

## Vicki McPhee: Reflections on One Order of Ministry

I recognized my calling to diaconal ministry in my early thirties. While I was aware that there were two streams of ministry in the United Church of Canada, I did not fully appreciate the differences between the two streams until I began my training nine years ago. As I progressed through classes and field placements, I had many opportunities to speak with Ordained Ministers about their calls, training and the subsequent ministries they were serving upon their ordination. In general, most of these ministers did not see my diaconal designation/identity to be of concern. However, there were a few people—Ordained and Lay—who considered the diaconal stream of ministry to be ‘less-than’ the ordained stream. For example, it has been expressed to me over the years that Diaconal students have less theological training, less knowledge of worship leadership and sacraments and less ability to function in solo ministry. It has become evident to me that the strengths and fullness of diaconal ministry training is not totally understood or appreciated by many in the wider church. This lack of understanding and appreciation is not limited to the United Church of Canada—it is the case ecumenically as well.

While the United Church of Canada has stated that the ordained and diaconal streams are equivalent in the minister’s capability of leadership within the church, there are organizations outside of the United Church that do not recognize that they are equal. Diaconal Ministers cannot be chaplains in the military or in the federal petitionary system—which is ironic as a key factor in the re-emergence of modern day diakonia in church was the formation of prison ministry in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Diaconal Ministers also cannot serve in the ecumenical shared pastoral charges such as those United Church congregations that have partnered with the Anglican or Lutheran churches. These exclusions are for two reasons. Chaplaincy requires one to be ordained by the church—referring to the rite of passage into ministry as opposed to the designation or identity of which stream one was called into. As well, ecumenically, being a commissioned minister—the rite of passage for the Diaconal Minister—is also a barrier. In many situations outside of the United Church of Canada, not having been ordained means that one does not have the full authority of ministry. Additionally, for some chaplaincy positions it is also necessary to have achieved a master’s degree. Diaconal students receive a diploma rather than a degree upon graduation.

During the Celebration of Ministry worship service at the Alberta Northwest Conference meeting last year, a Diaconal Minister was received into the United Church from another denomination. In recognition of her status, it was stated that she had been “ordained to diaconal ministry” by her denomination. What occurs to me is that, to those outside of ministry, using the terminology of the rite by which one entered into ministry (Ordained) versus using the description of our identity (Diaconal) is confusing and leads naturally to a misunderstanding of the connection or relationship between the two streams of ministry. It would seem, on the surface, that if Diaconal Ministers would enter into the ministry by the rite of ordination—as opposed to being commissioned—those connections and relationships between the

different streams of ministry would be much more clear for congregations, Search Committees, our ecumenical partners and with organizations outside of the church. But it is not that simple.

A key reason why Diaconal Ministers cannot be simply grandfathered into an ordained status and, consequently, be firmly understood as equal in all ways to the Ordained Minister is because of the suspicion that exists around the equivalency of the educational process for diaconal candidates. There still exists, after all the years that Diaconal Ministry has been recognized as Ordered Ministry in the United Church, a misunderstanding of the quality and depth of training and education a diaconal student undertakes. One common misconception is that the training received during the Pastoral Care Year at The Centre For Christian Studies is not equivalent to the CPE course often taken by those in the ordained stream when, in fact, they have equal standing. Through conversations with a variety of Designated Lay Ministers (DLM), it is clear that the DLM training and educational process is also not fully appreciated by the wider church.

What concerns me with the One Order of Ministry Remit is that the United Church might think it has solved a problem or cleared up issues of function, perception, and roles within the two streams of Ordered Ministry and that of Designated Lay Ministry. However, if the Remit passes with out paying considerable attention to the competencies and equivalences between different ministry training programs, the church is at risk of adding another layer of mistrust and confusion between the different streams of ministry. Currently the DLM educational program is not equivalent to that of the training for Diaconal and Ordained Ministry. There is no clear plan on how to augment the DLM program so that is in line with the level of training received in the ordained and diaconal programs. This could be a serious issue because, despite Diaconal Ministry being included as Ordered Ministry for nearly 35 years, there is still misunderstanding and distrust that the quality and depth of training for both streams of ministry are equivalent. In event that the Remit passes, it is highly unlikely that the DLMs who will be grandfathered into Ordered Ministry or those attending a new type of program will be accepted as equal partners in ministry unless there is a clear understanding that the education and training received by all candidates for ministry is equivalent to one another.

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