

GCE06 MINISTRY LEADERSHIP TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THE CHURCH IN THE 2020s

Origin: Executive of the General Council

1. What is the issue?

The 43rd General Council (2018) received several proposals in response to concerns that the vocational ministry needs of smaller, often rural, ministries are not being adequately met in these changing times. As well, other issues related to designated lay ministry and licensed lay worship leadership were recognized as relevant to the concerns for vocational ministry service in rural and smaller communities. The Executive of the General Council directed the General Secretary to conduct a comprehensive study on these issues and develop a strategy for meeting the ministry needs of all communities of faith, including access to the sacraments. A task group was established in 2019 to engage in this comprehensive study.

The task group has concluded that it is not reasonable to assume that every pastoral charge can have a pastorate without interruption (Basis of Union Section 10.10.2) as it might have been imagined or intended in 1925. The contexts and expectations in our communities, in Canadian society, and in ministry personnel lives have changed dramatically since union. Despite these changes, or because of them, even where our policies or expectations have not kept up, vibrant faithful ministry is happening in rural and smaller communities of faith, led by vibrant and faithful lay members and by generous, resilient, and theologically astute ministry personnel, active and retired. These proposals imagine that Section 10.10.2 of The Basis of Union can be fulfilled in new and different ways ninety-seven years later.

2. Why is this issue important?

The task group has understood the purpose of the Church is to be a community that embodies “Christ’s presence in the world” [*A Song of Faith*], seeking to love God and to love neighbour. That purpose is lived out through its communities of faith. Those communities of faith are where the faith tradition is taught and nurtured, where “gifts are shared for the good of all” [*A Song of Faith*], where persons are strengthened to resist the forces in our world that would marginalize, exploit, and destroy. Christian tradition has seen the Church as an instrument “of the loving Spirit of Christ” [*A Song of Faith*] for the mending of creation.

The church has said that we believe that “for the sake of the world, God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry” [*A Song of Faith*]. Each of us has a call that sets us apart for a particular task or tasks. Call can take different forms at different times in our lives. That call can be as a teacher, a pharmacist, a janitor, a nurse, a farmer, and the list goes on. As a denomination, we have not honoured these various calls as much as we could, especially given some reflection in Scripture about the Church, reflection that reminds us of the variety of gifts God has given (e.g., I Corinthians 12).

Some persons are called to exercise their ministry in and for the service of the Church. Such leadership is necessary if the Church is to fulfill the role God has for it, by helping to create and

nurture the community that teaches, comforts, confronts, serves, and witnesses to the wider world concerning God's creating, redeeming, and abiding love. In the community of faith, some leadership is volunteer, involved in its educational, outreach, and governance activities, and accountable to the community of faith. Some leadership is paid and accountable to the denomination. It focusses on equipping the saints for their ministry in the world.

Designated lay ministry was established by the 37th General Council in 2000 as a continued evolution of lay ministry. It was expected that it would meet the localized needs of smaller rural congregations, thus site-specific and time limited. In practice, however, it opened vocational ministry to a significant cohort of called, faithful leadership that had previously felt that they had no access to vocational ministry, effectively establishing a third stream of paid accountable ministry largely indistinguishable in call and function from ordered ministry. Most designated lay ministers describe a lifelong call to vocational ministry in the whole of the church.

The church has been more than willing to bend the definitions and limitations of designated lay ministry to call up and appoint designated lay ministers into traditional pastoral ministry roles. Remit Six authorized by the 42nd General Council, however, rejected the inclusion of designated lay ministry as a stream into the Order of Ministry. The task group and GCE have had to honour this decision of the church. This has left designated lay ministry in a sort of limbo. Designated Lay Ministers are drawn on to fulfill all the functions of ministry in pastoral charges and in serving the wider church but are not granted the same status as ordered ministers.

The designated lay ministry educational pathway/pedagogy is not dissimilar to that of other theological programs that integrate academic study and practice of ministry (for example, the Centre for Christian Studies and the summer distance program at the Atlantic School of Theology). The task group concludes that there is a role for the original conception of designated lay ministry (from the 37th General Council) while noting there are educational avenues of theological formation for ordered ministry that were not as accessible in 2000. The task group also heard that the designated lay ministry program was not accessible for some lay people who wish to offer trained ministry in their home communities of faith (often rural and/or smaller communities of faith). These realities led the task group to recommend refocusing the Designated Lay Ministry program on the original intention to prepare paid accountable lay leaders for ministry in their home community of faith.

The task group and the GCE recognize the long and faithful ministry that current designated lay ministers offer to the church, in all councils of the church, and thus propose to the 44th General Council that the church develop pathways that recognize the experience, service, and commitment of individuals currently serving as designated lay ministers, in meeting the criteria for Testamur and, thus, eligibility to be commissioned or ordained. These pathways to ordination or commissioning will be optional for current designated lay ministers.

The full report of the task group may be found [here](#).

3. How does this proposal help us to live into our church's commitments on equity?

The task group met from December 2019 through July 2021 and consulted with approximately 350 people from all regional councils:

- lay leaders of congregations without ministry personnel for extended periods of time (two consultations with members identified by regional council ministers);
- designated lay ministers (two consultations self-selected from an open invitation plus a survey [128 responses to the survey]);
- diaconal ministers (with experience in rural and urban communities of faith identified by regional council pastoral relations ministers);
- ordained ministers (with experience in rural and urban communities of faith identified by regional council pastoral relations ministers);
- staff of field-based theological education programs (Atlantic School of Theology summer distance program for ordination; Centre for Christian Studies for diaconal ministry; program for designated lay ministry at St. Andrew's College);
- community development capacity coordinators, regional pastoral relations and community of faith support ministers;
- Indigenous Ministries and Justice and Indigenous Office of Vocation staff;
- Christine Jerrett, Network and New Ministries Animator, General Council Office;
- Éric Hébert-Daly, Ministères en français.

