



3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200  
Toronto, Ontario  
M8X 2Y4 Canada

T: 416-231-5931 | 1-800-268-3781  
F: 416-231-3103  
united-church.ca | egliseunie.ca

February 26, 2024

To: Rev. Diane Everitt, Rev. Alison Miculan, and Rev. Amadeus Pyralis,

The Executive of General Council (GCE) met on February 23 and 24, 2024 and received your letter as correspondence. At the direction of the GCE, I am responding to your letter.

The Executive of General Council acknowledges the passion in your letter and the ways in which you describe your commitment to the United Church.

The Commissioners of the 44<sup>th</sup> General Council met for the annual meeting of General Council in October 2023. At that annual meeting, a proposal related to designated lay ministry in the United Church, “Ministry Leadership To Meet The Needs Of The Church In The 2020s, Part B Designated Lay Ministry” was brought back to the Commissioners for deliberation. This proposal was modified from the original proposal that was before Commissioners at the General Council meeting in 2022. Additional background material was prepared for the Commissioners for the October 2023 meeting.

At the October 2023 meeting, Commissioners discussed and made the decision to pass the proposal related to designated lay ministry. The Executive of General Council did not make this decision; General Council Commissioners, duly and democratically elected from regional councils, made the decision.

To address the points in your letter:

- 1) You have for all intents and purposes ignored the Remit results. This is particularly egregious because it was the only one of six remits that was declined by the church. You are sending the message that General Council Executive will do whatever it wants, whether or not they have the support of the denomination.*

*You have undermined the confidence of our members in your leadership. By compromising the democratic process of the Church, you are fostering mistrust. It appears that there is an agenda present that runs counter to the will of the church. The matter should never have been allowed to be brought to the table in its current form nor should it have been accepted.*

Remit 6 asked, “Does the presbytery/pastoral charge agree that there should be one new order of ministry **encompassing the present categories of recognized designated lay ministers, diaconal ministers, and ordained ministers**, with ordination to the ministry of word, sacrament, education, service and pastoral care **as the single rite of entry**, and with provision for the continued identity of the diakonia within the ordained ministry?”

The proposal [“Ministry Leadership To Meet The Needs Of The Church In The 2020s”](#), which was brought to GC44 2022, was a large omnibus proposal that covered a range of ministry leadership needs within the United Church, including developing a pathway for Designated Lay Ministers discerning a call to lifelong vocational ministry to meet the requirements for Testamur for commissioning or ordination. The Council asked that the designated lay ministry proposals be clarified, including proposed pathways, and deferred to the 2023 General Council annual meeting for decision.

The proposal [“Ministry Leadership To Meet The Needs Of The Church In The 2020s, Part B Designated Lay Ministry,”](#) which was brought to GC44 2023, clarified the designated lay ministry proposals within the larger “Ministry Leadership” proposal. “Ministry Leadership To Meet The Needs Of The Church In The 2020s, Part B Designated Lay Ministry” (hereafter referred to as “Ministry Leadership”) proposed that the Council recognize the lifelong call of many DLMs to the vocation of ministry and directed the General Secretary to develop and implement a pathway to Testamur that recognizes their education and accumulated experience. A possible pathway was outlined in the documentation accompanying the proposal that, since passing in October 2023, is now being implemented.

Designated lay ministry was originally envisaged as being a time-limited way to meet ministry needs in a person’s home community of faith only. However, many DLMs express that they have a lifelong vocational call to ministry and the church has been content to draw on their ministry gifts in ways that are identical to ordered ministry. The passing of this proposal at the October 2023 meeting of General Council ensures that those who have a lifelong vocational call to ministry will be eligible to exercise that call through Ordered Ministry. The Designated lay ministry stream will continue as a time-limited and local expression of lay ministry.

“Ministry Leadership” **does not** alter the Basis of Union, which is the prerequisite for a Remit. It does not change the definition of the Order of Ministry nor does it propose a single rite of entry called “ordination.” It does not fold diaconal ministry into the ordained ministry. It does not eliminate designated lay ministry as a stream of lay ministry leadership.

“Ministry Leadership” provides a pathway for current Designated Lay Ministers who discern, with the church, a call to lifelong vocational ministry and have demonstrated through their education, recognition, service, and leadership Testamur equivalencies and thus eligibility for commissioning or ordination to an appointment or call.

This proposal acknowledges an ongoing need for “local, time-specific lay ministry,” the definition of DLM adopted by the 37<sup>th</sup> GC which created the stream in 2000. Designated Lay Ministry remains a stream of lay ministry personnel, under terms established by GC37 2000.

*2) You have devalued Ordered Ministry personnel and nullified our credentials. This move is a blatant devaluing of the time, effort, education, curiosity and dedication of Ordered Ministers. It undermines our call. It undermines the discernment process. And it undermines our hard-earned education. We have heard a lot about DLMs feeling*

*devalued as a group. No one has more obviously been devalued than Ordered Clergy within The UCC.*

“Ministry Leadership” does not devalue Ordered Ministry personnel nor nullify credentials of Ordered Ministers. Lifting up one group of people does not diminish another. It enriches the whole. To write that DLMs devalue “the time, effort, education, curiosity and dedication of Ordered Ministry” is to write that DLMs have not dedicated “time, effort, education, curiosity, and dedication” to ministry. GC44 2023 explicitly stated that it “Honour[s] and value[s] designated lay ministers’ many years of faithful service to the church . . .” Further, this assumes that the attainment of a degree or diploma is the sole requirement for entry into ministry in the United Church, which has never been the case. Entry into ministry in the United Church also requires integration of knowledge and demonstration of skill in the art of ministry, as well as affirmation of call from the wider church.

