

## **LAY MISSIONARIES**

(A&P 2008, p.335-346; A&P 2011, p. 248-250, 18, 244, 44; A&P 2014, p. 244-247, 28)

The church is called to share in Christ's ministry in the world. To be renewed and nurtured continually for this service, congregations need pastors and teachers. In some contexts, presbyteries appoint individuals to provide this leadership in a role called lay missionary.

In 2004 the General Assembly agreed that standards, educational program and responsibilities should be established for lay missionaries. Church-wide consultation in the following years resulted in the General Assembly in 2008 adopting the following report of the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations). It defines the role and duties of lay missionaries and the responsibilities of the appointing presbyteries, and offers guidance on the educational preparation of lay missionaries.<sup>1</sup>

In 2011 and 2014 the General Assembly approved legislation to permit presbyteries to commission a ruling elder or a member of the Order of Diaconal Ministries to administer the sacraments in a pastoral charge where the presbytery discerns that there is no minister of Word and Sacraments available. The original report from Ministry and Church Vocations has been updated to reflect these changes in legislation.

### **Theological Foundation**

Roles, responsibilities and education of lay missionaries that meet the needs of The Presbyterian Church in Canada will be consistent with our theology of ministry. Three key documents for this discussion are *Living Faith (Foi Vivante): A Statement of Christian Belief*, adopted as a subordinate standard in (1998), *Together in Ministry: The Theology and Practice of Ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada*, accepted for use in the church by the General Assembly in 2003, and the "Preamble and Ordination Questions," read each time a minister of Word and Sacraments is ordained or inducted.<sup>2</sup> Also pertinent is our denomination's experience of lay catechists (1953-1984).

*Together in Ministry* outlines some foundational principles:

There is one minister, the Lord Jesus Christ, and one ministry, the ministry of Christ. All other ministries come from and are sustained by the ministry of Christ. The church is Christ together with his people called both to worship and to serve him in all of life. Through the church, the Lord continues his ministry. All members of the church are called to participate in Christ's work in the world, and have been given gifts by God to do so. Christians are initiated into this ministry through baptism, the sign and seal of their union with Christ and with his church.<sup>3</sup>

This emphasis on the one ministry of Jesus Christ as the source of all ministry is drawn from the "Preamble and Ordination Questions" established by The Presbyterian Church in Canada (Book of Forms section 447). It gives central importance to Jesus Christ, the original bearer of the gospel. It is Jesus who continues, through the ongoing presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to build and empower the church to witness to his original gospel ministry. What matters is that our ministry bears witness to and honours Christ, and helps the church to carry out the mission of healing, salvation and discipleship to which Christ has called it.

The whole church is called to participate in this mission. As *Together in Ministry* says, "At baptism we receive a vocation or calling for mission. We are to bring Christ's healing presence to the world for which he died, his peace to its pain and anguish."<sup>4</sup> This mission and ministry belong to all believers. We also believe that God gives particular gifts to the church to carry out that mission. There are different gifts, different functions, different levels of responsibility, but one body, one mission, one Lord (Romans 12:3-8). The overwhelming concern of the New Testament is for that mission. In particular, the concern is for the authenticity of the gospel that is proclaimed and the believability of the gospel community that proclaims it. For example, Paul's deep desire for the Corinthian church is that order be restored within its life and worship, so that this early Christian community could express better to the non-Christian world the nature of the gospel as a restoration of order out of disorder, indeed a new creation. In other words, the quality of a congregation's life is vital to the effectiveness of its mission in the world. New Testament passages that deal with leadership and with distinctions between different types or offices of leadership must be understood within this larger concern for the church's mission. Church order exists for the sake of the gospel, not the other way around.

The ministry of the whole people of God takes place in the world in a seemingly limitless variety of types of service. At the same time, all Christians also must exercise their ministry gifts within the body, in what the New Testament refers to as "one another" ministries. We are to love one another, to pray for one another, to carry one another's burdens, and to admonish one another. These injunctions portray the corporate life of New Testament Christian communities, where ministry is never identified with one person called a 'minister'. Instead ministry is the work of the whole community. For the sake of that ministry, all are called, all are gifted and all together are active in Christ's mission. The whole body exercises ministry – both within the congregation, enhancing its health, and beyond the congregation, in effective mission in the name of Christ. Both the internal life and the external mission of the congregation are fuelled by the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit.

