

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders

Guidelines for Preparation

January 2011



The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

LLWL 730/2011

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L'Église Unie du Canada

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Supported by the
Mission and Service Fund

Design: Ian Ball, Graphics and Print

Printed in Canada

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What's New

Clarification regarding role and remuneration for licensed lay worship leaders (LLWL):

- LLWL do not have status as ministry personnel
- LLWL may not be appointed to a presbytery vacancy
- LLWL may receive an honorarium

Introduction

Purpose of These Guidelines

As members of The United Church of Canada, we are called by God to be disciples of Christ in all aspects of our lives. God's call is demonstrated by our personal and spiritual development; our relationships with others; our actions in our workplaces, homes, and communities; and our contribution to God's ongoing creation. Also, we live out our call through our commitment to our faith community through activities such as participating in worship, caring for one another, making financial contributions, engaging in outreach, and supporting Christian nurture of children, youth, and adults.

In addition to general participation in congregational life, we may feel called to particular responsibilities such as worship leadership and preaching through the role of licensed lay worship leader. This booklet offers guidelines for those who are considering such a specialized responsibility, those who will shape programs to prepare such people, and those who will be involved in assessment and oversight.

Scope of These Guidelines

This booklet offers *guidelines* only for the preparation of licensed lay worship leaders in The United Church of Canada. These guidelines are intended for use by presbyteries/districts in

- developing curriculum for locally organized training programs
- evaluating the appropriateness of programs organized by other agencies and institutions
- assessing the informal equivalencies put forward by individuals applying to be considered for particular training programs

Programs vary according to the context, the abilities of participants, the availability of local resources, and the structure, sequencing, and organization of particular courses of study.

Role and Characteristics of Licensed Lay Worship Leaders

In 1925, when the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist churches joined to form The United Church of Canada, lay preachers, as a leadership designation, became a part of this union. Today, rather than the designation “lay preachers,” the term “licensed lay worship leader” is used to designate those who offer occasional worship leadership that continues to be part of our life as a church.

Specifically, a **licensed lay worship leader** is a person who

- has completed a course of study and, after appropriate recommendation and evaluation processes by presbytery/district, is licensed to offer occasional worship leadership and preaching within the bounds of that presbytery/district in the absence of a regularly designated minister.
- conducts worship when a regularly designated minister is away due to illness, continuing education course work, or vacation.
- is a member in good standing in a local congregation who has been determined by his/her home congregation and local presbytery/district to have gifts and a sense of call to a ministry of worship leadership and preaching. Through participation in a presbytery/district-approved course of study, these gifts and call are developed further, giving both the licensed lay worship leader and the congregation confidence that worship leadership is built upon a theological and biblical foundation consistent with the ethos of the United Church.

Many lay people in a congregation participate and give leadership in worship, but those who choose to participate in a licensed lay worship leadership program are choosing to develop their leadership gifts further. They are *not* entering an order of ministry. The term “licensed” indicates that an individual has engaged in a course of study and is considered suitable for this ministry by a congregational session, board, or council as well as that congregation’s presbytery/district. Licensed lay worship leaders are not eligible for appointment to any paid accountable ministry personnel position. At the discretion of the congregation, they may receive an honorarium for conducting individual worship services. Licensed lay worship leaders are not eligible, by virtue of licensing, to preside at sacraments or to wear a preaching stole or clergy collar.

Prior Assessment

Before expressing interest in participating in a licensed lay worship leader course, and before requesting recommendation to such a course by a congregational session, board, or council, an individual has gifts and experience that lend themselves to a ministry of worship leadership and preaching.

- Some people may bring transferable skills from their life and workplace experience, such as written and oral communication, public speaking, and teaching.
- In addition, some may indicate budding gifts for worship leadership through such congregational activities as facilitating adult study groups and prayer groups, making presentations at committee

meetings, and contributing thoughtful and reflective writing to church newsletters or other publications.

- Of course, an individual may clearly demonstrate worship leadership through leading prayers and liturgy, preaching, and conducting entire services.

Personal Qualities

In affirming that an individual has the potential to participate in a licensed lay worship leaders program, a session, board, or council is saying that this individual has demonstrated a commitment to the ethos of the United Church and is comfortable with that ethos as it is manifested at the levels of pastoral charge, presbytery/district, Conference, and General Council.

Such an individual may possess a prayerful and integrated spirituality, openness to ongoing development and learning, and a desire to share a relevant faith informed by Christian hope and God's Spirit. Other personal qualities may include the ability to

- relate sensitively to a wide range of people
- be discreet and trustworthy
- engage with ideas in an open and non-judgmental fashion

Clear written and oral communication skills, as well as organizational skills, are additional assets. While none of us is fully formed, and an individual interested in being a licensed lay worship leader will not have all the necessary competencies at the beginning of her or his course of study, evidence of budding gifts that can be further honed is part of the assessment process.