*3) It has been argued that this move was necessary to deal with the employment issues facing DLMs, such as limited term appointments. These are simple employment matters that should be dealt with through employment conditions. There is absolutely no need to make this a credentialing matter.*

“Ministry Leadership” was not proposed to deal with “employment issues” but expressly to recognize call, commitment and leadership of Designated Lay Ministers who have served faithfully over the twenty-plus years as ministry personnel and whom the church has appointed to serve in vocational solo ministry practice.

*4) It has also been argued that this is a “one-time” limited situation because the DLM programme at St. Andrew’s college is collapsing and in the future, there will only be two streams of Order Ministry (Ordained and Diaconal). This is not a problem: there are already only two streams of Ordered Ministry (Ordained and Diaconal), why is there a need to bring DLMs into the Order against the explicit wishes of the results of Remit 6? DLMs who experience a call to life-long Ordered Ministry, have always had the option to enter Ordered ministry through appropriate education and training. This excuse only reinforces the fact that this is a direct undermining of Remit 6 (GC 42).*

The proposal also recognized that a large portion of the cohort who sought recognition as Designated Lay Ministers did **not** have access to a traditional Eurocentric academic education stream. Designated lay ministry was their only option. The proposal further recognized that academic pedagogical models have changed significantly in the last twenty years and now more closely reflect that which was developed for designated lay ministry training: learning circles, distance-training, supervised in-ministry assignment during preparation.

As well, most university-based academic Master of Divinity programs, under the auspices of the Association of Theological Schools, no longer have an undergraduate degree as a prerequisite for an MDiv. For these reasons, the “Ministry Leadership” proposal directed that future candidates for lifelong

vocational ministry be directed towards the degree and certificate programs offered through our theological schools.

The DLM program at St. Andrew's College is not collapsing. The DLM program, as it currently exists, will end at the end of December 2025. This will enable current DLM students to complete the program they registered in. Future lay ministry training programs are part of the on-going conversations about trained lay leadership in collaborative ministry settings.

*5) We are all concerned about the future of our denomination. We would maintain that change to the authoritarian, hierarchical, non-democratic, bureaucratic structure in which we now find ourselves, is the opposite of what has made The United Church of Canada the vibrant, and responsive denomination it has been in the past. The undermining of knowledgeable and creative clergy who think theologically and draw from a well of education and academic study is the opposite of what will sustain and encourage our congregations. It feels as if General Council Executive has lost touch with not only our Ordered Clergy, but our congregations as well. Many of us are struggling to recognize "this United Church of ours."*

"Ministry Leadership" is a decision of the General Council, not the Executive of the General Council. It was made with the elected Commissioners' full awareness of the proposed implementation process of discernment, assessment and granting of Testamur.

The proposal does not undermine a "knowledgeable and creative clergy who think theologically" but celebrates the rich education and study that informs and shapes the creativity and theological insights of Designated Lay Ministers as demonstrated by their effective and faithful leadership since 2000.

*Our letter to the Judicial Committee outlining our concerns is attached. It has many signatories brave enough to take a public stand. Testimonials are also included. Many more have expressed fear in opposing the ideas and actions of General Council Executive. This is a sad reflection of the lived experience in this "Church of Justice."*

*The Ordaining and Commissioning of Lay people needs to stop. No seminary with true testamur "hands out" unearned degrees, and neither should the Office of Vocation. If you are interested in discussing reasonable and creative solutions to facilitate your way out of this unacceptable situation while dealing with the employment inequities of DLMS, we would be happy to discuss the matter with you further.*

*We would appreciate the opportunity to speak with GCE at your February meeting. Thanking you in advance.*

*Praying there are "ears to hear,"*

*Revs. Dianne Everitt, Alison Miculan and Amadeus Pyralis*

Further, this proposal does not hand out “unearned degrees.” The various programs of study at United Church theological colleges are one part of the formation for ministry that the United Church requires in its ministry personnel. The ability to integrate learnings gained through study and through the supervised practice of ministry are equally important aspects of formation and readiness for solo ministry practice, as is the recognition and affirmation of a lifelong vocational call to ministry by the wider church.

It should be noted that ordaining and commissioning has always been of **lay** people called to a lifelong vocation of ministry.

The GCE understands that the Judicial Committee has already received and responded to your request for an appeal, in mid-January. Thank you for your offer to meet with the Executive. Your correspondence regarded a decision of the General Council that is not within the mandate of the Executive to change or reverse and thus is not an action agenda item.

On behalf of the Executive of General Council,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Janzen-Ball".

Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball  
Executive Minister, Theology and Ministry Leadership