

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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A. Background

1. In 2009, the Assembly Standing Committee agreed to undertake a broad review of the ministry of Lay Preacher, and requested that the Ministerial Education Commission undertake this, as the MEC had already agreed to a more limited review within its own mandate. The original intention was that a final report would have come to the ASC prior to the Thirteenth Assembly, however the review team took longer than expected to complete the process.
2. The terms of reference for the Review were as follows:
 - i. identify whether the definition of the ministry of Lay Preacher is adequate for the future needs of the church [new Reg 2.2.3 (a)], and make recommendations to the Assembly regarding any necessary Regulation changes
 - ii. identify whether the Rules for Study for the ministry of Lay Preacher are adequate for the nature of the ministry as determined in 1 above, and make recommendations to the Assembly regarding any necessary amendments
 - iii. identify issues related to selection, training and continuing education of Lay Preachers and make recommendations to the body or agency appointed by each Synod
 - iv. review the training being offered by synods and presbyteries in the light of the Rules (as required by the Regulations)

The review will require consideration of:

- i. the range of contexts in which Lay Preachers serve
 - ii. the roles and tasks that Lay Preachers perform
 - iii. the roles and recognition of non-accredited lay preachers and worship leaders
 - iv. processes and standards for training and assessment of Lay Preachers
 - v. supervision and support for Lay Preachers
3. The review was conducted by the MEC's Working Group on Lay Specified Ministries – Mr Craig Mitchell, Rev Sandy Boyce, Dr Rodney Fopp and Mr Jim Hayward. Three members of the review team are accredited Lay Preachers, and all four have worked or currently work in education and training. Application was made to the Assembly General Secretary for funding to assist the research, and as a result Ms Lynne Taylor was contracted on a part-time basis as a researcher, assisting the review team. The Working Group is very appreciative of the work of Lynne Taylor as researcher and grateful for the funding which enabled this.
4. Each synod was asked to nominate one or more people to assist us with making appropriate contacts. We wish to express appreciation to the following people who are not implicated in any way in our findings: Neil Thorpe, Marian Zaunbrecher, Lindsay Cullen, Bronwyn Murphy, Rohan Pryor, Joan McRae, Max Howland, Jenny Tymms, Alison Whish, Graeme Cake and Sophie Lizares-Bodegon.

B. Structure of the Review

5. The Review was conducted partly as a research project both to determine the 'state of play' and to hear what the church was saying about the ministry of Lay Preacher. This involved seeking information from a range of individuals and councils, and also seeking to compare information regarding accredited Lay Preachers and 'non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers.
6. Surveys in 2011
 - i. Presbyteries – 21 responses
 - ii. Lay leaders (accredited and non-accredited) – 979 responses
(470 accredited, 64 Lay Preacher candidates, 424 other non-accredited)
 - iii. Ordained ministers – 100 responses
 - iv. Church Councils – 208 responses
7. A Report of Review Findings was distributed to Synods and Presbyteries in mid-March 2012, with a brief survey and a request for responses by 21 May. A digital copy of the Report was made available on the Assembly website. The Working Group also emailed information about the Report to Synods' lay education staff and the National Lay Preachers' Committee. Print copies of the Report were made available on request.
8. Considerable work went into the Report to produce a document that was (hopefully) appealing and accessible to readers, despite the fact that it contained a great deal of information. The Report was produced 'in house'. It should be noted that the 2011 surveys produced a large amount of data, not all of which has yet been reported.
9. Data from Surveys i, ii and iii above have been given to each Synod MEB. Craig Mitchell and Lynne Taylor are hoping to undertake further data analysis for publication, hopefully in *Uniting Church Studies* and another relevant journal. Since this is the most comprehensive study of lay leadership ever undertaken in the Uniting Church (apart from the NCLS), the data deserves further analysis.
10. There were a relatively low number of responses to the Report of Review Findings: 5 Presbyteries, 13 Church Councils or Congregations, 6 Lay Preacher Associations or Committees (including the National Lay Preacher Committee), 5 Synod agencies or committees, 1 Assembly Working Group, and 121 individuals.
11. The July 2012 annual meeting of the Ministerial Education Commission agreed to extend the Review until the end of 2012. This was to allow for
 - i. the reopening of submissions to the Report of Review Findings in order to gain further responses, particularly from Councils of the church.
 - ii. further consultation with young adults and people from a range of culture and language groups
12. The online survey was reopened in August 2012. In September, synod lay education contacts were asked to each conduct a focus group with young adults and with

people from one or more cultural/language groups. Responses were received from Western Australia and Queensland.

