



Category 3 Remit

Study Guide for Remit 6: One Order of Ministry

Approved by the 42nd General Council 2015

Between February 2016 and 28 February 2018, each presbytery and pastoral charge governing body will formally be asked in a category 3 remit to approve the creation of one order of ministry.

This is the question to be voted on:

At present there is one order of ministry that is made up of ordained ministers, ordained to word, sacrament and pastoral care, and diaconal ministers, commissioned to education, service and pastoral care. There is also a category of ministry made up of those who are recognized as designated lay ministers following successful completion of a specific program of study.

Does the presbytery/pastoral charge agree that there should be one new order of ministry encompassing the present categories of recognized designated lay ministers, diaconal ministers, and ordained ministers, with ordination to the ministry of word, sacrament, education, service and pastoral care as the single rite of entry, and with provision for the continued identity of the diakonia within the ordained ministry?

What the United Church formally says about ministry

Statement on Ministry 2012

The Statement on Ministry that General Council approved in 2012 (see gc42.ca/remits, under Resources) offers a succinct explanation of the church's theology of ministry. It is designed to be continually revised, consistent with the church's reformed heritage, as the practice and understanding of ministry changes. If passed, this remit will result in a further revision to the Statement.

Why are we considering this change?

While each is distinctive in definition and history, several task groups have identified the difficulty in distinguishing among the various streams of ministry in the United Church; in particular, explaining the functional difference among designated lay ministry, diaconal ministry, and ordained ministry. Moreover, various surveys have pointed to congregations not being concerned about the differences among the various streams of ministry, but rather deeply concerned about effective and faithful ministry leadership.

The reality on the ground is that each stream is commonly appointed or called to similar functions in solo pastoral ministry leadership, including the sacraments. Recent proposals for authorizing diaconal ministers for the sacraments as a rite of commissioning have further minimized distinctions. Most diaconal and designated lay ministers are already authorized by their Conferences for the sacraments. In relation to designated lay ministry, the word "lay" is often misunderstood.

The meaning of the One Order proposal

If the remit is approved, there will be one form of ordered ministry in the United Church known as the ordained ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral care and of education and service. Within this one ministry, provision will be made for the continued identity of the diakonia (see Frequently Asked Questions). The explicit mechanism of diaconal identity will be developed with the Diakonia of the United Church (DUCC) network. Since diaconal identity currently involves a specific program of study (Centre for Christian Studies) and commitment to the values of the global diaconal movement, it is assumed that these two foundations will continue.

Designated lay ministry (DLM), as it is now known, will end and be incorporated into the single ordained ministry of the church. This will involve creating a new diploma study program based on the learning styles of the current designated lay ministry program, and expanded and deepened to achieve a basic equivalency in competencies and preparation for ministry leadership. This new program will be similar to current programs at the Centre for Christian Studies and the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (training specifically for First Nations ministry). While the M.Div. program in its many forms across the church will remain the primary educational path to ordination, the new Diploma in Pastoral Theology program will provide an additional path.

While the One Order proposal is for a single ordained ministry, it changes the current ordained stream—which is defined as primarily word, sacrament, and pastoral care—so that it reflects the reality that in practice it also incorporates education and service. The proposal expands this stream to be more representative of the whole practice of the vocation in our church.

Current streams and educational paths

The church already recognizes both degree and diploma paths for ministry formation. Alongside various Master of Divinity (M.Div.) programs, the Centre for Christian Studies program and the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre program for Aboriginal Ministries have all been accepted as approved studies for admission to the order of ministry in the United Church.

The Diploma in Diaconal Ministry (Centre for Christian Studies) is a four- to five-year ministry-based program using an action–reflection model that involves learning circles, academic courses, and field placements.

The Diploma in Aboriginal Ministry (Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre) is a five-year ministry-based program involving learning circles, half-time field placement for the five years of the program, and spiritual formation with a Vision Keeper (supervisor).

The Diploma in Designated Lay Ministry is a three-year ministry-based program (requiring at least half-time appointments) consisting of six learning circles of 10 days each, three courses taken at a theological school or other university context, two comprehensive ministry papers, and ongoing ministry supervision throughout the studies.

The Master of Divinity program takes many forms, from distance learning programs to the more traditional three-year campus models. Part of the requirement for ordination for M.Div. students includes a full-time supervised internship of at least eight months or equivalent (St. Andrew's College has an 18- to 20-month ministry internship). The Atlantic School of Theology offers a five-year distance learning program for those engaged in

ongoing ministry. M.Div. programs generally require 30 academic credits of study, an internship, and field placements.

The One Order proposal would see the Diploma in Designated Lay Ministry replaced by a Diploma in Pastoral Theology. This new diploma would be expanded and based on the current DLM model in terms of ministry placement and learning expectations.

Pros and cons of One Order

Generally there seems to be limited understanding among United Church members of the differences among the three streams of ministry. For most people in the pews, there is little difference, provided the leadership they receive is capable, faithful, and effective.

