



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  
MINISTERS, CHURCH COUNCILS  
PRESBYTERIES**

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 role of Lay Preachers. It outlines the ongoing responsibilities of Ministers, Church Councils and Presbyteries 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. 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 in exercising this leadership.

The Uniting Church in Australia is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual church. Although most Lay Preachers are trained 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 or, where no Minister is in placement, or designated lay leader.
- 'Presbytery' may refer to the Presbytery Minister - Mission and Education, Secretary of a presbytery, or a nominated committee to which presbytery has delegated oversight of Lay Preachers.

## 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<sup>1</sup> lay preachers (local preachers) in any of the Uniting Churches and who adhere to the Basis of Union. It 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*

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<sup>1</sup> Lay Preachers are now recognised, not accredited

*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)]*

*A former Minister whose recognition has been withdrawn under the provisions of Regulation 2.10.3 and who is in good standing with the Church, may upon request be accredited as a Lay Preacher. [Reg 2.4.7 (b)]*

## **THE PROCESS OF BECOMING A LAY PREACHER**

### **1. ACCEPTANCE AS A CANDIDATE**

The candidate must

- be a confirmed member of the Uniting Church for at least 12 months prior to application,
- make written application to Presbytery through the Minister of the Congregation
- be interviewed by the Church Council
- be fluent in the language of the congregation or fellowship in which they will exercise a preaching ministry.

The Presbytery shall obtain a confidential report from an appropriate Minister and shall make any other queries and investigations it sees fit.

### **2. 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

- academic studies,
- a period of practical training to gain experience in the conduct of worship and preaching is required.
- undertake a Formation study on the Basis of Union and the Code of Ethics [Reg 2.4.7.(d)]

Once all the training requirements have been completed and passed the candidate may apply to the Presbytery, through the Church Council, for recognition as a Lay Preacher. [Reg 2.4.7.(c)]

### **3. 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)]

### **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)]

### **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*

## CHURCH COUNCIL RESPONSIBILITIES

The Basis of Union makes it clear that the Uniting Church in Australia is committed to the Biblical understanding of a diversity of Spirit-given gifts, each with *its corresponding service*. *The Uniting Church will thereafter provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them...* [Basis of Union 13]

When a Church Council discerns in a member gifts suited to the ministry of Lay Preacher, it may need to challenge that person:

- to recognise those gifts, and to prayerfully consider using them;
- to test them through sharing in worship;
- possibly to consider a Period of Discernment;
- to seek confirmation of call by applying to become a Lay Preacher candidate.

When the Church Council receives through the Minister notice of an application for a member to become a candidate in training, it is the Church Council's responsibility to examine the applicant with regard to:

- confirmed membership in the Uniting Church for at least 12 months (or equivalent status in another acknowledged church);
- suitability of character, personality, spiritual maturity and ability to exercise the responsibilities of a Lay Preacher. [Reg 2.3.4]

and forward the recommendation to presbytery within 90 days.

The Church Council has ongoing responsibility once training begins:

- to support the person in prayer;
- to share with them regularly concerning their studies and journey of faith;
- to consider how they can assist with study costs (as the person is preparing for ministry in your congregation it is appropriate for the congregation to offer financial support);
- to accept that time and energy is required to prepare for this ministry and, if requested, to release a candidate from other responsibilities for the periods of the year when they are working on their study program.

When a candidate has completed all training requirements they may apply to the Presbytery through the Church Council to be recognised as a Lay Preacher. Recognition is dependent on

- passed all examinations;
- conducted the required number of services and been assessed as required by the Presbytery;
- attended Formation classes on Code of Ethics and the Basis of Union.

The Church Council continues to have responsibilities after the Lay Preacher has been accepted and commissioned:

- to continue giving encouragement and support;
- to pay a travel allowance, at the rate set annually by Synod, to a visiting Lay Preacher (this is true for LP visiting but not for resident LPs - out of context);
- to encourage the Lay preacher in their continuing education (professional development);
- to ensure the Lay Preacher's ministry is consistent with the Code of Ethics;
- to pay the Lay preacher a yearly book allowance;
- to recommend to the Presbytery that recognition as a Lay Preacher should be withdrawn:

- if a Lay Preacher fails to maintain a satisfactory relationship with the life of the Church;
- if a Lay Preacher has retired from active service;
- fails to comply with the discipline of the church, including the Code of Ethics;
- if the Lay Preacher no longer conforms to the standards of a Member or Lay Preacher
- if the Lay Preacher ceases to be a member of the Church. [Reg 2.10.4]

Any Lay Preacher whose recognition has been withdrawn may seek to be reinstated. The Church Council will consider the matter in consultation with the Presbytery [Reg. 2.10.4 (c)]

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRESBYTERY

Presbytery has the responsibility to Synod to:

- follow directions of the Synod on which courses of training are approved by The Education for Ministry Working Group;
- appoint or designate a committee to take responsibility for Lay Preachers; [is there a Reg?]
- decide any appeals against decisions of the committee;
- determine the withdrawal of recognition of any Lay Preacher whom it considers to be no longer acceptable to the Church as a Lay Preacher.