13. The MEC agreed that the final Report would be considered by a special meeting of up to 2 representatives from each MEB in November 2012, with recommendations sent from this meeting to MEC members for response by 31 December 2012. The MEC Executive would then process these responses and formulate recommendations to the ASC for its March 2013 meeting.
14. The consultation with MEB representatives was held in Melbourne on 13 and 14 November, attended people from QLD (2), NSW/ACT (2), Vic-Tas (2), SA (1) and WA (2). There was an apology from the Northern Synod. This was an extremely worthwhile exercise, with excellent and helpful feedback provided.

C. Responses and Reactions

15. During the Review, submissions were also received from the National Lay Preachers' Committee, the SA Lay Preachers' Committee, New England North-West Presbytery (**Appendix B**), the Presbytery of Western Victoria, and as well as letters from several congregations and individuals. The submission from New England North-West Presbytery offered a wonderful perspective on how a presbytery might work well to enrich ministry in diverse settings. It is included as an attachment to this report, as a kind of case study, and also because it says exceedingly well many things that we would wish to say.
16. There was criticism that the Working Group did not follow up presbyteries that did not respond to the survey. The process was designed as a survey, not an audit. The response rate may indeed be indicative of the priority of the ministry of Lay Preacher across presbyteries. In future the MEC or ASC may wish to take a stronger approach in seeking information from presbyteries.
17. Some respondents disputed certain findings. However we can only report on evidence gained from what are relatively large samples, and therefore are willing to let those findings stand on their own merit, whether or not they conflict with individuals' perceptions regarding the status quo.
18. A few respondents expressed concerns that the Review also sought the views of 'non-accredited' lay preachers and worship leaders, as it was felt that this was inappropriate or irrelevant. As a Working Group we would note that this was part of the terms of reference, and that both the survey approach and Report often distinguished between the accredited and 'non-accredited' leaders. However in order to reduce length of the report, separate findings for each group are not always reported.
19. We received strong criticism from the National Lay Preachers' Committee regarding a number of aspects of the review as a whole, the first Report and the survey contained within it. (Criticisms that were almost identical were expressed by the

VicTas Lay Preachers' Association.) In particular the NLPC expressed disappointment that the Working Group had not liaised with them sufficiently. We wish to state that we treated the NLPC as a subject in the research rather than as a partner.

D. Findings from the 2011 Surveys

The following is adapted slightly from "The Ministry of Lay Preacher: Report of Review Findings"

20. Call and Gifts

Paragraph 3 of the Basis of Union says,

The Church as the fellowship of the Holy Spirit confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life; it also confesses that Jesus is Head over all things, the beginning of a new creation, of a new humanity. God in Christ has given to all people in the Church the Holy Spirit as a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end in view for the whole creation. The Church's call is to serve that end: to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.

God's call to the Church, to be an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself, both a promise and a present experience of reconciliation and renewal, is the ground of all ministry. As a church we acknowledge that the Spirit provides a diversity of gifts for this purpose. Such gifts are God's to give, not ours. Our faithful response is to order and reorder our life so that people are able to offer service that corresponds with their gifts, for the sake of God's mission in the world. (Paragraph 13)

In the tradition of churches who affirm the priesthood of all believers, we recognise that the whole of the laos, the people of God, are called to give testimony to the being and work of God as Trinity who creates, redeems and sustains us. God's gifts of Word and Sacrament are gifts to the laos, the whole people of God, for the sake of the world. As a denomination we affirm that God gifts particular people to lead in worship and to preach the Word. Some are called to ordained ministry, some to a specified 'lay' ministry, and many others serve faithfully alongside these ministries as God and the church call them.

21. A key question for the Uniting Church at this time is whether, as we are led to order our life for the mission of God, we can mutually affirm and provide for (a) the vital leadership and service to which ordained Ministers are called, (b) the particular role and contribution of those accredited as Lay Preachers, and (c) the regular, faithful service of many other church members in leading and assisting with worship in a range of ways. Some see Lay Preachers as merely a 'stand-in' for ordained Ministers, while others wish that every lay worship leader would be accredited as a Lay

Preacher. And frankly, many others neither know nor care.

22. We suggest that these three forms of worship leadership are not only important, but are built into what it means to be the kind of church described in the Basis of Union, a church which provides flexible order in response to the work of the Spirit among us. The question therefore, is how each might be equipped and encouraged in his or her particular ministry, and how we might order ourselves faithfully towards that end.

