

# FINAL REPORT ON THE REVIEW OF THE MINISTRY OF LAY PREACHER

## MEC Working Group on Lay Specified Ministries

February 2013

### Executive Summary

A national review of the ministry of Lay Preacher was undertaken by the Ministerial Education Commission in 2011 and 2012 on behalf of the Assembly Standing Committee. The MEC Working Group on Lay Specified Ministries undertook the review.

In 2011, surveys were conducted with presbyteries, accredited Lay Preacher, Lay Preacher candidates, 'non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers, ordained Ministers and Church Councils. A Report of the findings of these surveys was circulated in March 2012, with responses sought from councils of the church, relevant agencies and committees, and individuals.

The Review affirms that the service of 'lay' church members in leading worship and preaching is a rich and valued dimension of the life of the Uniting Church, reflecting our theology of the giftedness of the people of God. It also provides information about the changed circumstances in which many Lay Preachers are leading, namely, serving in small, sometimes isolated, congregations without a resident minister, and with little or no Presbytery supervision.

This Report summarises the findings and makes proposals in four areas:

#### 1. Role

- i. The title 'Lay Preacher' seems both inadequate and for many, unappealing, yet we are unable to suggest a better alternative at this point, and unsure whether the benefits of a change would outweigh any resulting problems.
- ii. It is evident that many Lay Preachers perform additional duties, often in congregations without a resident ordained Minister. However to redefine Lay Preachers into a broader role immediately has an impact on the ministry of Pastor. For this reason we recommend better Presbytery oversight and support in relation to additional duties.

#### 2. Recognition and Promotion

- i. The Review affirms the significance of the ministry of Lay Preacher for many congregations, and calls for the councils of the church to affirm, promote and celebrate this ministry. A national promotion strategy is proposed.
- ii. The congregation is where people's gifts and service are encouraged and developed. The role of ordained Ministers and other key lay leaders is vital in this. The Review calls for this 'culture' of equipping to be recognised, affirmed and resourced.
- iii. Recognising that an accredited denominational role may have little appeal to young people, the Working Group proposes that the MEC encourage synods to foster

additional ways in which younger adults (under 45) might be equipped to exercise their gifts.

### **3. Education and Training**

- i. Many survey respondents called for training that was more flexible in delivery, varied in style, and incremental in nature. The Report recommends revising the MEC Rules and proposes a new national, competency-based framework for Lay Preacher training and assessment, leading to a national certificate of recognition. Online learning options are seen as essential.
- ii. It is recommended that the Working Group talk with synod education agencies about more effective ways to work nationally in supporting education and formation for lay specified ministries, and make recommendations to the Task Group to establish the Education for Ministry Working Group.

### **4. Oversight and Support**

- i. The surveys reveal an extremely low level of oversight and review of Lay Preachers by Presbyteries and Church Councils. It is recommended that the 2012 Regulations be amended to make the role of the Presbytery clear in this regard.
- ii. The Report proposes that the Working Group, in consultation with others, develop Guidelines for presbyteries regarding promotion and recruitment, education and formation, oversight and support, feedback and review of Lay Preachers.
- iii. Concerns were expressed about financial remuneration and support in relation to training, travel and preaching/ leading 'fees'. It is proposed that the ASC request Synod Secretaries to confer about how to achieve better and more consistent support for Lay Preachers.
- iv. The Working Group requests the ASC to review the role and accountability of the National Lay Preacher Committee in the light of the mandate of the new Education for Ministry Working Group.

[NOTE: The new UCA Regulations use the term "recognition" of Lay Preachers rather than "accreditation". As these Regulations were approved during the course of the review, the Surveys and Reports contain the term accreditation to refer to those in the specified ministry of Lay Preacher, as we recognise that at this point the term "recognition" may be unfamiliar and confusing to some.]

### **Attachments**

Appendix A - Respondents to 2012 Survey

Appendix B – Submission, New England North West Presbytery

Appendix C – 20 Questions: Group and Individual Responses

Appendix D – MEC Rules for The Ministry of Lay Preachers

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