These convictions mean that among Christians there is no elite group of ministers who possess indelible sanctity and special privileges. In whatever ways the church orders its life, it must affirm that Christ is the minister, who calls the whole church to ministry. The whole church in Christ has been consecrated as sons, daughters and priests.

#### *Leadership within the Church*

From the beginning of the church's life, some individuals were chosen for specific functions of leadership within the body of the church. The New Testament tells of the apostles, chosen by Christ and commissioned to go to the world as witnesses to his resurrection. They became, with Christ as the cornerstone, the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20).

These same apostles also called forth and set apart those who would succeed them, thereby ensuring continuity of gospel witness and church leadership. They laid their hands on and prayed over those who would act more locally as pastors and teachers for the fledgling churches around the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea during the middle of the first Christian century (Acts 6:6; 3:3; 1 Timothy 4:14; 5:22; 2 Timothy 1:6). At the same time, other local leaders were called to specialized tasks of deacons or elders. Evidently, local leadership was essential in the formation of the first Christian congregations, although such leadership was initially fluid and lacking the structure of later centuries.

Thus, the New Testament presents no sense of contradiction between understanding the church as one body, a priesthood of all believers, and distinguishing in function between various types of leadership. Specialized functions within the one body are viewed as God-given, for the sake of the health, unity and mission of the whole church. In fact, so important was the continuity of the gospel of Jesus Christ for the mission of the whole church that some leaders were given the special tasks of telling the gospel story, interpreting the gospel story, and preserving and protecting the gospel story from distortion. While every Christian is called to be a witness to this gospel, the mission of the whole church depends on the faithful proclamation of the gospel by faithful teachers. Therefore, the New Testament presents a universal priesthood and a universal ministry, but not a universal teaching pastorate.

During the sixteenth-century Reformation, John Calvin spent much time thinking about the nature of the church and its need for leadership. Reading from the New Testament, Calvin and the Presbyterian tradition that followed him championed the office of pastor-teacher as among the most vital of Christ's gifts for the body. Calvin stressed, over against some more extreme versions of the Reformation, that God does not now lead and build the church by giving every believer direct revelations, but instead uses human means as intermediaries:

Let us not be like those fanciful persons who would have God to send them some revelation from heaven, that they might have no need of preaching or reading. Let us not be carried away with such foolish conceit, but let all of us both great and small submit ourselves soberly to the order that our Lord Jesus Christ has set, which is that such as have great skill and are well versed in the holy Scriptures, and have the gift of teaching, should strive to serve the whole church as they are bound to do.<sup>5</sup>

What amazed Calvin is that Christ's ministry in the church continues through human instrumentality. When God speaks now to the church, when God seeks to rule over the church, God does so by the Holy Spirit speaking through the Scriptures, as the Scriptures are expounded through the preaching of ministers of Word and Sacraments. God dares to address the church through human ambassadors, ordinary men and women, weak and earthen vessels, whose task it is as teachers of the Word to keep drawing the church back to the apostolic message and ministry. What matters to Calvin is faithfulness to that apostolic message. His commitment to and concern for this original divine revelation is what drives him to exalt the ministry of those who make it contemporary in the life of the church through a ministry of preaching and teaching.

God might have acted, in this respect, by himself, without any aid or instrument, or might even have done it by angels; but there are several reasons why he rather chooses to employ men. First, in this way he declares his condescension towards us, employing to perform the function of ambassadors in the world, to be the interpreters of his secret will; in short, to represent his own person ...Secondly, it forms a most excellent and useful training to humility, when he accustoms us to obey his word though preached by men like ourselves, or, it may be, our inferiors in worth.<sup>6</sup>

This elevated understanding of the place of ministers of Word and Sacraments has been fundamental in shaping ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Though chosen by the people of God and ordained for the sake of the ministry of the people of God in the world, ministers of Word and Sacraments are to be received as God's gift to the church, for its edification. Such edification includes the ministries of preaching and

teaching, sacramental ministry, pastoral care and discipline. The “Preamble and Ordination Questions” say this well:

