Licensed Lay Worship Leaders

October 2016

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders (October 2016)

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L'Église Unie du Canada

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About This Resource

This resource contains

- policies and procedures that must be followed
- further resources that provide information and guidance on how to support the preparation of licensed lay worship leaders, which you are encouraged but not required to follow

This resource expands on the policy found under Pastoral Relations, Section I.1.8.5 of *The Manual*. Please refer to the current edition.

The following are updated from the August 2013 edition of this resource:

- edits to Program Structure Options
- contacts for additional resources substituted for bibliography

Living Out God's Mission in the World

The policies and procedures of The United Church of Canada exist to support the church in living out God's mission in the world. The licensed lay worship leader policies and procedures aim to support lay members who are specifically called to share their gifts of leadership and preaching.

Policies and Procedures

The policy about licensed lay worship leaders may be found under Pastoral Relations, Section I.1.8.5 of *The Manual.*

This section of the licensed lay worship leader resource includes additional policies and procedures that must be followed.

A **licensed lay worship leader** is a lay member of The United Church of Canada, in good standing, who has been recommended by the governing body of their pastoral charge, duly educated, and licensed by their presbytery to offer occasional worship leadership and preaching within the bounds of their presbytery.

This section applies to a layperson who

(a) is a member of The United Church of Canada;

(b) has been recommended by the governing body of their pastoral charge to be a licensed lay worship leader;

(c) is willing to take a course of preparation to be licensed, and

(d) is willing to serve as a licensed lay worship leader under the direction of the presbytery.

The process set out below must be followed:

1. The governing body identifies, or a lay member self-identifies to the governing body, a call to licensed lay worship leadership.
2. The lay member completes a preparatory course that extends over at least two years and includes the study of theology, church history, Hebrew and Christian scriptures, preaching, worship, and pastoral skills.
3. The presbytery tests the lay member's suitability and readiness for licensed lay worship leadership by examining their personal character, doctrinal beliefs, and educational competency.
4. The presbytery issues a licence to the lay member to function as a licensed lay worship leader within the jurisdiction of the presbytery, under the direction of the presbytery. The licence is for a limited amount of time, set by the presbytery, and may be renewed.
5. The presbytery recognizes the licensed lay worship leader at a service of worship, led by the chair of the presbytery.

Resources for Preparation

This section provides information and guidance to support the preparation of licensed lay worship leaders. You are encouraged but not required to follow the best practices described here.

Licence

What Does "Licensed" Mean?

In 1925, when the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregationalist churches joined to form The United Church of Canada, lay preachers, as a leadership designation, became 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.

Many lay people in a congregation participate and give leadership in worship, but those who 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 personally and theologically suitable to offer occasional worship leadership within the bounds of the presbytery.

Licensed lay worship leaders are not eligible for appointment to any paid accountable ministry position. At the discretion of the congregation, they may receive an honorarium for conducting individual worship services (this income must be claimed as taxable revenue). Licensed lay worship leaders are not eligible, by virtue of licensing, to preside at sacraments or to wear a preaching stole or clergy collar.

Suitability

Prior Assessment

Before expressing interest in participating in a licensed lay worship leader course, and before requesting recommendation to such a course by a pastoral charge governing body, an individual should be able to identify gifts and experiences that lend themselves to ministry of worship leadership and preaching.

- Some people may bring transferrable skills from their life and workplace experience, such as written and oral communication, public speaking, and teaching.
- In additional, some may indicate budding gifts for worship leadership through such congregational activities as facilitating study groups or prayer groups, making presentations at committee meetings, or contributing thoughtful, 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 governing body is saying that the 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, 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 relevant personal qualities may include the ability to

- relate sensitively to a wide range of people
- be discreet and trustworthy
- be aware of boundaries and how to manage them
- engage with ideas in an open and nonjudgmental fashion

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

Competencies

A lay member preparing to become a licensed lay worship leader should meet the following competencies:

- develop their knowledge of the scriptural basis for Christian faith
- understand theological themes
- explore United Church history and polity
- recognize and respect different congregational contexts
- organize and prepare worship liturgy
- understand and write prayers
- become familiar with United Church hymnody as singing our faith
- prepare and deliver sermons
- practise public speaking and presentation

Program of Study

Each presbytery-approved program will vary according to the congregational context, participants, and availability of resources. The following are suggested topics of study deemed to be important ingredients in a licensed lay worship leader program; each presbytery will decide how to best structure the content.

Program Structure Options

Various approaches can be followed to structure an educational program. For example:

- Using existing courses and programs offered by theological education institutions, followed by an assessment of an individual's readiness to be recognized by presbytery as a licensed lay worship leader.
- Organizing a presbytery 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

Weekend workshops in an intensive format offer the greatest access for participants and resource people. Such a format gives time and space to integrate learning through practice and reflection. A group of presbyteries may work together to create such a program.

Encouraging Adult Learners

In developing a curriculum for adult learners, the following should be considered.

- Learning is a life-long 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 by opportunities for active engagement combined with time for reflection.
- Learning in a faith context is framed by our understanding of God and of life as a Christian disciple.
- Learning is relevant when it integrates pastoral and theological questions, combines information with relationship building, encourages imagination and creativity along with analysis and synthesis, and promotes confidence as well as competence.

Learning carries potential for transformation as a person, disciple, and worship leader. 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 new ways of living that are life-affirming rather than death-dealing. God desires transformation from individualistic to communal ways of being, from self serving to serving others, from despair to hope.

To engage in transformative learning, a learner needs to reflect on current beliefs and thoughts and 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 prayer is, a liturgist needs to think about how to put a prayer together. What resources are helpful? What experts or manuals need to be consulted? What kinds of tools are 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 who does the 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
  - clarifying the focus of a worship service: liturgical season, needs of the congregation, other participants (e.g., musician, lay reader)
  - respecting a congregation's traditions
- 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 the 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 we preach
- Using the lectionary
- Understanding and responding to congregational and societal pastoral contexts
- Preparing to preach
  - entering the texts
  - 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

Christian Scriptures

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

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 different understandings of Jesus
  - exploring contemporary Christologies
- Who is the Holy Spirit?
  - reflecting on the relationship between the three persons of the Trinity
  - exploring the nature and role of the Holy Spirit
- What is church?
  - reflecting on different understandings of what it means to be the church in the world
  - exploring what it means to be a worshipping community that celebrates sacraments
  - surveying church history, including the history of lay leadership and ministry
  - reviewing the formation and history of The United Church of Canada
- Examining other theological topics, such as atonement, grace, creation, mercy, salvation, sacrament, end times, discipleship
- Developing a respectful understanding of other world religions

Pastoral and Contextual Foundations

- United Church ministerial structures
  - clarifying roles and responsibilities at the levels of congregation, presbytery, 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

Additional Resources and Assistance

The General Council Office may be of assisstance in identifying additional resources or support for developing a presbytery program of study. Call 1-800-268-3781 and ask for "Ministry Vocations" or "Worship."

www.united-church.ca/handbooks