

APPENDIX: BACKGROUND BRIEFING ON DESIGNATED LAY MINISTRY PROPOSALS

Origin and definition of Designated Lay Ministry (DLM)

The 35th General Council 1994 directed that a study of the “implications of various categories of designated ministry personnel” be undertaken with a report to the 37th General Council 2000. That report, entitled “Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century”, recommended, and the 37th General Council 2000 passed, that a new category called designated lay ministry be established that includes lay people serving in Presbytery/District-recognized ministries.

The “Ministry Together” report found that many lay ministers reported that they chose that stream because the traditional seminary-based educational pathways did not take into account their accumulated life, work and church experience and because they were unable to access traditional four-year residential educational programs. It pointed to the part-time learning circle while working part-time models being developed by the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre, Francis Sandy Theological School, and the Centre for Christian Studies. It recommended that a similar pedagogical model be developed for training DLMs.

Lay pastoral ministers, lay pastoral ministers-in-training, and, in some cases, staff associates, many without consultation, became, by action of the General Council, Designated Lay Ministers. This stream of ministry personnel would be “localized, accountable for a specified period of time, and congregational based. People in ministry who identify as ‘lay’ and who do not envision a lifelong covenant with the church as a [sic] Ordered Minister could choose to be a Designated Lay Minister for the term of their appointment.” This was to be distinct from Ordered (Commissioned and Ordained) ministry personnel who were available to the church in response to a lifelong vocation with the church universal. (cf Record of Proceedings 2000 37th General Council pp. 573-637). Thus, DLM at inception was conceived as a time-limited local ministry based on appointment only.

Evolution of DLM in Practice

The “Statement on Ministry in The United Church of Canada (2012, approved by 41st General Council 2012) reads:

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 “Ministry Leadership in the 2020s” study (presented at the 44th General Council 2022) found that many people serving as DLMs stated that their call to ministry was not time-limited or localized. However, the traditional ministry requirement of a multi-year residential academic degree was not accessible to them for multiple reasons. The DLM education pathway of distance learning and learning circles while practicing ministry was accessible so they pursued the DLM stream as the only way to honour their call to lifelong, vocational ministry. Soon after creating the stream, the church began appointing DLMs into full-spectrum solo pastoral ministry roles, often full-time. As a result, the education pathway evolved to better equip them for this full-spectrum practice. DLMs have served in all roles and offices in presbyteries, Districts, Conferences, Regional Councils, and General Council. Many have long-service appointments in communities of faith, and others have served multiple communities of faith over many years of ministry. Their practice of ministry and leadership in the church has become, for many church members, indistinguishable from that of ordered ministers.

While their practice of ministry is indistinguishable from that of ordered ministers in the eyes of many church members, DLMs have been frustrated, hurt and disappointed at continuing to be limited to appointments and not eligible for call, paid at lower minimum salary schedule than ordered ministers, and retaining no status as ministry personnel between appointments and in retirement in many regional councils.

It has been suggested that these functional distinctions simply be eliminated for DLMs in current appointments. The conclusion of the “Ministry Leadership in the 2020s” study was that by simply eliminating the distinctions in both practice and function, Designated Lay Ministry and Ordered Ministry would become identical. Therefore, why continue the distinction for DLMs who are effectively functioning as ordered ministers, not as a category of time-limited and localized lay leadership as was conceived for designated lay ministry in 2000?

The distinction between designated lay ministry and ordered ministry, beyond function and practice, relates to the integrity of each form of ministry of leadership in the United Church and in Christian ecumenism and how each form relates to the ministry of all. “Ministry will be transformed as the church itself is transformed.” (Statement on Ministry 2012) The United Church, formed and transformed, now seeks to provide a pathway for DLMs, through acquired experience and continued learning, to be considered for testamur and eligible for ordering (commissioning or ordination).

This background document addresses four areas of policy and practice related to this reality:

1. the status of the approximately 130 current Designated Lay Ministers, 30 DLM Candidates, and 70 persons who retired as Designated Lay Ministers.
2. the future of communities of faith wishing to have trained lay persons from within the community of faith offer lay leadership
3. accessibility to seminary-based educational pathways to ordered ministry
4. acknowledgement of the faith and leadership of DLMs

Proposal 1: Acknowledgement of the faith and leadership of DLMs

Designated lay ministers serve, and have served, with faithfulness, spirit-filled energy, imagination, and conviction. Throughout the church, members have testified to the importance of their leadership in teaching and preaching and caring and serving. The intent of this series of proposals is to acknowledge the life-long call and commitment that many DLMs bring to The United Church of Canada and to provide a pathway to fold them, on an individual basis, into the Order of Ministry. This particular proposal asks that the gifts of ministry and leadership that DLMs have offered to the church be recognized liturgically at the 45th General Council (2025).

