

Statement on Ministry in The United Church of Canada (2012)

The Ministry of All

The church is a community of believers (*ecclesia*) called into existence by the presence of Jesus Christ and the call to continue Jesus' ministry in the world. Through the Spirit, who enlivens and renews the church, all members¹ are empowered to share in Christ's ministry, the work of the church. The church is about God's mission in the world—living out the gospel message through action—that there will be shalom for God's creatures and healing for God's creation. Ministry serves God's mission in the world.

The United Church of Canada since its beginning has upheld a central tenet of the Reformation, that the ministry of the church includes the ministry of all the baptized. (1 Peter 2:9) At various points in its history the church has affirmed that all its members are called to ministry as parts of Christ's body. The ministry of Jesus begins with a community of people. These diverse communities actively participate in God's mission as disciples of Christ's ongoing ministry, which takes many forms. The ministry and discipleship of all is reflected in the conciliar structure of the United Church.

The ministry of all seeks to be

- representational, reflecting the character of Jesus the Christ, who is among us as one who serves
- relational, originating in God's covenant and modelling mutual acceptance and respect with all creation
- collaborative, recognizing that the church's life is based in partnership
- accountable, being exercised on behalf of and therefore with the authority of the faith community
- prophetic, enabling communities formed by God's Word and Spirit to be living messengers for the reign of God and to resist the powers of evil
- charismatic, discerning and faithfully using the gifts and charisms of the Spirit for the building up of the church

The ministry of all takes place as the Spirit moves in known and unknown ways, bringing into the community of faith and sending into the world the gifts of its people. "For the sake of the world," says A Song of Faith, "God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry. To embody God's love in the world, the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship of all believers."

¹ Members in this document is used in its broadest understanding as all who choose to identify and participate in the life of the community of faith.



Ministries of Leadership

“In the church, some are called to specific ministries of leadership, both lay and ordered; some witness to the good news; some uphold the art of worship; some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering; some build up the community of wisdom; some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.”²

While all members share in Christ’s ministry, the church from its earliest days has recognized that God calls some to exercise specific gifts of leadership, both paid and voluntary. These ministries of leadership are based in God’s call and therefore serve to remind the community to whom we belong. The capacity to respond to God’s call is tested by the community and is therefore a reminder that these ministries belong to the body of Christ. All forms of leadership in the church are therefore accountable to the community of faith.

These various forms of leadership in the church can be expressed in the following ancient expressions given current meaning:

- enlivening worship and celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*)
- interpreting and passing on Christian tradition (*kerygma*)
- responding to the needs of the community and the world (*diakonia*)
- nurturing faith, making the wisdom of the ages relevant for today (*didache*)
- building up the community of faith as the beloved community of God (*koinonia*)
- embodying the presence of Christ in the world (*marturia*)

Such ministries of leadership are all expressions of sharing the good news of Jesus Christ. Through these forms of ministry, leaders empower the community and its members to be representational, relational, collaborative, accountable, prophetic, and charismatic in character.

The ministry of leadership, both paid and unpaid, is lived out in diverse ways. Some examples are youth ministry, leadership in worship, pastoral visiting, licensed lay worship leaders, community and outreach ministries, and the use of new forms of electronic technology.

It is the responsibility of leaders to seek to be humble and authentic, to act with personal integrity and courage, and to be passionate for God’s love for creation. All leadership requires adequate preparation and a discipline of spiritual growth and life-long learning. Education and formation need to contribute to awareness of and sensitivity to the contexts of the ministry and the intercultural commitments of the church.

A particular form of a ministry of leadership in the church is found in the oversight responsibilities and authority given to the courts of the church: the session or its equivalent, the presbytery, the Conference, and the General Council. In Reformed and specifically in the United Church tradition, the episcopal role of the bishop is shared between the presbytery and the Conference.

² A Song of Faith; based on 1 Corinthians 12

The decision-making structures of the United Church are conciliar, meaning that each court has particular roles and authority. Because of our theology of the ministry of all, all courts of the church include both lay and ordered leadership.