4. How might the General Council respond to the issue?

*note: It is suggested that the General Council consider Section A and Section B separately.

The Executive of the General Council proposes that the 44th General Council could:

A. Better Supporting Rural and Smaller Communities of Faith

1. Lay-led Communities of Faith

- a) affirm the importance and value of "lay-led congregations" (a descriptive term, not a formal "class", loosely describing a congregation without called or appointed ministry personnel for more than a year) continuing to be linked to the denomination and supported in governance by a regional council appointed pastoral charge supervisor;
- b) affirm the role of the regional councils in assisting communities of faith in determining appropriate governance and decision-making practices and necessary oversight of any person paid for services (custodial, administrative, ministry, etc).

2. Licensed Lay Worship Leaders

- a) reaffirm that licensed lay worship leaders continue to be limited to worship leadership on an occasional basis, "occasional" determined by the regional council;

- b) revise the policy with respect to Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to require that where the community of faith requires a larger scope of service, or more than “occasional” leadership, than is within the scope of a licensed lay worship leader, the regional council work with the community of faith to develop either a collaborative ministry or a congregational designated ministry role with its attendant accountabilities and ensure adequate training and oversight of congregational designated ministry.

3. Congregational Designated Ministry

- a) revise the policy with respect to congregational designated ministers to require that
 - i. if a congregational designated ministry position includes worship leadership the congregational designated minister must successfully complete the licensed lay worship leadership program of that regional council, or an equivalency determined by the regional council, and be a full member of The United Church of Canada;
 - ii. if the congregational designated minister is the primary individual leading worship, then they must be a full member of The United Church of Canada;
 - iii. revise Section I.1.11.4 d) of The Manual to delete the requirement that there be a ministry personnel appointed or called to the community of faith and replace it with the requirement that the regional council ensure that there is adequate and appropriate support and oversight of the ministry.

4. Pastoral Charge Supervisors

- a) affirm the importance of the role of pastoral charge supervisors to nurture the connexion with and support of the United Church with churches that do not have appointed or called ministry personnel;
- b) direct the General Secretary, with the regional councils, to consider how the role of paid pastoral charge supervisors may support the development and evolution of collaborative ministries.

5. Technology

- a) encourage regional councils to give priority to and encourage leveraging technology to support communities of faith in the provision of worship and pastoral care and for supporting oversight, supervision, and governance.

B. Designated Lay Ministry - in light of the rejection of the One Order of Ministry remit proposal in 2018:

1. For Current Designated Lay Ministers

- a) direct the General Secretary, in consultation with Designated Lay Ministers, to develop a proposal to enable current recognized Designated Lay Ministers to meet the Testamur requirements for ordering (commissioning or

ordination). Such a proposal will recognize the lifelong vocational call of many current designated lay ministers; honour and value their many years of service to the church; and credit their theological education and formation for ministry. These criteria should form the basis for any prior learning assessment that may form part of such a proposal. Such a proposal should also take into account that there may be current recognized Designated Lay Ministers who already meet the criteria for Testamur and qualify for immediate transition into ordered ministry; and

- b) direct the General Secretary to consider recognition of status of Designated Lay Ministers who are retired.

2. For Future Designated Lay Ministers

- a) limit designated lay ministry to that which was conceived by the 37th General Council;
- b) refocus the designated lay ministry program to reflect the specific original focus;
- c) refocus designated lay ministry as a lay practice of ministry specifically on localized and time-specific appointment within their community of faith, or the current community of faith appointment;
- d) articulate the distinction between those called to ministry in the community of faith or pastoral charge where their membership resides and those called to life-long denominational vocational ministry;
- e) encourage the Board of Vocation and candidacy boards to direct people discerning a call to life-long church-wide ministry towards ordered ministry preparation and formation;
- f) the church stop “using” designated lay ministers as if they are ordered ministers with privilege of call, lifetime service throughout the church and recognition in retirement while at the same time restricting them to appointment, providing no status between appointments or in retirement, and paying them less;
- g) in consideration of the localized character of the practice of designated lay ministry, request that regional councils not approve appointments of designated lay ministers to communities of faith that are not the home communities, or current site of appointment, of the designated lay minister.

5. **For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:**

The United Church—through its faith statements, practices, and policies—has made theological affirmations about the paid, accountable ministry that is carried out in and for the service of the Church:

- God calls individuals to ministries of Word, Sacrament, Education, Service, and Pastoral Care.
- Call has both an inner dimension (the individual must believe themselves called to such a ministry by God) and an external dimension (others must see in the individual the gifts

and graces necessary for such a ministry); the Church tests that call at various points in an individual's journey to become a paid, accountable minister in the Church.

- Changing context requires re-thinking ministry, and the United Church's streams of ministry, in the same way it requires re-thinking all other aspects of our theology. In the church's history, different ministry streams have emerged alongside the ordained and diaconal streams whose roots lie in the early history of the Christian Church. Some streams have changed and evolved, others have existed for a time and disappeared. At present, our changed context requires re-thinking how the categories of Designated Lay Ministry, Licensed Lay Worship Leaders, and Congregational Designated Ministers have been understood. The current context also requires adaptation in the ways diaconal and ordained ministers who are serving communities of faith carry out their ministry.

Ministry in rural areas and in smaller communities of faith is not a problem to be solved but an evolving reality to be embraced. In many cases the church's rules and regulations need allow for new understandings of and criteria for denominational accountability and due diligence. While some standards of accountability need to be denominational, many, particularly those for lay leadership and community of faith oversight, are contextual and need to be determined regionally. COVID has taught us that rules are regional and often time limited. We need to be nimble, flexible, and responsive.