23. Following are our main conclusions from the research undertaken.

i. **The ministry of Lay Preacher is valued by those most directly involved.**

Ministers and Church Councils who relate to Lay Preachers, and Lay Preachers themselves, are strongly supportive of this ministry and its value for the church. The presbyteries which responded to the survey also indicated positive concern for the future of this ministry.

ii. **The ministry of Lay Preacher should be better recognised, affirmed and promoted.**

While it is possible to see this as self-interest, there was a clear view that this ministry was not sufficiently affirmed by some Ministers and by the Councils of the Church. One in five non-accredited lay leaders said that their congregations are ignorant or indifferent about this ministry. This is not to suggest that every congregation needs a Lay Preacher, but rather, if the church is to have such a specified ministry, it needs to encourage its development and support those who serve.

iii. **The ministry of Lay Preacher is not universally acknowledged and affirmed in its present form.**

Only half of the non-accredited leaders said that their congregations had a positive view of the ministry of Lay Preacher. A significant proportion of Ministers, Church Councils and lay leaders agreed that the ministry of Lay Preacher needs reform. To affirm this ministry is not necessarily to continue it in its present state. There was some support for licensing Lay Preachers for a limited period. Some respondents favoured introducing another form of local recognition for lay worship leaders.

iv. **Younger people are not necessarily drawn to the ministry of Lay Preacher in its present form.**

While many respondents believed that young people should be recruited, there was insufficient information as to whether the ministry of Lay Preacher actually appeals to them. Although there is evidence of young people seeking training in some places, the views of young people themselves need to be sought more intentionally.

v. **Lay leaders make a significant contribution in smaller, rural and isolated congregations, particularly where an ordained Minister is not present.**

The surveys highlighted the incidence of lay leadership in such congregations,

both accredited and non-accredited, and the view that this is a vital contribution to the life of these churches.

vi. **A high proportion of lay worship leaders and preachers are elderly, reflecting the age of church members.**

It seems likely that this relates to leaders' willingness to travel long distances, their openness to undergoing formal training, their need for financial assistance, and their desire to feel valued for their faithful service.

vii. **A significant proportion of Lay Preachers serve beyond their home congregation.**

Almost two-thirds of Lay Preachers said they lead at least quarterly in a UCA congregation other than their home church. Non-accredited leaders are much more likely to lead only in their local congregation.

viii. **A significant proportion of church members who preach or lead regularly have had no formal training in worship leading and preaching.**

While this is most likely due to a range of factors related to age, location, access to training and training approaches, it is nevertheless a cause for concern. Church Councils and presbyteries need to consider how they might equip those who serve in leadership.

ix. **Many accredited Lay Preachers perform additional duties in relation to their role, either formally or informally.**

Additional duties in pastoral care, leading funerals, administration, teaching and other areas are undertaken in accordance with the leader's gifts. Respondents stated that in some congregations such duties are related to the lack of availability of an ordained minister. Expectations, recognition, competency and training are all matters requiring attention where additional duties are performed.

x. **Ministers and lay leaders play a vital role in recruiting, encouraging and mentoring people.**

Most people start as leaders as a result of local encouragement. They may experience a sense of call from God before or during this process. A climate of affirming gifts, building confidence, and providing constructive feedback is essential. Recruiting people to seek accreditation also requires local encouragement and support. Ordained Ministers can play an important role here.

xi. **There are gender differences in why people begin to lead in worship and why they become accredited Lay Preachers.**

This information in the Report of Review Findings on page 8 is deserving of further research.

xii. **The style, location, duration and cost of training are seen to be barriers to people considering accreditation.**

Lay Preachers generally expressed appreciation for the training they received, and synods and presbyteries have significantly revised their training approaches in recent years. However it is clear that many people see the training required for accreditation as a significant difficulty. This seems to be less about content than about style and standards of education.

xiii. **Lay Preacher candidates are likely to be trained over an extended period while leading regularly.**

The survey suggests that candidature for the ministry of Lay Preacher happens in-service rather than pre-service. Candidates are already leading and perhaps preaching when they commence training, and undertake their learning over an extended period while studying, possibly without sufficient supervision.

xiv. **Ministers are less positive about the skills, resourcing and ongoing learning of Lay Preachers than are Church Councils.**

While Ministers were not negative about these aspects of Lay Preachers' service, overall they were less complimentary than Church Councils. This does not seem surprising given Ministers' levels of education and experience, and hence their critical awareness of what is involved in worship leadership.

xv. **Ministers can take a stronger role in training worship leaders and providing feedback locally.**

While only half of the Church Councils agreed that Ministers should be involved in training, two-thirds of lay leaders and almost three-quarters of Ministers responded positively to this option. There was stronger support for Ministers providing regular feedback to lay leaders.

xvi. **Lay leaders express interest in ongoing learning, particularly if it is accessible locally or digitally.**

Leaders are willing to undertake continuing education, particularly in relation to the background of the Bible, preaching styles, theology, contemporary and 'alternative' worship. However their willingness and ability to learn is affected by the method of learning (face-to-face, distance, online, etc), the location and timing of events, access (eg. high-speed Internet) and the costs involved.

xvii. **Most Lay Preachers rarely or never receive formal review from a Minister, Church Council or Presbytery.**

Only a very small percentage of Lay Preachers are reviewed annually or more frequently by Church Council or Presbytery. A significant proportion also said that they rarely or never receive feedback from a Minister. This can be because a minister is never present when the person is leading or preaching. Some system of review by councils of the church seems essential.

xviii. **Most lay leaders welcome constructive feedback and encouragement.**

Only a small minority of leaders indicated that they didn't require this. The vast majority of leaders would welcome helpful specific guidance, including

both informal and formal feedback.

