

The Development of Designated Lay Ministry in the United Church

The 37th General Council, August 2000, received a report from the Division of Ministry Personnel and Education entitled “Ministry Together.” This report presented a model for paid, accountable lay ministry for congregations and other ministries, which would be known as “Designated Lay Ministry.” The model envisioned a set of common competency requirements for all positions, with specialized competencies for particular types of ministry. Individuals would qualify to fill these ministry positions based on the completion of an educational program or on satisfactory evidence of prior learning and experience.

The report was not adopted as a whole, although several of the resolutions were passed. In summary, the Council agreed to

1. establish a category of ministry to be called designated lay ministry (which would assume the previous categories of lay pastoral minister and staff associate)
2. establish that all those in positions of designated lay ministry would be members of, and accountable to, the presbytery
3. recognize “congregational accountable ministry,” which was defined as “any paid accountable ministry of less than fourteen (14) hours per week, exercised by a lay person within and for a Pastoral Charge, in the areas of education, outreach, pastoral care, worship, or service, for which the person is accountable to the Pastoral Charge through its Official Board or Church Board or Church Council”

The 38th General Council in 2003 subsequently reduced the threshold of hours per week for congregational accountable ministry to eight, matching the original proposal in the “Ministry Together” report.

The establishment of designated lay ministers as a new presbytery membership status required a change to the Basis of Union; therefore a remit was required. Remit 5A asked:

Do you agree that: (a) the new collective term for lay persons appointed by a Presbytery to a Presbytery/District recognized ministry should be “Designated Lay Ministers”; and (b) membership in the Presbytery and the Conference be extended to such lay persons.

The remit was circulated with 77 presbyteries responding: 56 yes, 21 no.

The Designated Lay Ministry Report

Following the General Council in 2003, a task group was formed to work toward the implementation of designated lay ministry. Early in the task group’s process, it recognized that the implementation of designated lay ministry also necessitated the development of criteria and guidelines for paid congregational lay ministry. While the “Ministry Together” report was thorough in its portrayal of designated lay ministry, “criteria about United Church membership, educational expectations, screening procedures, liability, and accountability” for paid lay ministry below the eight-hour threshold was “to be developed.”

The Designated Lay Ministry Task Group report proposed that the church consider creating a comprehensive model of paid lay ministry under the broader status of “Designated Ministry,” with “Presbytery Designated Ministry” for those lay ministries that include accountability and membership with presbytery, and “Congregational Designated Ministry” for those ministries with accountability and membership in the congregation.

DLM Background

However, remit 5A, as authorized by the 37th General Council (2000), was subsequently enacted by the 38th General Council (2003). Therefore, the term designated lay minister, now in the Basis of Union, is the one that must be used for lay people appointed to a presbytery-recognized ministry, including those who were filling positions as lay pastoral ministers and staff associates.

Policy Refinement by the 39th General Council

The implication of the task group's report was that accountability for paid lay ministry positions would be to either the presbytery or to a congregation or pastoral charge. As a result, policy approved by the 39th General Council established that:

1. There be two streams of paid accountable lay ministry in the United Church:
 - (i) Designated Lay Ministers who are accountable to a Presbytery and recognized by the Conference; and
 - (ii) Congregational Designated Ministers who are accountable to a Pastoral Charge and recognized by the Presbytery.
2. Presbyteries shall approve all paid accountable ministry positions by either:
 - (i) declaring a vacancy that may be filled by a member of the Order of Ministry or a Designated Lay Minister; or
 - (ii) approving a Congregational Designated Ministry position to be filled by someone appropriately qualified according to guidelines to be approved by the Executive of the General Council.

The Implementation Team

When policy for Designated Lay Ministry and Congregational Designated Ministry had been established, the next task was to develop procedures and resources to support the assessment, education, selection, and support of paid lay ministry.

The responsibility for this work falls to the General Council Office, and an interunit staff team was assembled. Over a three-year period, the implementation team consulted with many individuals, groups, and committees that had a stake in paid lay ministry.

Based on the input from these various stakeholders, the implementation team established

- a methodology for assessing ministry positions
- an educational program for designated lay ministry, and a prior learning assessment process
- procedures for approving lay members as eligible for appointment and recognition as designated lay ministers

The Procedural Handbook

As the 40th General Council approached, the implementation team proposed that the church would be better served if the procedural policy related to designated lay ministry and congregational designated ministry was removed from *The Manual* and reside in a separate policy handbook that would be approved by the Executive of the General Council. Removing the procedural policy from *The Manual* would allow the Executive to make amendments to the procedures as required, rather than delaying three years for the approval of a General Council. This proposal came to the 40th General Council, and was approved. *Designated Lay Ministers Policy and Procedures* was first published in 2010.