Proposal 2: Possible pathway to Testamur for Current Recognized DLMs and current DLM Candidates

The direction from GCE in November 2021 was to: *“Recognize the lifelong vocational call of many current designated lay ministers and, building on the Office of Vocation practices and in consultation with designated lay ministers, design an accessible pathway for meeting the Testamur requirements for ordering (commissioning or ordination) through prior learning assessments and/or additional accreditations. Many active designated lay ministers may already meet the criteria for testamur and will qualify for immediate transition into ordered ministry.”*

Testamur is the course of study required for ordained or diaconal stream candidates. On behalf of the United Church, certain theological schools grant testamur to those candidates who have satisfactorily completed the program of study required. Each United Church theological school that has the right to grant testamur is responsible for designing a curriculum to cover the areas of study specified and for the method of teaching.

If the proposal is accepted, the “prior learning assessments” requirement could be determined to be met through serving a minimum of 5 years in half-time to full-time pastoral ministry appointments after the initial liturgical act of recognition by presbytery, Conference, or regional council. This would capture DLMs’ practical experience, their demonstrated leadership, and their continued educational development. This process would apply to current DLM candidates as well and so would remain in place for current DLM candidates until they’ve completed the minimum years of pastoral ministry experience after recognition. The process *could* look like this:

- **Minimum of 5 years’ experience** in at least half-time pastoral ministry appointments **after** recognition (for a minimum total of 8 years of experience, 3 of which were under supervision)
- Provide a copy of certificate/diploma/letter signifying completion of a program of study or prior learning assessment that led to recognition as a DLM,
- Be interviewed by the Credentialling Committee of the Board of Vocation in order to discuss vocation and call to lifelong ministry as expressed through ordination or commissioning, as is currently the case for diaconal ministers who desire to be ordained, or ordained ministers who desire to be commissioned.
- Be granted testamur by the Board of Vocation, on recommendation of the Credentialling Committee.

- Act of ordination or commissioning at a regional council celebration of ministries service.

Note: The denomination's Testamur is granted on behalf of the General Council or Indigenous Church by its approved theological schools. In this specific instance, for DLMs who have met requirements of testamur, the General Council could act through the Credentialling Committee of the Board of Vocation to assess equivalent credentialling and authorize testamur. Previously, the General Council Executive or sub-executive has authorized testamur (eg. Sub-executive meeting April 25, 2003²; see also November 1997 GCE minutes²).

The General Council, or its Executive, also has the responsibility of "giving and revoking the power of a theological school related to the United Church to issue a testamur." (D.2.8.b). In November 2022, with the joining of United Theological College/Séminaire Uni with Montréal Diocesan Theological School, the Executive of General Council gave Montréal Diocesan Theological College the right to grant testamur to United Church candidates for ordination.³

Proposal 3: For Lay Ministry Going Forward

Current DLMs and DLM Candidates who choose to remain DLMs

Current recognized DLMs and current DLM candidates who choose not to pursue ordination or commissioning will continue to minister under current policies and practices. This will include being recognized by a regional council at a celebration of ministries service (for DLM candidates) **and** being able to take appointments in various communities of faith (for current DLMs and DLM Candidates).

Trained Lay Leadership

Some local lay leaders will continue to be called on to provide regular worship leadership and pastoral care in their local community of faith. Work is currently being done to further develop models of collaborative ministry that would include training for lay leaders in communities of faith. These trained lay leaders could work in collaboration with a called or appointed ministry personnel within collaborative ministry settings, offering worship leadership, pastoral care, or Christian education, among other things. Training would not lead to accreditation but be focussed on building skills and expertise to fund the "eco-system" of shared/collaborative ministry emerging among communities of faith without paid accountable ministers regularly on-site. Because these lay leaders will specialize in areas of ministry, rather than be generalists, they will develop skills and expertise in particular areas of ministry needed by the community of faith. This model of ministry and its training would be distinct from the training received and ministry practiced by current commissioned, designated lay, and ordained ministers. Training for models of collaborative ministry is envisioned to be widely and readily accessible through local and online resourcing currently being developed.

Proposal 4: For Future Candidates Without Undergraduate Degrees

The church values the integration of knowledge and practice in its ministry personnel, from initial formation and theological education within a theological school, including in field education; through the further development of skills for ministry in supervised settings; and in

its commitment to ongoing continuing education for ministry personnel. The Candidacy Board resources state:

The pedagogical model for education and formation for a vocation in ministry is founded on *integration* of knowledge and practice of ministry. There have always been several paths of formation and education toward ministry, and there are continually new paths under construction as schools and centres design programs to meet both

- a) the demands of the church, and
- b) the learning styles and life experiences of students

In service to both the church and its ministers-in-formation, schools offer a variety of paths to a common goal. Though variously exercised, **this principle of integrated, practice-based learning is true of every United Church school.**

The education options have changed significantly since 2000 when the DLM stream was introduced. Currently, most of our theological schools do **not** require an undergraduate degree for entry into degree and diploma programs leading to ordination or commissioning. However, the church's own requirements for entry into a program for ordination **do** require an undergraduate degree or application for a reduction in the undergraduate degree requirement.