- xix. **Lay leaders welcome the opportunity for peer support and encouragement.**
While some perceive Lay Preacher gatherings (or the like) as being unappealing in terms of membership or scope, many leaders would welcome local and wider opportunities for networking, resource sharing, mutual encouragement and learning.
- xx. **Lay leaders desire easy access to helpful resources for worship leading and preaching.**
Across the range of questions asked, there were repeated requests for resources to be more available locally or electronically, and for financial assistance to access them.
- xxi. **Cultural issues related to the ministry of Lay Preacher require further investigation.**
The surveys did not gather sufficient evidence to understand the issues involved for particular cultural and language groups. However it seems that there are issues related to roles, training, support and resources that require further investigation in culturally appropriate ways.

E. Findings from the 2012 Surveys

Views of Young People

- 24. Two focus groups were run in Queensland with a total of 16 participants aged 16 to 27 years, 11 males and 5 females. Both groups were Anglo-Celtic. None of the people were accredited Lay Preachers.
- 25. Young people are actively involved in worship planning and leadership in both churches – prayers, bible readings, music, café church. Preaching is occasional in one of the churches and was not mentioned by the other.
- 26. The young people were aware of the ministry of Lay Preacher, saying it consisted of “old people who do boring services”. It was not seen as relevant or appealing for young people; “not on the radar.” Certification was seen as unnecessary for something that people are already doing and enjoying. “We don’t want to be limited in the way we lead worship.” Time (presumably to study) was seen as an issue, along with the itinerant nature of young adults.
- 27. Preparation for worship leading was important, but training less so. Mentoring was seen to be of value, along with ‘learning by doing’ and experimentation. Evaluation and feedback was also seen as important. Support and encouragement for leaders was seen as helpful in order for people to gradually improve over time.
- 28. Both groups were keen to see young people being encouraged to lead, experiment

and be creative in a supportive environment within their own congregations or communities.

Views from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Groups

29. In Western Australia, 5 people were interviewed, including people from Tongan, Fijian, Romanian and Iranian cultures. The group included the co-chairs of the Multicultural Ministry committee and the Synod Consultant for Multicultural ministry. In Queensland, the Synod Multi-Cross Cultural Committee responded – 8 members.
30. In some cultures, for example, Korean or the Orthodox traditions, preaching is the role of the ordained minister. Lay people may be asked to assist with elements of worship. In other cultures, such as Tongan or Fijian, lay people (eg. Elders, Lay Preachers) lead regularly and this role is valued and affirmed. People may take years to prepare for these roles. Hence the importance and place of recognized or accredited lay leadership in worship varies according to the culture or tradition. However, lay participation is not necessarily restricted to accredited Lay Preachers.
31. It was recognized that ‘second generation’ congregations may have different attitudes and practices regarding lay leadership, for example, greater participation by young adults. These young adults may also be more willing or capable to undertake formal study requirements.
32. Training was seen to be part of growing up in the church – faith nurture in the home, Sunday School, youth class/group, Bible study, prayer meetings. In this way any person could become equipped to lead as part of being a mature Christian. Some specific training courses exist, but these were not discussed in detail.
33. A number of comments were made about training – the need for learning and assessment in different languages, the difficulty of people completing written assessments, need for local peer assessment, stronger focus on understanding UCA ethos, appropriate tools for theological reflection and reframing the gospel in terms of people’s cultural contexts, the importance of narrative and less reliance of written liturgy in some cultures. More information about training options was also requested.
34. Both within and across cultures, there can be a lack of clarity regarding the role of ordained Ministers, Lay Preachers and Pastors. (This includes lay people presiding at sacraments, weddings, funerals.) It was suggested that the theological thinking behind the various ministries in the UCA needed to be better explained within cultures. There is also some misunderstanding regarding accreditation in terms of the role of the presbytery and the completion of study requirements.
35. Concern was expressed that some people see Lay Preacher as a ‘fast track’ to being a minister or as giving them ‘pastor’ status.

