

## **Bruce Gregersen: A History of the One Order Remit**

The processes that have led to the development of the One Order Remit cover a decade of ministry studies in The United Church of Canada. As the lead staff to these studies, I hope a brief historical overview can assist in understanding the genesis of the proposal.

The first part of a three-stage journey involved the work of the Meaning of Ministry Task Group (2006-2009) established in response to a number of proposals to the 39<sup>th</sup> General Council.

The Task Group undertook its work through an invitation across the church to respond to questions about the nature of ministry. Responses confirmed that a major issue was the relationship of designated lay ministry and the ordained ministry. In 2000 the 35<sup>th</sup> General Council had received a major report (the previous decade of study), "Ministry 2000," that recommended bringing together a number of lay categories of ministry including Lay Pastoral Ministers and Staff Associates into a single new category called Designated Lay Ministry. The report set in place the criteria for this ministry and included the following paragraph:

The report offers the perspective that the vocation of the Ordained or Diaconal Minister involves lifelong service and accountability to the church. It is ordination or commissioning to the church universal. The vocation of the lay minister, on the other hand, is spontaneous, localized, and temporary in its service and accountability. (*ROP, GC 2000, 614*)

The Task Group recognized that these distinctions had significantly changed and that more work was needed to clarify the identities and roles of the streams of ministry in the church. The Task Group recognized that in many denominations, sacramental authority distinguished between ordained and lay pastoral (ecclesial) ministries. But it also believed that the United Church had moved beyond that understanding.

The Task Group settled on the terms that the Ministry 2000 report had introduced: designated lay ministry is time limited and localized, while ordained and diaconal ministry is lifelong and accountable to the whole church; and noted that in the United Church this was expressed in terms of Presbytery membership and accountability. The Task Group also believed that a succinct statement on ministry could provide a reference point for understanding ministry in the United Church.

The Statement on Ministry (2009) proposed by the Task Group to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council therefore included a section on designated lay ministry that affirmed that while under appointment, Designated Lay Ministers function in all aspects of ministry leadership but that at the end of an appointment, the authority for function concludes as does Presbytery membership. Furthermore, because Designated Lay Ministry is dependent on appointment, it is celebrated (re-enacted) at each appointment. "Designated Lay Ministry," the statement affirmed, "encompasses time- and place-limited accountability and function."

Those who were present at this Council will remember the hurt and disagreement expressed by many over this part of the statement. Changes were made, moving away from the time limited and localized definition. With a number of Conferences also resisting any distinctions in liturgical actions, it became clear that the proposals of the Meaning of Ministry Task Group for distinguishing and defining the streams of ministry had failed. The 2009 Statement was approved but further work was directed to refine the statement to refer to the whole people of God more clearly. This began the second round of ministry studies undertaken by the Theology and InterChurch InterFaith Committee from 2009-2012.

The TICIF Committee did propose a more comprehensive statement but was also unable to offer a clear distinction between ordained and designated lay ministry. Instead it offered a proposal to the council for the study of local ordination. The concept was to use a process familiar in the Anglican Communion, to “locally” ordain those needed for pastoral leadership in remote or otherwise difficult to fill charges. Designated Lay Ministry would continue for those who were formally staff associates.

It believed that this could resolve the difficulties in the term “lay” in designated lay ministry. In doing so it also rejected arguments being made for consideration of a third “lay order” of ministry. The Statement of Ministry (2012) was approved, as was the proposal to study local ordination. At the same time, a proposal from Winnipeg Presbytery that diaconal ministers be authorized for sacraments as a rite of commissioning was also referred for study. This then led to the third round of ministry studies, the Joint Ministry Working Group (2012-2015).

The Working Group quickly moved away from the proposal for local ordination. The Committee did not believe that it would resolve a central issue that it identified of the educational expectations for ministry leadership. It questioned what levels of distinction would be meaningful between “local” and “full” ordination. It also believed that in the national structures of the United Church, local would soon become meaningless.

At the same time, the Working Group brought into its consideration the proposal for sacramental authority for diaconal ministers. It could see no theological or functional justification against this, but again, what then would be the differences between the various streams of ministry? The Working Group was convinced of the distinctive history, identity and call of diaconal ministry, but it also recognized that most diaconal ministers served, and would continue to serve in the United Church, in solo pastoral leadership.

The Working Group, within its first year of work, focused on the concept of One Order of Ministry. It believed that the tensions between the streams of ministry were dysfunctional and damaging to the ministry of the church, something affirmed by the previous two studies. It also believed that while there needed to be multiple streams of educational preparation for ministry leadership, there should be a basic equivalency across these streams.

It released its first document on One Order that proposed ending the use of the language of ordination, commissioning, and recognition altogether. While this proposal did receive some solid support, there was far more opposition and challenge. In particular the Joint Working Group acknowledged the difficulties no longer using “ordination” would create ecumenically. As a result of this challenge, the next iteration of the One Order proposal moved to the singular use of the language of ordination, but included ordination to the diakonia. The Working Group believes that this is the workable alternative to the journey that began a decade ago.

Perhaps a final note of “what next” if the remit fails.

An option could be to return to the previous terminology of “lay pastoral minister” and “staff associate.” It would likely involve re-testing the definition for “lay pastoral ministry” as time limited and localized. However, if “lay pastoral ministers” are lifetime-accountable to the whole church, then it is arguable that the current training program should be expanded towards some level of equivalency with other diploma programs. This however still does not deal with the appropriateness of the use of the term “lay” in such ministries, nor with sacramental authority for diaconal ministers.

But perhaps that can be left for the next decade of study on ministry in The United Church of Canada.

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