacDonald

APPENDIX I

Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century Resolutions from the 37th General Council

This is an unofficial summary.
The official record of the actions of the
General Council is found in the *Record of Proceedings*.

RESOLUTION NO. 8

Title: Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century
From: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education

BE IT RESOLVED THAT

The 37th General Council approve the request of the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, to adopt the following principles, as outlined in the report *Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century*:

1. the value and diversity of paid accountable ministries currently existing within The United Church of Canada;
2. the emphasis placed upon a high standard of education required of, and the diversity of training available to, those entering into paid accountable ministries;
3. the uplifting and honouring of the ministry of the laity and ordered ministry.

Carried

RESOLUTION NO. 9

Title: Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century
From: Division of Ministry Personnel and Education

BE IT RESOLVED THAT

The 37th General Council receive the report of the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education, entitled *Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century*.

Carried

The following resolutions were adopted by the 37th GC:

1 Ministries of the laity

- a) that Congregations intentionally recognize ministries conducted by lay people of all ages
- b) that The United Church of Canada, through the Division of Mission in Canada, provide resource materials and guidelines for developing congregational programs that will enable Congregations and members to discern the ministries of the laity and to devise methods of accountability for those ministries
- c) that The United Church of Canada provide worship resources for rituals celebrating

the relationship between faith and life.

2 Guidelines for all courts of the church when considering those to administer the sacraments under current standards.

The person who is granted permission to administer the sacraments shall be someone who:

- a) is a member of The United Church of Canada and a member in good standing of the Pastoral Charge, Presbytery/District, or Conference that is granting the responsibility, and
- b) has the respect of the community and has been proven trustworthy in leadership, and
- c) has a faith that they can articulate and that has been demonstrated in the community, and
- d) understands that the responsibility that they are undertaking is to fulfil a role in serving the community, is bringing access to the table, not excluding people from it, and
- e) is willing to be accountable to the court that is entrusting them with this responsibility, and will act within the policies and guidelines of the Congregation and wider church, and
- f) is familiar with the polity and practices of The United Church of Canada, particularly regarding sacraments, and
- g) has engaged in reflection and education on the sacraments and the role and meaning of sacrament within the community of faith, as deemed appropriate by the relevant court.

3 Designated Lay Ministry

- a) that The United Church of Canada establish a new category of designated lay ministry, which will consist of lay people serving in Presbytery/District-recognized ministries (including congregational ministries, outreach ministries, youth and young adult ministries, chaplaincies, educational ministries, and administrative ministries)
- b) that this designation would take place at the Presbytery/District level through a ritual of recognition by prayer and the laying on of hands,
- c) that at the beginning of each new Presbytery-recognized ministry relationship, a covenant will be made with the Designated Lay Minister, the Presbytery/District, and those with whom the ministry is exercised.

4 Criteria for recognition as a Designated Lay Minister.

That the criteria for recognition as a Designated Lay Minister be:

- a) at least three years of active membership in The United Church of Canada, which will include a period of intentional discernment with the community (possibly including the current Discernment Process or some variation appropriate to the individual and context),
- b) interviews with the Conference Interview Board and the Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee,
- c) a commitment to participate in an appropriate competency-based educational program, or evidence of having completed an equivalent educational program,
- d) a Presbytery/District appointment to a vacancy in a Pastoral Charge, outreach ministry, or Presbytery/District-recognized ministry,
- e) final interviews by the Presbytery/District following successful completion of the educational program.

5 Standards for Designated Lay Ministers

- a) that The United Church of Canada have clear and measurable standards for Designated Lay Ministers that are appropriate to the roles and functions of their ministry position

- b) that the United Church develop methods to determine an individual's competencies for ministry through a prior learning assessment (PLA).
- c) that the United Church explore and develop ways in which ecumenically shared lay ministries can be affirmed and available for Pastoral Charges, mission units and Outreach Ministries.

6 Threshold between Congregation and Presbytery/District accountable ministries.

- a) that the threshold between a congregational-accountable ministry and a Presbytery/District-accountable ministry be based on the ministry roles being performed (education, outreach, pastoral care, worship) and on the number of hours in the position description,
- b) that a congregational appointment be made in consultation with the Presbytery/District for any ministry position under 14 hours per week (according to guidelines determined by the General Council),
- c) that any lay ministry position of 14 hours per week or more in the areas of education, outreach, pastoral care, or worship must conform to the requirements of designated lay ministry and be a Presbytery/District appointment.