36. It would seem that where accredited Lay Preachers exist, their oversight is primarily local rather than by the presbytery or even by a cultural church network, so to speak.

Feedback from Report of Review Findings

37. Responses to the online survey were as follows (see **Appendix A** for a list of group respondents).

- i. Assembly Agencies – 1
- ii. Synod Commissions or Committees – 5
- iii. Presbyteries - 7
- iv. Church Councils / Congregations – 22
- v. Individuals - 218

38. Table 1: Individual respondents

Individual respondents	Percent	n=
an accredited Lay Preacher	50.9%	111
an ordained Minister	17.8%	39
a Lay Preacher Candidate	6.4%	14
a church member	13.2%	29
a lay church worker (employed)	0.9%	2
a Pastor/Lay Pastor/Community Minister	5.0%	11
Other (please specify)	13.2%	29

(Note that individuals were able to select more than one category so column totals do not sum to 100% (n=218))

39. The online survey presented four possible scenarios and 20 statements for response.

- Option 1: Continue the ministry of Lay Preacher as specified in the UCA Regulations and Training Rules
- Option 2: Amend the ministry of Lay Preacher to reflect changing roles and responsibilities
- Option 3: Discontinue the ministry of Lay Preacher
- Option 4: Other (please specify)

40. Four Options: Responses from Councils, Committees and Agencies

In terms of any variation by type of respondent, church councils/congregations overwhelmingly favoured amending the ministry of Lay Preacher to reflect changing roles and responsibilities (17 responses for amending, 4 for continuing as it is, 1 skipped the question). Synod and Presbytery groups were also most likely to favour amendment, while Lay Preacher Associations were the most likely to indicate a preference for continuing the ministry of Lay Preacher as it is, though as many of the synod or presbytery lay preacher associations preferred some form of amendment as voted to continue with the status quo. (Table 2) No group response indicated that the ministry of Lay Preacher should be discontinued.

41. Table 2: Group responses to Option question

Preferred option	Option 1 Continue	Option 2 Amend	Option 3 Discontinue	Option 4 Other	<i>dns</i>
Synod	1 (20%)	4 (80%)	0	0	
Presbytery	2 (29%)	2 (29%)	0	2 (29%)	1 (14%)
Church Council/Congregation	4 (18%)	17(77%)	0	0	1 (5%)
Lay Preachers' Association or Committee	2 (29%)	1 (14%)	0	3 (43%)	1 (14%)
National Lay Preachers' Committee	1 (100%)	0	0	0	
Assembly Working Group on Worship	0	0	0	1 (100%)	

42. **Option 4: Other:** descriptions

Groups that indicated a preference for Option 4 generally indicated a need for change. These responses are quoted below.

- i **Assembly Working Group on Worship:** Provision in training as in UCA regulations along with changes in the way lay preachers are trained and supervised in accordance with issues identified in report.
- ii **Lay Preachers Committee of SA:** We would have settled for a combination of #1 and #2, but as that's not possible, we select #4.
- iii **Lay Preachers' Committee of Yarra Yarra Presbytery:** Item 2 but with a broader recognition of Lay Presidency
- iv **VicTas Synod:** Extension of Item 2. Expansion of continuing education and training in Lay Presidency for interested Lay Preachers (LP). Those with training and qualifications to be endorsed across Presbyteries - as they are now for preaching. Include a broader recognition of Lay Presidency.
- v **Presbytery of Gippsland Education Committee:** We would support 2 but want it to reflect the further detail of retaining a category of other Lay Worship Leaders with an appropriate level of training and an encouragement to move to Lay Preachers
- vi **Presbytery of Port Phillip West (Vic-Tas):** Options 1 and 2 were evenly split - consensus is that UCA regulations and training rules need to be updated to reflect changing responsibilities

43. **Four Options: Additional Comments from Councils, Committees & Agencies**

A range of additional comments was received. Please note that only online respondents had an obvious place to make additional comments on the options. Many of the comments relate to issues considered later in the survey. eg. role, training, oversight. Hence they are summarized later in this report. Comments included:

- i Restating the importance of this ministry for the life of the UCA
- ii The need to reaffirm, restate or clarify this ministry in relation to other ministries
- iii New regulations do not specify who has oversight of Lay Preachers (previously

- the Presbytery)
- iv Questions about the term “Lay Preacher” as it suggests preaching, not worship leading, and many people only do the latter – so how are they included?
 - v Encouragement for a review of standards and pathways, including the MEC Rules for training and training courses
 - vi Concerns regarding recognition and portability of assessment
 - vii Recognition of the limited appeal of the ministry of Lay Preacher as it stands for some, particularly young people
 - viii Concern regarding this being a Uniting Church ministry, and hence its grounding in an understanding of the Basis of Union

44. Four Options: Responses from Individuals

Accredited Lay Preachers were the most likely to vote for the continuation of the ministry of Lay Preacher (41%), but even 51% of them considered it should be amended (Table 3).