Paid Accountable Ministries of Leadership

While all members of the church share in Christ's ministry, the church has from its earliest days recognized that God calls some from within the community through specific gifts to ordered expressions of ministry. The United Church recognizes one order of ministry in two expressions, ordained and diaconal. The church has also recognized the emergence of lay expressions of paid accountable ministry in local and time-limited contexts. These include designated lay ministries recognized and accountable to the presbytery and congregational designated ministries accountable to congregations.

Ordered ministries and those designated lay ministries recognized by the presbytery are called to a distinct role of leadership within the church. Their leadership is authorized and exercised through their membership in a presbytery (or district). Through this membership, they are called to exercise governance and leadership, shared with elected leaders, in the ministry of the church. Ordered ministers and designated lay ministers while in paid accountable ministry positions are office holders within The United Church of Canada. While there may be elements similar to employment, the essential nature of the relationship is a covenant with the presbytery, the pastoral charge or presbytery-recognized ministry, and God.

Ordained and diaconal ministers are ordered by the denomination and serve the mission and ministry of the United Church as a whole. Preparation for ordered ministry involves university level theological study and an extensive discernment and assessment process. Ordered ministers maintain the historical connection of the United Church to the church catholic through the faithful witness to the apostolic tradition and the interpretation of a living faith. Ordered ministers carry responsibility as communicators of the tradition enacted in word and sacrament, education and service. They serve as resident theologians, called to bring the church's theological heritage into the context of God's mission in the world.

They are ordained and commissioned to the ministry of The United Church of Canada within the holy catholic church. Consistent with the historical traditions of the church, in the United Church, ordination and commissioning take place through the laying on of hands and once enacted, are not re-enacted. Ordination and commissioning are liturgically enacted at a Conference level.

Ordained ministers serve in all aspects of ministry and are formally called to word, sacrament, and pastoral care. This involves presiding in worship and sacrament, nurturing and strengthening the beloved community of God, making the wisdom of the ages relevant for today, and being representatives of Christ in the world in seeking justice and wholeness for all of creation.

Diaconal ministers serve in all aspects of ministry and are formally called to education, service, social justice, and pastoral care. Diaconal ministry, rooted in the tradition and history of diakonia, "encourages a growing faith, speaks truth to power, seeks mutual empowerment,

proclaims prophetic hope, nurtures life-giving community, fosters peaceful, right relationship within the church and the whole of creation....”³

By virtue of their training and recognition, ordered ministers are representatives of the whole United Church. Their ministry is presbytery accountable. Because of their distinct role of leadership their membership in the United Church resides in a presbytery throughout their lives. As they are called to ministry and God’s mission in the world, ordered ministers in presbytery-recognized ministries are maintained on the role of presbytery or may be retained when engaged in other vocational or personal activities. Ordered ministers are entrusted to initiate new forms of ministry, including the possibility of non-stipendiary ministries authorized and accountable to or recognized by presbytery.

Designated lay ministers are members of the church called to exercise gifts for leadership in mission and ministry that respond to a need within a local congregation or community ministry. Their ministries are presbytery accountable and dependent on appointment. Designated lay ministers are required to complete an educational program while under appointment, and completion of the program provides eligibility for subsequent appointments. Designated lay ministers function in various aspects of ministry leadership relating to their appointment and they are also members of presbytery. At the end of an appointment, the presbytery and designated lay minister discern together questions of ongoing ministry and presbytery membership. Because designated lay ministry is dependent on appointment, it is celebrated (re-enacted) at each appointment. The appointment is liturgically enacted by the presbytery either in a presbytery meeting or in the local ministry.

The Future of Ministry

The church is about God’s mission in the world. Therefore the Holy Spirit continually calls the church to renew its understanding of ministry, opening itself to new expressions that serve the needs of the present day.

In particular, existing paradigms of congregational identity are changing. People no longer maintain formerly expected patterns of participation. The United Church is challenged to re-image the nature of life in the church. As the church has begun to experiment with new expressions of community it will develop a greater variety of forms and models of ministry that will involve all of the people of the church. As the church carries God’s Word into the world in new ways, ministry will be characterized by more collaboration, networking, and transparency as well as a variety of educational approaches.

Ministry will be transformed as the church itself is transformed.

Approved by the 41st General Council, 2012

³ Quoted from Diakonia of The United Church of Canada Statement of Vision