At our theological schools now, students are assessed based on educational background and prior learning assessments. Schools also provide additional supports to students who may need accommodation around learning and other disabilities. Schools also regularly tailor their programs to students' needs and interests in theological education and formation for ministry. Today, unlike in 2000, most schools provide distance-learning, online program options.

Our theological schools also all engage in theological education using action-reflection (or "praxis-based") models of learning, not a primarily theoretical model. Students integrate learning in the classroom with practical, experiential-based learning throughout their program of study, no matter what school they are enrolled in.

Faculty from the theological schools eagerly affirmed the church's commitment to in-ministry based learning to meet testamur requirements. Faculty continue to develop accredited diploma and degree programs with this commitment in mind.

Please see the last page of this document for a chart outlining the various ways in which students can enter into diploma and degree programs for ministry at United Church theological schools.

Proposal 5: Pathway for retention of aspects of permission to administer the sacraments and regional council membership in retirement

Because Designated Lay Ministry was originally conceived to be time-limited and localized, DLMS do not retain any ministry personnel status or permission to exercise ministry functions outside of that time-limited local appointment. DLMS between appointments and after retirement are considered lay members with no ministry status or function. Many long serving DLMS upon retirement find themselves not recognized as retired ministry personnel, ineligible

to be voluntary associate ministers, or even members of the regional council, unlike Ordered Ministers who, by virtue of ordering, are members of the regional council for life.

While the definition of “ministry personnel” is referenced in *The Manual*, it is not a definition set in *The Manual*. The Basis of Union (Section 10) implicitly equates ministry personnel with ordered minister, with specific exceptions when a lay member is under appointment. *The Manual* does, however, give regional councils, (and formerly presbyteries), permission to grant licence to administer the sacraments to people who have retired as DLMs (C.2.9 and I.2.4.1 b). Some regional councils do, others do not. Some regional councils, under the authority to name lay members in C.1.2 b), grant members who retired as DLMs member-at-large status. The Statement on Ministry (41st General Council 2012) also states this: “At the end of an appointment, the presbytery and designated lay minister discern together questions of ongoing ministry and presbytery membership.”

It is proposed that the General Council encourage regional councils to review their practices under C.2.1 b) and I.2.4.1 b) to consider, in light of the leadership roles and acquired experience of many lay members who retired as designated lay ministers, granting both licence to administer the sacraments and membership in the regional council. Further, that regional councils be encouraged to review their policies on voluntary associate ministry and eligibility to practice other functions of ministry as may apply to lay members who have retired as designated lay ministers.

School	Vancouver School of Theology	St. Andrew's College within Saskatoon Theological Union	Centre for Christian Studies (diaconal)	United Church Studies@Montréal Diocesan Theological College (DIO) & Montréal School of Theology, McGill	Emmanuel College of UofT	Atlantic School of Theology
Entry Level						
no undergrad	graduated entry c/o St. Mark's BTh	graduated entry c/o STU's BTh	Prior learning assessment recognition	admission to 120 credit BTh (CGEP=90), can lead to MDiv, no prior learning assessment required	N/A	Prior learning assessment
some undergrad	permission to register tests capacity	Prior Learning Assessment Registration (PLAR) (complete 6 courses in addition to MDiv)	Prior learning assessment recognition	placed according to BA credits	Assessment c/o Admission committee; supports	Prior learning assessment
undergrad degree (humanities preferred)	MDiv entrance	MDiv entrance	Dipl Prog entrance	MDiv at MTS = 60 credit upper level BTh + one year of in-ministry practice and formation at UTC	MDiv entrance	MDiv entrance
part MDiv or other theological degree	use MDiv as measure of testamur	use MDiv as measure of testamur; includes integrated seminar	Dipl Prog entrance + Prior learning assessment recognition	use school report as measure of sufficient knowledge of student	use MDiv as measure of testamur	use MDiv as measure of testamur
accommodations	follow UBC and ATS protocols for alternate forms of assessment of student learning outcomes; access to UBC testing for disability, learning assessments and writing centre supports		Negotiate with Prog Staff + CCS policy of accommodation	Supports available at McGill for UTC students for all types of learning accommodations and disabilities; McGill can do assessments as required for learning accommodations and disabilities. Writing centre supports students including those working in a second or third language	Support at UofT	AST working as faculty on understanding breadth of accommodations needed; continual adaptation and learning in relation to EDIA/JEDI; look for expertise to advise us as well as peer learning & teaching among faculty

Entry Requirements to United Church Theological Schools' Programs