45. Table 3: Individual responses re future of ministry of Lay Preacher

Preferred option	Option 1 Continue ...	Option 2 Amend ...	Option 3 Discontinue ...	Option 4 Other	n=
an accredited Lay Preacher	41%	51%	1%	7%	108
an ordained Minister	24%	61%	5%	11%	38
a Lay Preacher Candidate	29%	71%	0%	0%	14
a church member	24%	55%	3%	17%	29
a lay church worker (employed)	50%	50%	0%	0%	2
a Pastor/Lay Pastor/Community Minister	18%	73%	0%	9%	11
Other (please specify)	23%	62%	0%	15%	26
ALL INDIVIDUALS	34%	56%	2%	9%	213

46. Four Options: Additional Comments from Individuals

Not surprisingly, a large number of additional comments were received, and many relate to issues taken up later. This is a brief summary of the major themes that relate to the four Options.

- i A significant number of people affirmed this ministry and saw scope to improve on it within the existing Regulations.
- ii Questions regarding lay presidency at the sacraments – better/broader recognition, approval across presbyteries, approval granted more willingly, perhaps for all Lay Preachers. Similar questions regarding funerals.
- iii Questions about the term “Lay Preacher” as it suggests preaching, not worship leading, and many people only do the latter – so how are they included? Is another category of “local lay preacher/worship leader” needed? What about music leaders, etc?
- iv Amendment was recommended in relation to roles and responsibilities, training approaches and pathways, recognition of the lack of ordained ministers in rural areas.
- v Role and accreditation are related to oversight, and the latter is evidently a problem.

- vi To what extent does the UCA want or need a system of accreditation, particularly for local service?
- vii Questions about how the ministry of Lay Preacher relates to the ministry of Pastor. Do they overlap?
- viii Questions about the value and appeal of this ministry for young people.
- ix Some see the nature of worship and its preparation (eg. by a team) changing or needing to change, and ask what this means for the role of Lay Preachers and their training and resourcing.

47. 20 Statements: Responses from Councils, Committees and Agencies

The 20 statements presented each arose from issues identified in the research as stated needs, desired outcomes or possible strategies (though not necessarily from a majority of respondents). Hence each statement described a possible goal or action, arising from survey responses that might be deemed to improve the ministry of lay people in leading worship and preaching. These were not framed as recommendations of the Working Group and respondents were free to agree or disagree with them.

48. However a number of respondents saw them as recommendations rather than as a means of testing views based on the initial surveys. Some had difficulty with the word “needs” and saw some statements as “negative”. Also, some saw them as positive, which they saw as a problem! In reality the statements were designed to reflect or draw out the survey findings. We sought to express what we heard respondents saying. It should also be noted that the National Lay Preachers’ Committee felt that these statements were “poorly worded, resulting in the potential for ambiguous responses”. We would agree that a few of the statements could have been worded more clearly.

49. There were a large number of additional comments offered by both groups and individuals, often with diverging views. This report summarises the main themes. It should be noted that not all respondents made additional comments, and also that the comments here do not in most instances represent a majority view.

50. 20 Statements: Summary of Responses

Responses to the 20 statements are grouped under the following headings:

- Recognition and Promotion
- Role
- Education and Training
- Oversight and Support

The statement numbers correspond with their original listing in the Report of Review Findings and also correspond with the more detailed analysis of responses in **Appendix C.**

51. Recognition and Promotion

52. A majority of councils / committees / associations, and of individuals, either **strongly agreed** or **agreed** with the following statements:

1. The councils of the church need to provide greater recognition of the ministry of Lay Preacher.

2. The councils of the church need to undertake greater promotion of the ministry of Lay Preacher

4. 'Non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers need some form of local recognition or commissioning within their congregation.

[It is clear from the additional comments that some saw this statement as justification for having Lay Preachers (ie. accrediting lay leaders), while others saw it as applying to a different kind of local recognition for people who were not (or not yet) Lay Preachers. The statement was intended to test the latter option, as described in the discussion paper.]

18. The Assembly needs to undertake further research to identify what kinds of leadership development and recognition are helpful for young people.