That the church may be continually renewed and nurtured for ministry, Christ furnishes the church with pastors and teachers. He requires and enables the church to discern and to confirm by ordination those whom he calls to this pastoral teaching office. The standards of his church he entrusts in a special degree of responsibility to their care. (Book of Forms section 447)

Referring to ministers of Word and Sacraments, *Living Faith* adds that, “Their ministry is an order which continues the work of the apostles. Christ preserves this order today by calling to it both men and women. The church recognizes this calling in the act of ordination.”<sup>7</sup>

The special responsibility entrusted to ministers for the standards (or teaching) of the church refers to the special tasks of teaching and interpreting the gospel, and of preserving and protecting it from distortion. Ministers are called to help the people to understand and live the gospel. Therefore, it matters what ministers teach, preach and enact in the sacraments, in pastoral care and in leadership. This is the reason why our church invests tremendous resources in the discernment and preparation of its ministers, and why it sets such high standards in this regard. Moreover, this special responsibility is reflected in assigning to ministers the sole responsibility for the content and conduct of public worship and for the supply of the pulpit.<sup>8</sup>

Though there is continual debate in the church about the curriculum and location of theological education for ministers, few question the conviction that as a church we want and need ministers who have received a thorough theological education, including competency in knowing and teaching the scriptures. The church has sought and still seeks to have ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments inducted in local congregations as pastor-teachers or resident-theologians to equip the local church for ministry.

#### Alternatives to Clergy Leadership?

Although our theology of ministry anticipates congregations being served by ordained ministers of Word and Sacraments, in practice this is not always the case. Some congregations in our far-flung country are bereft of ministers of Word and Sacraments. The reasons are complex. In an age in which spouses of clergy also work outside the home, family mobility is much more restricted than when clergy were male with wives who did not work outside the home. Not only that, but the compulsory ordained missionary appointment system, that appointed newly ordained clergy to rural and remote locations and subsidized their stipends from the national church budget, was discontinued in 1986. The result has been that some presbyteries have very few clergy and receive few if any applications for pastoral vacancies. Moreover, some congregations cannot provide the minimum stipend and allowances for ordained ministers, even if such were available.

How do we solve these issues? For congregations to continue to have the leadership of a minister of Word and Sacraments, either they must share a minister, for instance in a multiple point pastoral charge, or the financial resources must be found elsewhere. Perhaps the minister serves in the congregation part-time while working in secular employment. Perhaps the denomination’s national budget allows congregations with ample resources to subsidize others. When clergy leadership simply is not an option,

one alternative is to allow lay persons, whether paid or voluntary, to carry out some ministry functions traditionally performed by clergy. Recent examples include the formation by a couple of our presbyteries of “ministry clusters” – multiple-point pastoral charges led by a team consisting of several presbytery-appointed lay leaders and a called or appointed, supervising minister of Word and Sacraments. Another earlier example (1953-1984) was the use of “Catechists” – lay members of one of our congregations who served as lay preachers and pastors under the supervision of their presbytery and with the approval of the General Board of Missions.<sup>9</sup> Just as the term catechist was falling into disuse, the General Assembly approved the guidelines of the Board of World Missions for lay missionaries – lay persons, appointed by the board to full or part-time work as “Lay Missionaries” or “Lay Missionaries with Special Training” and serving under the supervision and pastoral care of the presbytery.<sup>10</sup>

Consistency with our theology of ministry, however, requires that these various forms of lay ministry, while meeting the church’s need for continuing leadership, at the same time meet the church’s need for the faithful proclamation of the gospel. For this reason, such lay leaders serve under the supervision of a minister of Word and Sacraments. For this reason as well, presbyteries are enjoined to ensure that the ministers exercise care in their supervision. Such supervision does not assume, incorrectly, that our Presbyterian lay leaders lack the maturity of faith and gifts and graces to lead worship, to preach and to teach. Rather the responsibility to supervise comes from the church’s belief that Christ entrusts the teachings of his church especially to the care of its ministers of Word and Sacraments.