Competencies

During a licensed lay worship leaders course of study, competencies will be explored such as

- developing knowledge of the scriptural basis for Christian faith
- understanding theological themes
- exploring United Church history and polity
- recognizing and respecting different congregational contexts
- organizing and preparing worship liturgy
- understanding and writing prayers
- becoming familiar with United Church hymnody as singing our faith
- preparing and delivering sermons
- practising public speaking and presentation

Again, the intent of this booklet is to offer general guidelines, not to outline a program of study. Each presbytery/district-approved program will vary according to the congregational context, the abilities of participants, the availability of local resources, and the structure, sequencing, and organization of a particular program.

Program Recommendations

According to *The Manual*, presbytery/district is directly responsible for the oversight of study programs leading to recognition of licensed lay worship leaders. To assist this oversight, the Human Resources Unit of the General Council Office offers the following suggestions to enhance the consistency of presbytery/district programs across the church.

What follows are suggested study topics or elements that are deemed to be important ingredients in a licensed lay worship leader program. Presbytery/district will decide how best to structure the content of these topics or program elements.

Program Structure Options

There are various approaches to the structure of an educational program. For example:

1. Using existing courses and programs offered by theological education institutions, followed by an assessment of an individual's readiness to be recognized as a licensed lay worship leader by presbytery/district.
2. A group of presbyteries/districts or Conferences requesting an education centre to provide a licensed lay worship leaders program. For example, the Calling Lakes Centre at Fort Qu'Appelle, Saskatchewan, currently offers a program for prairie presbyteries/districts.
3. Organizing a presbytery/district program delivered in a variety of formats, such as
 - independent, directed-study programs
 - weekly evening events
 - monthly weekend workshops
 - intensive sessions offered in larger blocks over several days

From among these options, weekend workshops in an intensive format offers the greatest access for participants and resource people. Such a format gives time and space to integrate learning through practice and reflection on practice.

Encouraging Adult Learners

In developing a curriculum for adult learners, consider the following principles:

- Learning is a lifelong process that includes formal institutional education as well as all aspects of a person's life, such as family of origin, relationships, workplace, church life, community engagement, reading, ongoing activism, and contemplation.
- Learning is enhanced by attention to various learning styles and with opportunities for active engagement combined with time for reflection on action.
- Learning in a faith context is framed by our understanding of God and life as a Christian disciple.
- Learning is relevant when it integrates pastoral and theological questions, combines acquisition of information with relationship building, encourages imagination and creativity with analysis and synthesis, and promotes confidence as well as competence.

Learning includes many elements and carries potential for transformation as person, disciple, and worship leader as old assumptions are examined and new ways of engaging the world are considered. At the axis of old and new is reflection, a process of examining, questioning, affirming, and revising previous perceptions. God calls us to be transformed, to adopt life-affirming rather than death-dealing ways of living. God desires our transformation from people who lack self-worth to people who recognize our worth as God's beloved. We are called from individualistic to communal ways of being, from self-serving to serving others, and from despair to hope.

To engage in transformative learning, a learner needs to reflect on current beliefs and thoughts to choose new ways of believing and thinking. Adult educator Patricia Cranton suggests three strands to reflection:¹

- *Content reflection* explores content or information. For example, offering prayer in worship involves looking at the purpose of prayer at various points in the service (call to worship, offering prayer, prayers of intercession, and so on).
- In *process reflection*, rather than focusing on what is prayer, a liturgist needs to think about how to put a prayer together. What resources will be helpful? What experts or manuals need to be consulted? What kinds of tools will be useful?
- In *premise reflection*, learners take a step back from the situation and ask underlying questions: Why do we pray? Whom do we pray to? How does prayer shape the one praying?

Content attends to concrete information, whereas process explores how information is put together and what resources will be used, and premise looks at the underlying meaning. A well-rounded learning experience attends to all three reflective strands.

In addition to reflection, educators may consider what elements create an environment of encouragement for adult learners, such as

- attending to the physical setting for learning
- clarifying expectations for learning and assessment
- seeking and being open to input from adult learners
- creating an environment of mutual learning
- establishing realistic and attainable learning objectives
- evaluating the program by drawing on insights from participants, leaders, and presbytery/district

1. Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994).

Suggested Program Elements

In preparing a licensed lay worship leaders course of study, consider the following topics:

Worship Leadership

- Licensed lay worship leader parameters
 - clarifying worship leadership roles and functions
- Worship service
 - exploring United Church worship service structures
 - looking at seasons of a liturgical year
 - examining patterns and forms of worship in The United Church of Canada
 - doing a brief historical overview of worship
- Underlying principles
 - respecting a congregation's traditions
 - clarifying the focus of a worship service: liturgical season, needs of the congregation, other participants (e.g., musician, lay reader)
- Worship leadership skills
 - structuring and composing public prayers
 - trying out appropriate posture, movement, and gesture
 - practising voice production: volume, pace, rhythm
 - incorporating silence
 - using inclusive language
 - attending to needs of children and youth
- Pastoral skills
 - anticipating the “pastoral” dimensions of lay leadership in worship
- Worship leadership practicum
 - finding written and online resources
 - assessing quality of resources
 - addressing issues of plagiarism and acknowledging sources
 - preparing and delivering liturgies