7 Ordered Ministry

- a) that the current criteria for ordination and commissioning into the Order of Ministry be affirmed for ordered ministry, with the following change:
- b) that the period of active membership in The United Church of Canada before entering the discernment process be changed from one year to two years.

8 One Common Rite

That a process be developed to ensure the 38th General Council be well informed to consider one common rite into Ordered Ministry.

9 Network of theological schools and programs

That the General Council ensure the existence of a vibrant network of theological schools and programs so that all those who are interested in designated ministry positions will have access to a variety of educational opportunities.

10 Opportunities to study together

That this General Council create more opportunities for the various categories of designated ministry and laity to study together in programs that honour the various forms of ministry.

11 Continuing Education

That the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education and the Division of Mission in Canada be directed to explore new and creative ways to encourage and support continuing education for those in designated lay and ordered ministry.

12 Settlement to Presbytery/District Recognized Ministry

- a) that settlement by action of the Settlement Committee be to a Presbytery/District-recognized ministry or a Presbytery/District-accountable ministry
- b) that the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education be asked to develop appropriate criteria for Presbyteries/Districts to determine whether to accept a particular organization, agency, or outreach ministry as a suitable ('recognized') settlement site. These criteria would include, at least:
 - the willingness of the institution to be part of a covenant with the United Church;
 - the willingness of the individual to enter into this covenant and be accountable to the Presbytery/District; and

- the agreement that the individual will be involved in the life of the Presbytery/District and Conference.

13 Membership within the church courts

- a) that Designated Lay Ministers who are under appointment in a Presbytery/District-recognized ministry will have their membership transferred from a Congregation to the Presbytery/District
- b) i) that for the purposes of electing Commissioners to General Council, Designated Lay Ministers and Ordered Ministers together will make up 50 percent of the General Council, and that the proportion of each will be determined by their numbers [*Basis of Union*, Section 8.1.1]
ii) and that a remit be authorized to test the will of the church in this matter.
- c) that Designated Lay Ministers who are no longer in an appointment, unless on disability leave, will have their membership transferred from the Presbytery/District to a Congregation
- d) that Designated Lay Ministers who are no longer in an appointment will have their name, status, and employment history recorded by the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education.

14 Ordered Ministers not in a Presbytery/District-recognized ministry

That members of ordered ministry who are not in a Presbytery/District-recognized ministry and not regularly retired must be in a covenant relationship with a Congregation or recognized ministry to be considered for retention on the roll of Presbytery/District, unless Presbytery grants an exception.

15 Further Study

That The United Church of Canada engage in further study and action to incarnate a vision of ministry having these characteristics:

- a) *unity* — where all people are in ministry; where all forms of ministry are equally valued
- b) *responsiveness* — where the church is less institutional and more of a movement, reflecting the characteristics of Jesus as a risk-taker and an alternative voice to the dominant culture (prophetic, joyful and compassionate); the types and structures of ministry are flexible, non-hierarchical, spontaneous, contemporary, just and justice-seeking
- c) *accountability* — where ministry is rooted in the service of God's mission in the world, and is expressed in and accountable to the community
- d) *preparedness* — where all those in designated ministry are appropriately prepared theologically and in the practice of ministry for the forms of ministry to which they are called.

16. That the *Manual* be revised to reflect these actions and any necessary remits be authorised.

The following resolutions were referred to the DMPE for further work in consultation with the Committee on Theology and Faith

The Sacraments

- a) that the responsibility for granting permission for congregational leaders to preside at the sacraments of communion and baptism should rest with the Session (or its equivalent) in a Pastoral Charge as an extension of its responsibility to have oversight of 'the administration of the sacraments' [*Basis of Union*, Section 5.10.1(3)]
- b) that the responsibility for granting permission for Presbytery/District or Conference leaders to preside at the sacraments should rest with the Presbytery/District or Conference for those under its responsibility and authority.
- c) That the General Council, through the Division of Mission in Canada, provide or identify resource materials for Sessions re: the administration of the sacraments similar to those currently available to Lay Pastoral Ministers in Training.

Sacraments: Ordered Ministry and Designated Lay Ministry

- a) that membership in ordered ministry inherently provides the authority to preside at the sacraments of communion and baptism,
- b) that the Presbytery/District at the request of a Session (or its equivalent, or board of an outreach ministry) will have the authority to grant permission to celebrate the sacraments to Designated Lay Ministers with whom they have a covenant relationship.