### **Definition of Lay Missionary**

Lay missionaries are lay persons appointed by presbyteries to provide pastoral and teaching leadership in congregations. (Certified candidates for ministry fall under a separate category, as described in the following paragraph.) Typically, lay missionaries serve under the supervision of an interim moderator in a congregation or pastoral charge lacking a called or appointed minister of Word and Sacraments. They may also serve in “ministry clusters” – multiple-point pastoral charges led by a team of several presbytery-appointed lay leaders and a called or appointed, supervising minister of Word and Sacraments.

When presbyteries assign certified candidates for ministry to teaching and pastoral work under the direction of an interim moderator, they are appointed as “student on annual appointment” or “student on summer appointment”. In these cases, special provisions apply.

### **Duties of Lay Missionaries**

All lay missionaries serve under the supervision of one of our ministers of Word and Sacraments. Lay missionaries may be assigned a wide range of teaching and pastoral duties, with the following exceptions:

- The minister of Word and Sacraments, as the executive of the presbytery, retains responsibility for the conduct and content of public worship and for the supply of the pulpit (Book of Forms section 111).
- The minister of Word and Sacraments celebrates the sacraments or arranges for another minister of Word and Sacraments to do so. In some exceptional situations, where a presbytery discerns that there is no minister of Word and Sacraments available to administer the sacraments in a pastoral charge, it may commission a ruling elder or a member of the Order of Diaconal Ministries to do so under specific terms. (Book of Forms section 201.4)<sup>11</sup>

- The minister of Word and Sacraments moderates the meetings of the session.

### **Responsibilities of Presbyteries**

Presbyteries fulfill many of their responsibilities for their lay missionaries through the interim moderator or, in the case of ministry clusters, through the called or appointed minister of Word and Sacraments. Presbytery responsibilities include the following:

1. Assign an interim moderator.<sup>12</sup> Provide the interim moderator with adequate support for the tasks of supervision.
2. In consultation with the session(s), outline the duties of the lay missionary position and the competencies needed. Consider the educational and experiential background needed.
3. In consultation with the session(s), prepare a position description.
4. Ensure that the appointed lay missionary is well equipped to serve well within a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. While there are no requirements with respect to membership or ruling eldership within this denomination, prospective lay missionaries should display the necessary gifts, qualities and characteristics before appointment. These are outlined in general terms below:
  - professed Christian faith.
  - demonstrated beliefs and practice consistent with those of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. To explore theological matters with the prospective lay missionary, presbyteries may wish to use *Living Faith: Foi Vivante* and its companion study guide, or *A Catechism for Today*, written by the Committee on Church Doctrine.<sup>13</sup> To explore matters of church governance and safe church practices, the presbytery may wish to refer to the *Book of Forms, Leading with Care*, and *The Policy for Dealing with Sexual Abuse/Harassment*.
  - a sense of calling to provide leadership within the church that has been tested and affirmed within the Christian community.
  - knowledge of and compliance with relevant denominational policies (*Leading with Care* and *The Policy for Dealing with Sexual Abuse/Harassment*).
  - a police records check, as appropriate depending on the duties of the position.
  - education and experience demonstrating that the person has developed the competencies required for the position.
5. Review the remuneration and position description, making any adjustments for suitability and fairness. The schedule of minimum stipends and allowances (category II or III) applies, including provisions for housing and utilities, health and dental insurance (where applicable), study leave and vacation, with prorating to reflect part-time service.
6. Provide the lay missionary with orientation to the congregation or pastoral charge and its ministries and to the denomination. Include instruction in required policies.
7. Regularly provide the lay missionary with pastoral support.
8. Regularly provide the lay missionary with opportunities to plan, review and evaluate work based on the position description, with accountability to the presbytery through the interim moderator.
9. Ensure that the lay missionary regularly makes use of study leave and vacation entitlements.

Supervision of lay missionaries is a serious consideration for a presbytery considering such an appointment. Certainly greater care, energy and attention will be required of an interim moderator in a pastoral charge with an appointed lay missionary than with a retired Presbyterian Church in Canada minister supplying the pulpit and meeting

emergency pastoral needs. Particularly when an interim moderator is serving actively as a called minister, the presbytery must ensure that the interim moderator's congregation understands and accepts the extra responsibility and duties expected of their minister. For this reason, the use of lay missionaries might be ideal only in presbyteries with retired ministers to serve as interim moderators or in clustered multiple-point pastoral charges with a called or appointed minister of Word and Sacraments.