Preaching

- Looking at the underlying principles in preaching, such as “Why do we preach?”
- Using the lectionary
- Understanding and responding to congregational and societal pastoral contexts

- Preparing to preach
 - entering the texts
 - brainstorming and focusing
 - using preaching resources appropriately
 - organizing a text
- Developing and practising delivery skills
- Preaching practicum as opportunities for delivery and receiving feedback on content

Biblical Foundations

Hebrew Scriptures

- Introducing approaches to biblical texts
- Exploring historical and cultural contexts of ancient Israel
- Surveying biblical texts

New Testament

- Exploring economic, political, and religious context of Jesus of Nazareth
- Surveying Paul's life and ministry and the economic, political, and religious contexts of the Pauline communities
- Looking at the formation of the gospels
- Reviewing types of text: parables, miracle stories, letters, apocalyptic literature
- Walking through later New Testament letters

Theological Foundations

- Who is God?
 - reflecting on biblical images
 - exploring contemporary approaches to understanding God
- Who is Jesus Christ?
 - looking at gospel portraits of Jesus
 - reflecting on varieties of understanding of Jesus
 - exploring contemporary Christologies
- What is church?
 - noticing varied biblical approaches
 - exploring contemporary frameworks for church
- Surveying church history, including the history of lay leadership and ministry
- Reviewing formation and history of The United Church of Canada
- Examining theological topics such as sin, grace, salvation, spirit, sacrament
- Comparing Christianity with other world religions

Pastoral and Contextual Foundations

- United Church ministerial structures
 - clarifying roles and responsibilities at the levels of congregation, presbytery/district, Conference, and General Council
 - describing roles and responsibilities of licensed lay worship leaders

Further Learning

Learners may identify other learning needs that frame their ongoing development as Christian disciples and their continuing formation for worship leadership, such as

- personal and spiritual formation
- patterns and disciplines of personal prayer and reflection
- varieties and styles of preaching

Appendix A: Polity

The Manual, 2010, of The United Church of Canada provides the policy and authority for the licensed lay worship leaders program. Relevant sections are as follows:

Definitions

001

“**Licensed Lay Worship Leader**” means a member of the laity recommended by a Session or Church Board or Church Council who has successfully completed the course of study required by the appropriate General Council working unit and is licensed by the Presbytery.

The Basis of Union

5.10.2 It shall also be [the Session’s] duty:...

(3) to recommend to Presbytery suitable lay members to be licensed as Licensed Lay Worship Leaders.

6.4 It shall be the duty of the Presbytery:...

6.4.4 to license as a Licensed Lay Worship Leaders a member of the laity who has been recommended by a Session and who has successfully completed the course of study in accordance with the procedures established by the General Council and after examination is approved by the Presbytery.

By-Laws

344 Licensed Lay Worship Leaders.

- (a) The Presbytery shall make enquiry as to the ability, character, and doctrine of a person recommended by a Session or Church Board or Church Council to be licensed as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader, and shall conduct a written examination on the course of study required by the appropriate General Council working unit. Upon successful completion of these requirements, the Presbytery shall issue a licence to the person on the prescribed form. The Licensed Lay Worship Leader shall be recognized at a public service to be held under the direction of the Chairperson of the Presbytery.
- (b) Presbytery Direction. The person licensed as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader shall function under the direction of the Presbytery.
- (c) Transferability. A Licensed Lay Worship Leader transferring membership in the United Church from one Pastoral Charge to another Pastoral Charge in the same Presbytery shall continue to be recognized as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader. A Licensed Lay Worship Leader transferring membership to a Pastoral Charge in another Presbytery shall not function as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader until recognized as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader by that Presbytery.

- (d) Renewal of Licence. The licence of a Licensed Lay Worship Leader shall be renewed each year at the discretion of the Presbytery within the jurisdiction of which such Licensed Lay Worship Leader is a member in good standing of a Congregation.

Program of Study for Licensed Lay Worship Leaders

- 733 Program. The normal program leading to licensing as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader shall extend over at least two (2) years, and shall include the study of theology and church history, Hebrew and Christian scriptures, preaching, and worship and pastoral skills. Lists of recommended books and seminar topics on each subject are available from the appropriate General Council working unit.
- 734 Oversight. The Presbytery shall have oversight of study programs for Licensed Lay Worship Leaders. It shall be the responsibility of a Committee of the Presbytery to assess the readiness of an applicant for licensing as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader.

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Certificate for Licensed Lay Worship Leaders



having been recommended by the Session of

_____ Pastoral Charge

is hereby licensed by

_____ Presbytery

to serve as **Licensed Lay Worship Leader**
within the bounds of the Presbytery

Issued at

Date

Secretary of Presbytery

Chairperson of Presbytery

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