53. Additional comments – Recognition and Promotion

- i Changes in society and generational differences were acknowledged as significant factors in the lack of appeal to younger people of such a regulated approach to ministry. While a number of respondents longed for young people to become Lay Preachers, few seemed to think that they were likely actually to do this.
- ii Recruitment to ministry is about 'call', not simply promotion.
- iii For some respondents, commissioning of local worship leaders was seen as a disincentive for leaders to seek training or accreditation. [There appeared to be an assumption that such people would not have been trained.] Others saw such a commissioning almost as a commencement of training towards being a Lay Preacher.
- iv Some respondents asked whether the availability of Lay Preachers was in fact 'propping up' small congregations by keeping the doors open on a Sunday morning, when alternative measures needed to be taken for the future.

54. Role

55. A majority of councils / committees / associations, and of individuals, either **strongly agreed** or **agreed** with the following statements:

19. Accredited Lay Preachers need Church Councils and presbyteries to provide clearer expectations and support in relation to any additional duties expected of them.

56. The following statement received a **mixed response**. See **Appendix C**, page 21 for details.

20. The Uniting Church should authorise all Lay Preachers to preside at the Sacraments.

57. Additional comments - Role

- i Lay Preachers' Committees and Associations in particular were affirming of the role as it is currently defined, while recognising that improvements needed to be made to the overall system.
- ii The title "Lay Preacher" is questioned by a reasonable number of respondents. Does it accurately reflect the role? Is it off-putting to some?
- iii A number of respondents expressed confusion about the role of Lay Preachers in relation to Pastors. For example, a small minority felt that only one category (ie. Pastor) was needed.
- iv What does the ministry of Lay Preacher mean where there are lay teams sharing the preparation of worship? Is it necessary for one of them to be accredited? Or all of them?
- v Some Lay Preachers' Committees/Associations expressed emphatically the view that training and formal accreditation should be maintained. Leadership by untrained and/or 'non-accredited' people was seen as a problem for the church.
- vi Lay presidency at the sacraments is a key issue for many Lay Preachers. This is firstly in relation to the availability of ordained ministers and the willingness or otherwise of presbyteries to authorise presiders. A significant number of Lay Preachers believe that all accredited persons should be so authorised, yet there was strong opposition to this from a wide range of groups and individuals, including ordained Ministers. Others believe that all Lay Preachers should study the sacraments, whether or not they become presiders.
- vii There is support for greater, perhaps more formal, local recognition of lay worship leaders and preachers – a local 'commissioning' perhaps, in a similar way to the commissioning of other lay leaders – elders, youth leaders, etc. The issue here is not so much about licensing as about acknowledgment and support. Perhaps the necessity for such acknowledgement, and its form, should also be local decisions.
- viii The broader role of an increasing number of Lay Preachers in relation to pastoral care, teaching, funerals, etc., is recognised. However, some were quite opposed to any change of Regulations, preferring local handling of such matters (or simply the discretion of the Lay Preacher).
- ix Lay Preachers serve in different ways in different settings, hence their oversight and support within a presbytery needs to differ accordingly.
- x In various ways, some people raised the question of the mission of the church – Lay Preachers as evangelists, equipping them to lead worship that was more missional in its nature, Lay Preachers being more able to lead worship that was culturally relevant in today's world.
- xi A few people suggested that a broader, specified ministry of Lay Leader was

needed to cover the broader role that many Lay Preachers undertake.

58. Education and Training

59. A majority of councils / committees / associations, and of individuals, either **strongly agreed** or agreed with the following statements:

3. Ordained ministers need to be better resourced for mentoring and training local lay worship leaders and preachers.

9. Lay leaders need to be provided with more flexible, gradual pathways towards Lay Preacher accreditation.

10. Lay leaders need training that recognises and builds upon their competencies, rather than requiring a fixed study program.

[While the majority of groups and individuals agreed, there was much less consensus. See **Appendix C**, page 11 for details. The issue here is that if people already have particular competencies, they are not required to undertake every aspect of a study program, ie. a 'fixed' curriculum. One group suggested that different 'starting points' for training were needed.]

11. The Uniting Church needs to maintain the current educational standards for the ministry of Lay Preacher.

[While the majority of groups and individuals agreed, there was much less consensus. See **Appendix C**, page 12 for details.]

13. The training for lay worship leaders and preachers needs greater emphasis on contemporary worship and preaching styles.

[While the majority of groups and individuals agreed, this included only 63% of individuals. See **Appendix C**, page 14 for details.]

14. Presbyteries and synod education agencies need to collaborate more closely in order to provide more regional training opportunities.

15. The Assembly should collaborate with synod education agencies towards the provision of online learning and resources for lay worship leaders and preachers.

The following statement received a **mixed response**. See **Appendix C**, page 13 for details.

12. Lay leaders need simpler training courses that may lead towards further learning for accreditation.

[The difficulty in this case rested with the word "simpler", which was intended to mean both less "academic" and at a lower level or standard than current Lay Preacher training. This statement could have been better worded. However the critical issue is that the 2011 surveys indicated that training is perceived to be too academic, complex, lengthy, and that the standards and assessment are too difficult.]