### **Educational Preparation**

Presbyteries and lay missionaries are encouraged to consider the theological colleges of The Presbyterian Church in Canada as resources for learning from a Reformed theology perspective and about this denomination. They offer courses from six-week courses for elders to lay certificate and graduate levels, and increasingly, with a variety of formats that make distance education possible. Also, in recent years the Life and Mission Agency has arranged preaching workshops for lay preachers, with leadership by Presbyterian Church in Canada ministers. As presbyteries encourage their lay missionaries to take study leave, perhaps also through the interim moderator they can serve in an advisory role for such matters as course selection.

While the particular duties of a lay missionary position might require learning in additional areas, all lay missionaries require knowledge and understanding of the following: the Old and New Testaments, biblical interpretation, basic Christian doctrine, the Reformed tradition, church history, worship leadership, prayer, preaching, pastoral care, ethics, Christian education, congregational leadership, and the mission of the church. As well, lay missionaries should display maturity in their integration of their Christian faith and life, and should be able to articulate their own journey of faith, their understanding of the church's faith, and their approach to congregational ministry.

### **Concluding Remarks**

While definition of the role and duties of lay missionaries was established by the General Assembly in 2008, presbyteries retain discretion as they appoint lay missionaries to serve in pastoral and teaching ministries within congregations. This document provides guidance to presbyteries in fulfilling these responsibilities.

### **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> In recent years General Assemblies have considered the following requests and reports concerning lay missionaries: A&P 2003, p. 580-83; A&P 2004, p. 405-06; A&P 2005, p. 403-04; A&P 2006, p. 334-43; A&P 2007, p. 349; A&P 2008, p. 335-46.

<sup>2</sup> (1) *Living Faith (Foi Vivante): A Statement of Christian Belief*. Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 1984. (2) *Together in Ministry: The Theology and Practice of Ministry in the Presbyterian Church in Canada*. Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2004. (3) The "Preamble" is found in the Book of Forms section 447.

<sup>3</sup> *Together in Ministry*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Calvin, John, *Sermons on the Epistle to the Ephesians*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1973, p. 362.

<sup>6</sup> Calvin, John, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeil, ed., Ford Lewis Battles, tr., Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960, 4.3.1.

<sup>7</sup> *Living Faith (Foi Vivante)*, section 7.2.3.

<sup>8</sup> Ministers are named as "the executive of the presbytery," with responsibility for the conduct and content of public worship and for the supply of the pulpit (Book of Forms section 111).

<sup>9</sup> For fuller detail, see the study paper, A&P 2006, p. 334-43.

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<sup>10</sup> The qualifications of Lay Missionaries with Specialized Training were to be determined in relation to the requirements of the position to be filled. A&P 1985, p. 429.

<sup>11</sup> “Where a presbytery discerns that there is no minister of Word and Sacraments available to administer the sacraments in a pastoral charge, it may commission a ruling elder or a member of the Order of Diaconal Ministries to do so on the following terms: (a) The candidate shall be interviewed by the presbytery to ascertain his/her personal and spiritual qualifications to lead worship. (b) Those commissioned shall be trained in the theology and practice of the sacraments. (c) The commission shall be limited to a specific pastoral charge and shall be for a period not exceeding two years. The commission is renewable following a presbytery review. (d) Those commissioned shall be accountable to the presbytery, through the interim moderator, for the duration of the commission.” (Book of Forms section 201.4; A&P 2011, p. 248-250, 18, 244, 44; A&P 2014, p. 244-247, 28)

<sup>12</sup> Ministry clusters with a called or appointed minister of Word and Sacraments do not require an interim moderator, as the minister looks after the responsibilities otherwise assigned to an interim moderator.

<sup>13</sup> (1) Boyer, Carolyn, *An Interactive Study Guide to Living Faith*, Toronto: The Presbyterian Church in Canada, 2004; (2) *A Catechism for Today* was approved by the General Assembly in 2004 (A&P 2004, p. 252-89).



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