



THE UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

Lay Preachers' Association
of the
Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

CALLED TO PREACH

THE SPECIFIED MINISTRY
of LAY PREACHER

A manual for
LAY PREACHER CANDIDATES
and
LAY PREACHERS

(adapted for use by the Presbytery of Tasmania)

This resource is intended to be accessed via CTM and Presbytery websites.
Copies may be printed and distributed as required.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

This manual collates relevant information concerning the training and recognition of Lay Preachers. It outlines the ongoing responsibilities of recognised Lay Preachers regarding this ministry within the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania.

The ministry of Lay Preacher is an honourable and significant response to a call by God. It is a specified ministry as detailed in the Regulations. The Church recognises gifts for building up the people of God through the leadership of public worship of God and the preaching of the Word. And those so gifted delight in the joy of participating in God's mission in the world by exercising this leadership.

The Uniting Church in Australia is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual church. Although most training courses are conducted in English there is no restriction on candidates seeking recognition so that they can minister within a congregation with a particular language requirement.

Note the use of the following terms in this document

- 'Minister' will refer to a Minister of the Word, Deacon or Pastor (ministry worker) or, where no Minister is in placement, the designated lay leader.
- 'Presbytery' may refer to the Presbytery Minister - Leadership Formation, Secretary of a presbytery, or a nominated committee to which presbytery has delegated oversight of Lay Preachers (Pastoral Relations Committee in Tasmania).

BACKGROUND - THE BASIS OF UNION

Each of the traditions coming into union in 1977 to form the Uniting Church in Australia recognised the Holy Spirit's gifts in lay people to take part in leading the public worship of God's people. The Uniting Church recognises the significance and God-given nature of these ministries and commits itself to their continuance:

The Uniting Church recognises and accepts as lay preachers those who at the time of union are accredited lay preachers (local preachers) in any of the uniting Churches and who adhere to the Basis of Union. She will seek to recognise those endowed with the gift of the Spirit for this task, will provide for their training, and will gladly wait upon that fuller understanding of the obedience of Christians which should flow from their ministry. Such members will be called Lay Preachers. [Basis of Union 14(d)]

THE SPECIFIED MINISTRY OF LAY PREACHER

Lay Preachers are people who are recognised by their Church Council and their presbytery as having:

- gifts of the Spirit for this ministry
- suitable character, personality and spiritual maturity, and
- ability to exercise the responsibilities of Lay Preacher.

The Ministry of Lay Preacher is one in which lay persons may participate in the proclamation of the Gospel and in witness to Christian faith and experience, and for which they have received gifts and are called by the Holy Spirit. [Reg 2.2.3 (a)]

A Lay Preacher is a member of the Church who is authorised to conduct services of worship in the Congregation in which such Lay Preacher holds membership and in any other Congregation to which the Lay Preacher may be invited by the Minister, or where there is no Minister in placement, the Church Council or local leader. [Reg 2.2.3 (b)]

SUMMARY OF REQUIREMENTS

- Any member of the Uniting Church may apply to be a candidate for the ministry of lay preaching
- Candidates must study approved academic subjects to qualify
- Candidates will normally conduct six services during an assessment period
- Candidates must attend a Formation weekend on the Basis of Union and the Code of Ethics for Lay Preachers

ACCEPTANCE AS A CANDIDATE

The candidate must

- be a confirmed member of the Uniting Church for at least 12 months prior to application,
- make a written application to the presbytery through the Minister of the Congregation in which membership is held. [Reg 2.3.4(b)]
- be interviewed by the Church Council who will forward to presbytery a report on the applicant's suitability within 90 days. [Reg 2.3.4 (b) (c)]
- be fluent in the language of the congregation or fellowship in which they will exercise a preaching ministry.

The presbytery then assesses the person's suitability, spiritual maturity and ability to exercise the responsibility of a Lay Preacher. [Reg 2.3.4(a)(ii)(d)]

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

- A candidate must complete and pass the necessary training requirements, as outlined by the Synod. These are prescribed by the Education for Ministry Working Group [Reg 2.4.4 (a),(b)].
- As well as academic studies, a period of practical training to gain experience in the conduct of worship and preaching is required. A candidate must demonstrate competence in conducting services; of which a number, determined by presbytery (Pastoral Relations Committee), are assessed. Preaching appointments may commence during the period of academic study, and some of these may be included in those assessed.
- Recognition is dependent on the candidate undertaking a Formation study on the Basis of Union and the Code of Ethics [Reg 2.4.7.(d)]
- Once a candidate has completed and passed all the training requirements they may apply to the Presbytery, through the Church Council, for recognition as a Lay Preacher. [Reg 2.4.7.(c)]
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RECOGNITION AS A LAY PREACHER [formerly ACCREDITATION]

