

I listened to the impassioned voices of my ordained colleagues protesting One Order of Ministry and realized that, if I had not become the Executive Secretary, mine would likely have been the loudest in the room. I hope I would have been able to articulate my reasons and not just my reaction but I am not sure I would have been any better able to separate the two than many of my colleagues seem to be. Several of them are understandably upset because they feel that considering other paths to ordination devalues the commitment and sacrifice they made to serve the Church. Unfortunately, that is often expressed in terms of unfairness rather than in terms of championing the way they were prepared for ministry. I deeply value the academic and practical training I received. But that preparation was not perfect—no preparation is! There were gaps that only pastoral experience and the helpful advice of a neighbouring minister filled.

I believe that having an educated clergy with critical thinking skills and a thirst for knowledge is essential in our time. When I was in the pulpit, I believed that the way I was trained—an undergraduate degree, a Masters of Divinity and required field placements and internships—was the only way to prepare for that. Now that I am in the Executive Secretary's chair, I see this differently.

As the Executive Secretary, I have to explain rules that no longer make sense. The problem is not with the rules; it is the changing circumstances to which they apply. When crafted, these by-laws reflected the church's understanding and experience of ministry. But ministry has changed. Over thirty years ago, when I was ordained, ordination (please bear with me diaconal colleagues) was understood to be a call to the ministry of Word and Sacrament where the church needed me. Transfer and Settlement was not some crazy plan to complicate the life of the newly ordained; it was the living out of the call to serve the whole church. As an ordinand, I was expected to serve the Church where needed and to trust that the Church knew where that was. The Church came to understand that diaconal ministers shared that same sense of call to the church universal in ministries of Service, Education and Pastoral Care. Hence, the two streams of ministry became our existing Order of Ministry. What was alike was our call to serve the Church as a whole; what was different was how we prepared to answer that call. Designated Lay Ministers were raised up and served in a local context to meet ministry needs for a set time. Mostly, that was how ministry worked.

But that is not true anymore. It is now possible to be ordained without serving in any ministry context more than 50 km from your home congregation. The only vestige of a call to the "whole" Church that remains in our current practice is the requirement to have a ministry position prior to ordination/commissioning. I am not arguing for a return to Transfer and Settlement; I am describing our current reality. Also, the Church has fewer and fewer ministry positions that could be described as diaconal. In the economy of staff that congregations make, diaconal positions are lost. The distinction between diaconal and ordained ministers these days is not in their service but in their training. The Designated Lay Ministers in London Conference are doing more than filling a gap in their local setting. They are engaged in service to the whole Church through leadership in our courts and committees.

The reality of our current ministry context makes it very difficult to explain those rules from a different time and a different expression of ministry. For example, a diaconal minister can no longer celebrate the sacraments when they leave a pastoral relationship but a Designated Lay Minister may continue to do so—a rule that made sense when

diaconal ministers rarely needed a licence to celebrate the sacraments and Designated Lay Ministers were understood to be meeting a local need that could not be met in any other way. How do I explain that Designated Lay Ministers are lay members of Conference but are counted with ministry personnel for purposes of the lay/ministry personnel balance? When a retired Designated Lay Minister moves from one Presbytery to another, the only way that Presbytery can draw on their gifts is by making them one of their limited number of Members at Large (unless they are the lay representative from their new congregation). These rules once made sense but not so much anymore. This is more than a matter of making the rules logical; this is a matter of meeting the ministry needs of the Church.

If there is one thing that being the Executive Secretary has made clear to me, it is that from the congregation's perspective, a minister is a minister is a minister. These differentiations do not make sense to them since their experience of their minister is not defined by how that individual was prepared for ministry. When I move from what this means for me as an ordained minister to what this means for the Church, then I can only support One Order of Ministry.

The differences will be in the training, and the Church is enriched by the way these differences prepare people for ministry. The One Order of Ministry proposal will change how Designated Lay Ministers are trained and will strengthen the academic base of that ministry while continuing the practical experience. In time and study, it will better match the commitment required in our other training programs. So what is our objection?

We have already endorsed different ways of training for our existing Order of Ministry. We would be requiring new Designated Lay Ministers to meet a similar standard of training. What then is our concern? Is it that people already recognized as Designated Lay Ministers will belong to the Order of Ministry on the basis of their present experience and service? For so many of the Designated Lay Ministers in London Conference, that would only be an honest recognition of the role they play.

From where I sit: 1) congregations do not distinguish between one type of minister and another; 2) these differences are distinctly United Church and impossible to explain to others with whom we are in communion; and, most importantly, 3) the three expressions of ministry currently in our church reflect different ways of training but not of serving. That's why I think One Order of Ministry would be good for the Church because, in the end, isn't that the goal of a set-apart ministry—to serve the Church? That's the perspective of this Executive Secretary—but a word of caution, Executive Secretaries are like ordained ministers: we do not all think alike!

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