

## **ORDINATION TO AND FUNDING FOR NON-TRADITIONAL MINISTRIES**

(Life and Mission Agency – Overture Responses, A&P 2021, p. 501–04)

### **Section A: Interim Response Prepared for 2020 GA**

An overture from the Presbytery of Niagara was referred to the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations and Canadian Ministries) in consultation with the Committee on Church Doctrine. A second overture from the Presbytery of Huron-Perth was also referred to the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations). This response will consider them together as both overtures raise similar matters.

The prayer of the overture from the Presbytery of Niagara asks for two things: first, to explore an alternative path to ordination for those seeking a call to non-traditional ministries; and second, to explore different ways of funding non-traditional ministries. The response will consider each part in turn.

### **Part 1: Our Understanding of Ordination and its Implications for Non-Traditional Ministry Contexts**

The question of whether presbyteries can ordain certified candidates to non-traditional ministries has been considered by Assembly before. In 2008, the General Assembly approved a major document, *The Meaning of Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments* (A&P 2008, p. 353-65), setting out a theology of ordination to ministry of Word and Sacraments and appropriate contexts for ordination including ordination to specialized ministries such as institutional chaplaincies or synod camp directors. A ministry position would have to meet the following criteria for it to be a valid context for ordination:

- The ministry position would require the full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments involving duties and responsibilities only an ordained minister of Word and Sacraments could perform: for example, regular preaching, teaching, administration of the sacraments and pastoral care. If the duties and responsibilities of the position could be carried out by trained laypeople, there would be no basis for ordination.
- The ministry position, which must be at least half-time (Book of Forms 176.1), could be recognized by the presbytery as a valid context for service such that once ordained, the minister's name could appear on the constituent roll of the presbytery. If the ministry position could not be regarded as part of the presbytery's ministry, there would be no basis for ordination.
- The ministry position would be recognized by the presbytery as a genuine call of the wider church to a specific ministry. If the ministry position could not be recognized as such through our call process as either a congregational call or a Life and Mission Agency appointment, there would be no basis for ordination.
- The ministry position would be recognized by the presbytery as a gospel call to the candidate, without which there would be no basis for ordination.
- The ministry position would allow the presbytery to exercise fully its responsibility for the care and oversight of the candidate, who, if ordained, would be accountable to the presbytery in the exercise of his or her ministry while serving or living within its bounds. If there were no clear lines of presbytery oversight for the candidate and the ministry and no clear lines of accountability to presbytery for the candidate and the ministry, there would be no basis for ordination.
- Another factor would be the financial requirement that any ministry position must meet the minimum stipend and allowances as set by the General Assembly. Any ministry lacking these key components would not qualify as a proper context for ordination.

The 2008 General Assembly also set out a two-step process by which specialized ministries would be evaluated to determine if they were valid contexts for ordination. In the first step, the presbytery and the Committee on Education and Reception "shall inquire diligently" as to whether the ministry position to which a certified candidate seeks ordination "involves full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments". The second step mandated "that the presbytery, to which as corporate bishop pertains the power to ordain, be urged to act responsibly in this matter of ordination, ensuring that all criteria for ordination have been met. While presbytery decisions are normally approved by a simple majority vote, they are encouraged to strive for a high degree of consensus in these cases." (A&P 2008, p. 360, 362) It should be noted the two-step process as approved by the 2008 General Assembly was limited to two specific ministry positions, institutional chaplaincy and synod camp director. So while in theory our current understanding of ordination provides a sturdy framework for envisioning and creating new, cutting-edge, non-traditional ministries which would be valid ordination contexts, in practice our process is applicable to only two specialized ministry positions.

The overture from the Presbytery of Niagara requests the development of an alternative path to ordination for those seeking calls to non-traditional ministries. Currently, certified candidates for ministry can be ordained only if they receive a call to a congregation or a Life and Mission Agency appointment or to an institutional chaplaincy or synod camp director position which meets the criteria for ordination. Our existing polity makes no provision for presbyteries to appoint candidates directly to non-traditional ministry positions within their bounds to which candidates could then be ordained. One possible option would be for presbyteries to be given authority to make such direct appointments. Another route would be to develop a process by which presbyteries could request the Life and Mission Agency to make appointments to non-traditional ministries within their bounds to which candidates could be ordained. Yet another possibility would be to use the two-step process approved by the 2008 General Assembly as the basis for developing a general process for ordaining certified candidates to non-traditional ministry positions. There may be other options but the matter would require study by the Life and Mission Agency and the Clerks of Assembly, possibly leading to the development of enabling legislation which would need approval under the Barrier Act.

Our polity also requires a ministry position to be at least half-time to qualify as a valid context for ordination. The overture from the Presbytery of Huron-Perth suggests the percentage requirement for ministry is inconsistent with our theology of call and ordination and an impediment to developing “tent-maker” ministries (Ac.18:1–3) which would permit an ordained minister to serve part time while receiving income from other employment.

Ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments in The Presbyterian Church in Canada confers significant rights, privileges and responsibilities upon a certified candidate. In our polity an ordained minister becomes a member of presbytery with an expectation of full participation in the courts of the church. This includes the right to make and second motions, to vote, to dissent, to attend General Assembly as a commissioner, to have a part in administering discipline and to participate in the ordination of other certified candidates with the laying on of hands. Ordination also opens the door to seek a subsequent call or appointment to any ministry position within the denomination for a minister of Word and Sacraments. These rights, privileges and responsibilities are properly accorded where there is a significant time commitment to a call, which the church has understood to be at least half-time. Additionally, eligibility for some provisions in stipend and allowances provided to ordained ministers is based on a minimum half-time position. For example ordained ministers must work at least 20 hours a week in order to receive coverage under the Health and Dental Insurance Plan. For these reasons the “percentage of ministry and required remuneration” for ordination to a ministry position requested in the prayer of the overture should continue to be a minimum 50% as previously established by General Assembly.

## **Part 2: Funding for Non-traditional Ministries**

The question of establishing alternative pathways for funding non-traditional ministries has long been of concern to The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In an effort to meet the funding needs of non-traditional ministries several grants and funds are made available to the church:

- Supporting Ministries Grants (Specialized Ministries Stream and New Congregational Development Stream)
- The New and Renewed Ministry Fund – New Ministries Stream
- Avondbloem Experimental Fund

While there is wisdom in ensuring a multitude of funding opportunities for non-traditional ministries, it is also important that non-traditional ministries do not underestimate their ability to raise funds from the gathered community and from supportive individuals and congregations that feel connected to their mission. It is not recommended that a non-traditional ministry rely solely on denominational grants for their financial sustainability. Healthy and sustainable ministries establish a variety of funding streams.

It is recommended that non-traditional ministries seeking financial support through denominational grants and their presbyteries enter into conversation with Canadian Ministries well before the grant application deadlines to institute a financial plan and to identify multiple sources of funding.

The above is offered as an interim response to the overtures on the understanding that the Life and Mission Agency, in consultation with the Clerks of Assembly, will explore options by which certified candidates for ministry might be appointed to non-traditional ministry positions which would qualify as valid contexts for ordination and recommend any changes to the 2021 General Assembly.

## **Section B: Supplementary Report with Response for the 2021 General Assembly**

Following the cancellation of the 2020 General Assembly, the Life and Mission Agency (Ministry and Church Vocations) continued to explore options by which certified candidates for ministry might be appointed to non-traditional ministry positions which would qualify as valid contexts for ordination. In consultation with the Clerks of Assembly and with Canadian Ministries, the third option previously mentioned was preferred: using the two-step process approved by the 2008 General Assembly for institutional chaplaincy and synod camp director positions as the basis for developing a general process for ordaining certified candidates to non-traditional ministry positions.

With respect to the ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments of directors of Presbyterian Church in Canada synod camps, the 2008 General Assembly approved the following as the first step process:

The synod camp board, presbytery and Committee on Education and Reception shall inquire diligently whether the duties of the camp director involve full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments or whether they can be performed as readily by a member of the diaconal order or by a qualified lay person.

The 2008 General Assembly approved a similar first step for ordination to a chaplaincy position in an institution not directly responsible to The Presbyterian Church in Canada:

Presbyteries and the Committee on Education and Reception shall inquire diligently whether the chaplaincy position involves full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments, including the fact that it can be performed freely without any doctrinal restriction of our Reformed faith by the employing body.

The second step for ordination to both synod camp director and institutional chaplaincy positions approved by the 2008 General Assembly affirmed the presbytery's authority:

The presbytery, to which as corporate bishop pertains the power to ordain, is urged to act responsibly in this matter of ordination, ensuring that all criteria for ordination have been met. While presbytery decisions are normally approved by a simple majority vote, they are encouraged to strive for a high degree of consensus in these cases.

Both steps of the 2008 General Assembly process outlined above could be consolidated into a general process. The following recommendations are therefore presented.

### **Recommendation LMA-035** (adopted, p. 38)

That the following be the process for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments to a non-traditional ministry position:

1. Presbyteries and the Committee on Education and Reception shall inquire diligently whether the non-traditional ministry position meets the criteria for ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments in accordance with the *Theology of Ordination to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments* adopted by the 2008 GA (A&P 2008, p. 353–65) and in particular the following:
  - Does the ministry position require full exercise of the ministry of Word and Sacraments?
  - Is presbytery permitted to recognize the ministry as a valid context for service by ministers of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, such that it may place the name of the minister, once ordained, on the constituent roll of the presbytery?
  - Is the offer of the position properly understood to represent the call of this church to a particular ministry?
  - Does the presbytery recognize the ministry position as a gospel call to the candidate?
  - Is the presbytery prepared to enter a relationship of care for the minister, who will be accountable to the presbytery for his or her ministry while serving or living within the bounds, as legislated?
2. The presbytery, to which as corporate bishop pertains the power to ordain, is urged to act responsibly in this matter of ordination, ensuring that all criteria for ordination have been met. While presbytery decisions are normally approved by a simple majority vote, they are encouraged to strive for a high degree of consensus in these cases.