Presbytery is responsible also for the following but may delegate the following to a committee

- determine applications for acceptance as a candidate for training as a Lay Preacher;
- determine applications for recognition as a Lay Preacher;
- arrange assessment of services of worship conducted by Lay Preachers in Training;
- determine whether a candidate is eligible to be recognised as a Lay Preacher;
- promote and plan opportunities for continuing education for Lay Preachers
- maintain a register of accredited Lay Preachers and Lay Preacher Candidates;

[Reg 2.4.7 (c) - (f), 2.10.4 (a) - (d)]

When a candidate's study is completed, the Presbytery will receive an application from them for recognition. The Presbytery will:

- be satisfied that the candidate is still called to the ministry of Lay Preacher; [??]
- sight the Certificate of Completion of Studies from CTM to ensure that the training requirements have been met;
- arrange for a service of worship at which a Certificate of Recognition will be presented.

**APPENDIX A**  
**APPLICATION TO BECOME A CANDIDATE FOR LAY PREACHING**

**DECLARATION OF INTENT**

I believe that God is calling me to train for a preaching/worship leadership ministry within the Uniting Church in Australia. In obedience to that call, I present myself to the Church Council for acceptance as a candidate for training as a Lay Preacher.

I understand that my call will be tested as my application is considered by the various councils of the Church.

Signature of applicant:

Date:

**PERSONAL DETAILS**

Surname:

Given names:

Preferred title (Ms etc.):

Date of Birth:

Postal Address:

Telephone (daytime):

(evening):

E-mail:

**CHURCH MEMBERSHIP**

Congregation:

Presbytery:

Are you a confirmed member of the Uniting Church in Australia?

If `Yes`, number of years:

If `No` give details:

**TO BE COMPLETED BY MINISTER**

Name:

Position:

Signature:

Date:

Attach any comments on a separate sheet and forward application to the Church Council.

**TO BE COMPLETED BY THE CHURCH COUNCIL**

Date:

Name of Church Council Secretary:

Signature:

Date forwarded to Secretary of Presbytery:

**TO BE COMPLETED BY THE PRESBYTERY OR ITS LP COMMITTEE**

Date received:

Date of meeting:

Application approved by consensus: [ ] YES [ ] NO :

Applicant advised (date):

By whom:

Minister/Church Council advised:

Signature (Presbytery Secretary):

Date:

**APPENDIX B**  
**APPLICATION for RECOGNITION as a LAY PREACHER**

**DECLARATION OF INTENT**

I believe that God is calling me to a preaching ministry within the Uniting Church in Australia. In obedience to that call, I present myself to the Church for recognition as a Lay Preacher.

I have completed the required training and assessment processes towards accreditation. However, I recognise that my education for the ministry of Lay Preacher has just begun and I am prepared to commit myself to the discipline of ongoing education and review of my call to ministry.

Signature of applicant:

Date:

**PERSONAL DETAILS**

Surname:

Given names:

Preferred title (Ms etc.):

Date of Birth:

Postal Address:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-mail:

Congregation:

**EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS**

Date of acceptance as a candidate for training as a Lay Preacher:

Presbytery in which application to candidate was lodged:

Have you completed the required studies for the Lay Preachers Course or been granted exemption for any part?

YES/NO

(Please attach copies of your subject results and/or approved exemptions.)

Have you completed the Lay Preacher Formation weekend?

YES/NO

How many services of worship have you led?

How many times have you preached?

.....

Has the presbytery arranged for assessment of at least three Services in which you led worship and preached?

YES/NO

**TO BE COMPLETED BY MINISTER**

Name:

Position:

Signature:

Date:

Attach any comments on a separate sheet and forward application to the Church Council.

**TO BE COMPLETED BY THE CHURCH COUNCIL**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name of secretary: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date forwarded: \_\_\_\_\_

Attach any comments on a separate sheet and forward application to Secretary of Presbytery

**TO BE COMPLETED BY PRESBYTERY OR ITS LP COMMITTEE**

Date received: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Recognition granted:             YES         NO         DEFERRED

Reasons for non-acceptance or deferral:

Applicant advised (date): \_\_\_\_\_ By whom: \_\_\_\_\_

Minister/Church Council advised (date): \_\_\_\_\_ By whom: \_\_\_\_\_

Certificate issued (date): \_\_\_\_\_

Commissioning service arranged:

(date): \_\_\_\_\_ (time): \_\_\_\_\_ (place): \_\_\_\_\_

Name added to Synod and Presbytery databases of Lay Preachers (date): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature (Presbytery Secretary): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_