Education

For the majority of denominations, Protestant and Catholic, the most common degree required for ordination or pastoral leadership is the Master of Divinity (M.Div.). It replaced, many years ago, the Bachelor of Divinity degree, which still required an undergraduate degree (a first bachelor's degree) as a prerequisite.

The M.Div. has been the mechanism of ensuring that ordained ministers are prepared in a broad range of capacities: theology, history, pastoral care, ethics, and so on. Ministry leadership needs to value both training and education, and the M.Div. has been accepted as ensuring that a candidate for ordained ministry possesses both.

A significant concern about the One Order proposal is whether it diminishes the commitment of the church to an educated clergy. Yet it should be pointed out that the five-year diaconal studies program is currently accepted as offering the core competencies for ministry leadership. Similarly, the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre program, based on a five-year formation period for ministry leadership in First Nations communities, has also been accepted as appropriate preparation.

The designated lay ministry (DLM) training program emphasizes life experience and allows for different learning styles. Considering that designated lay ministers now make up about 10 percent of ministry personnel, and their numbers will likely increase, the One Order proposal calls for the DLM program to be expanded into a Diploma in Pastoral Theology, similar in time and learning expectations to the Centre for Christian Studies and Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre models.

Identity

Some fear that the One Order proposal would lead to a significant loss of identity for all three streams of ministry. In respect to ordained ministry, some argue that ordination currently requires a level of education and preparation that they do not see present in this proposal, resulting in an overall diminishment of both standards and status for ordained ministers.

Some diaconal ministers are concerned that this proposal does not adequately recognize the distinctive history, call, and formation that they consider characteristic of the diaconate.

Some believe the differences among the current three streams of ministry are evident and important, and that ordaining everyone means the loss of these key differences. While there could be some loss of identity for all three streams of ministry if the One Order proposal is

accepted, it could be argued that this streamlining would eliminate artificial boundaries in the church among word, sacrament, pastoral care, education, and service as all three train for and practise each of these ministry functions.

Having all ministers belong to one order should also help eliminate the idea that diaconal ministers are not “real ministers.” The diaconal community in the United Church will be involved in determining how the continued identity of the diakonia will be expressed within the ordained ministry.

Equity

The One Order proposal addresses issues of fairness in employment policy for designated lay ministers (DLMs). In principle, DLMs currently have status only while under appointment. In practice this is unworkable, and often ignored, raising issues of continued status between appointments, insurance, pension entitlements, and job security.

The One Order proposal will create a single minimum pay scale for ministry personnel. In the current financial situation of many churches, the lower minimum salary of designated lay ministers can offer an incentive to choose the less-expensive option. A minimum salary scale for all ministers offers greater equity and encourages congregations to look at the gifts of ministry they need, rather than a pay category.

There will continue to be an expression of paid lay ministry called congregational designated ministry (CDM). CDMs will be accountable to their community of faith, which will have full employment responsibility within established guidelines. CDMs will always serve in relation to an ordained minister (or candidate), focus on a limited spectrum of ministry leadership, and not carry sole responsibility for congregational leadership. Therefore they will not be part of the order of ministry.

More detailed study resource available

This background material for Remit 6 is summarized from a longer document that was developed with the assistance of an advisory panel. The longer document includes a study guide for exploring the proposal, plus detailed discussion about all aspects of this proposed change in our church's ministry. This comprehensive document can be found at <http://gc42.ca/remits>, under Resources.

What is a category 3 remit?

A category 3 remit is required for substantive, denomination-shaping changes to the Basis of Union (*The Manual*, s. F2). A category 3 remit also requires that a study process be available in the church before the remit is released.

The proposed change must be sent to all presbyteries and the governing body of every pastoral charge for a vote. If an absolute majority of the presbyteries and an absolute majority of the pastoral charges vote in favour of the proposed change—not just a majority of those that vote—then the next General Council must also vote in favour of the proposed change for it to take effect.

NB: If a presbytery or pastoral charge does not vote, that is considered a vote AGAINST the proposal.

Frequently asked questions

What is the diakonia?

Diakonia is a Greek word for “ministry” or “service.” The traditional role of diakonia can be seen today in service (social ministry) in response to needs within and beyond the local community, and in Christian education, welcoming “outsiders” (strangers, seekers, newcomers, candidates for baptism) and bringing them into the faith community.

Will our ordination under the One Order proposal be recognized by ecumenical partners?

The overall direction of the One Order proposal is consistent with the ecumenical consensus reached in the Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry document, which the global ecumenical community has embraced.

What is congregational designated ministry?

A congregational designated minister is a baptized layperson employed by a local ministry unit who is accountable to the governing body of the local ministry except in matters of oversight and discipline, where they are accountable to the presbytery. The role of a congregational designated minister is to fulfill a specified ministry position; to work with the ministry personnel who is called or appointed to the pastoral charge, as directed by the governing body; and to comply with the polity of the United Church.