The candidate will have completed

- an approved course of study and received a Certificate of Lay Preacher Studies from the Centre for Theology and Ministry
- the required number of services
- the Formation study

If the presbytery determines that the candidate has qualified for recognition as a Lay Preacher, it arranges for a service of worship at which recognition is acknowledged and a Lay Preacher Certificate is issued. [Reg 2.3.4; 2.4.7 (c, d)]

Any Lay Preacher transferring membership from one Congregation to another shall be recognised as such in the Congregation to which transfer is made. [Reg 2.2.3 (c)]

REQUIRED COURSE OF STUDY

The Education for Ministry Working Group of the Assembly sets the standards for study and the requirements for initial recognition. These courses are also suitable for the continuing education of Lay Preachers who have been recognised for some years. [Reg 2.4.4 (b)]

The course of study approved for use within this Synod has three options:

A. A course of study, overseen by the Centre for Theology and Ministry (CTM), which is to include Biblical studies, Theology, and Preaching and Worship. OR

B. Approved units with member colleges of the University of Divinity in Victoria.

<http://www.divinity.edu.au> OR

C. Distance education modules are available through Uniting College in Adelaide, offered at Certificate IV level. Details can be found at <http://unitingcollege.org.au/uniting-church-ministry/lay-preacher>

AND

D. A Lay Preacher Formation weekend that explores the Basis of Union and Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice that ensures candidates are familiar with the expectations contained in the Basis of Union and the Code of Ethics. It may not be offered every year, so candidates are advised to attend when one becomes available regardless of progress in their studies.

Note: It is also possible that credit may be given for relevant prior learning (see page 5).

Assessment tasks in CTM courses may include

Writing reflections on texts and multimedia, including affirmation, analysis and critique.

Analysing Bible passages, researching Biblical terms and themes, exploring doctrines, creeds and affirmations of faith may also be part of the assessment as well as writing essays to engage an issue and present a point of view (make/mount an argument).

CONTINUING EDUCATION (PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT) & ASSESSMENT

Lay Preachers are expected to participate in a program of continuing education (also called professional development). Details of Continuing Education are outlined in a separate document. The expectation is that at least 10 points are to be accumulated over any two-year period. A local Minister (or Church Council) is tasked to oversee and encourage a Lay Preacher's Continuing Education.

When completed, acknowledgement by the local Church Council enables application to the Secretary of the Synod Lay Preachers' Association for a Lay Preachers' Continuing Education certificate to be issued. Presentation of these certificates will usually occur at a Lay Preacher Conference, or at the presbytery level. Active Lay Preachers could anticipate receiving a fresh certificate every two years.

A Lay Preacher remains under the oversight of their presbytery throughout their ministry. The presbytery (through the Pastoral Relations Committee) receives a review of each Lay Preacher's ministry from the Church Council not less frequently than every five years or when the presbytery conducts a consultation with the Congregation.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Can I do some study before applying to be a Candidate for training as a Lay Preacher?

You are free to apply at any stage either during or on completion of your training program. Be guided by the counsel of your Minister and other spiritual advisers.

Are there costs associated with Lay Preacher training?

Costs will depend on the particular course that a candidate decides to pursue. There is definitely a time cost and this may mean relinquishing some congregational responsibilities while undertaking study.

Financial Assistance

- Lay Preacher training is intended to benefit the candidate's congregation, so an application for assistance to the Church Council is appropriate.
- Some assistance may be available through presbytery sources so speak to the local Ministry Worker or the Presbytery Minister Leadership Formation or the Pastoral Relations Committee.
- The Synod Lay Preachers' Association is able to offer small grants towards the cost of a completed unit.
- CTM also has funds available for candidates for lay ministry -

<http://ctm.uca.edu.au/layeducation/lay-ministry-intensives/lay-education-grants/>

What if I've completed study in subjects that I believe may be equivalent to these courses?

If a person presenting for interview indicates that they have completed studies in the areas required for recognition, they do not automatically receive exemption for them. The Uniting Church Assembly sets rules related to subject areas, emphases and educational contexts. The Church Council will refer the matter to the presbytery and the Centre for Theology and Ministry for a joint determination about recognition of prior learning and current competency in areas of required study. The applicant will need to supply:

- complete details of the specific subject(s) for which they seek exemption;
- details of when the course was completed and through what organisation;
- details of how the course was assessed and the grades received;
- a detailed outline of the content of each subject for which equivalence is sought.

Suggested Application Forms are in a separate document titled Appendices A & B

APPENDIX A - Application to become a Candidate

APPENDIX B - Application for Recognition as a Lay Preacher