60. Additional comments – Education and Training

- i There appears to be strong support for multiple, flexible, graded pathways in education and training. However many leaders may be unaware of existing pathways.
- ii Recognition of training completed in other denominations or non-UCA colleges, including people from partner churches was also an issue, both in terms of recognition of prior learning, and understanding the ethos of the UCA.
- iii A key issue is the mutual recognition of different training curriculum and assessment across synods and presbyteries. There is also confusion relating to VET accreditation versus gaining 'credit' for study through synod education agencies.
- iv Assessment criteria need to be clarified and consistent nationally. There is a range of views on whether a competency-based system is best. Some were strongly in favour of maintaining 'academic' standards, seeing this as somehow antithetical to gaining competencies. Some also seemed to see competencies as excluding gaining knowledge or understanding.
- v There is a need to be more intentional about educating Lay Preachers regarding the UCA Basis of Union.
- vi If ordained Ministers are to be more actively involved in mentoring and training Lay Preachers (and other worship leaders), they need to be equipped and resourced for this role. Some Lay Preachers themselves can also mentor.
- vii The role of Presbytery staff in training and oversight needs to be acknowledged better.
- viii Some believe that the training 'curriculum' needs to be broadened in terms of (a) leadership in general; (b) specific areas such as pastoral care, funerals and/or sacraments; and/or (c) Christian discipleship.
- ix Some respondents (particularly Lay Preachers' Committees or Associations) had difficulty with the use of the term 'contemporary' as its meaning seemed unclear. [The term was used in the original surveys, where a significant number of Lay Preachers indicated that they desired training in this area.] Some believed that people need to be trained in worship 'styles' related to the congregation in which they serve, whereas for others there is a strong need for people to have a broader experience and ability to lead in a range of styles.
- x There were a significant number of comments regarding mentoring and coaching, experiential or 'on the job' training, and peer feedback as helpful approaches to learning. The need for some people to be coached or tutored through their studies was also highlighted.
- xi A number of respondents called for attention to Lay Preachers' "formation" as distinct from education or training, without specifying what they meant by this.
- xii Accessibility and affordability of training were seen by many to be key factors.
- xiii A significant number of respondents mentioned the need for online learning options, including continuing education. The notion of a central hub, or clearinghouse / repository for online learning resources was also proposed by some.

- xiv Some wondered about the willingness of Lay Preachers to undertake continuing education, and the incentive and support for them to do so.
- xv Training in people's first languages (other than English) was seen as important by some.

NOTE: There is an inconsistency within the additional comments between the desire to maintain current standards, and the idea that the 'bar is too high', and the study and assessments too difficult.

61. Oversight and Support

62. A majority of councils / committees / associations, and of individuals, either **strongly agreed** or agreed with the following statements:

5. Accredited Lay Preachers need to receive feedback from their church council/s at least annually.

6. Accredited Lay Preachers need to receive a formal review from their presbytery at least every five years.

7. Church councils and presbyteries would benefit from having the Assembly provide tools to assist them in undertaking reviews of Lay Preachers.

8. Lay leaders in small, rural and isolated churches need to receive stronger encouragement, support and oversight from presbyteries.

16. Synods should review the levels of financial assistance provided to lay worship leaders and preachers for training, travel and resources.

17. Presbyteries should organise more regional or local gatherings for mutual encouragement and mentoring of lay worship leaders and preachers.

63. Additional Comments – Oversight and Support

- i It was noted that some Synods and Presbyteries already put considerable effort into networking, communication, continuing education and encouragement of Lay Preachers.
- ii What is the status of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Lay Preachers? What is its place in formation, training and supervision?
- iii The question of national oversight was raised in relation to the new Assembly Education for Ministry Working Group. What will be its role and how will it relate to other bodies, for example the National Lay Preachers' Committee? Should there be a more unified approach to national oversight of Lay Preachers.
- iv Several respondents agreed with statement #8 only on the basis that the support was directed towards helping them become accredited.
- v Peer support was seen to be of value, but in some instances difficult because of geography.
- vi Some, perhaps many, church councils would have difficulty giving feedback, either because of how it may be perceived, or because they lack expertise. Many congregations are grateful to be able to fill the worship roster.

- vii A key issue is that many Lay Preachers serve in congregations other than the church where they are members, so that feedback needs to come from the councils in those congregations whom they serve.
- viii Feedback from people with expertise in leading worship and preaching is needed, such as from ordained Ministers and experienced Lay Preachers.
- ix Some suggested that a directory of Lay Preachers within a Presbytery or a Synod would be helpful.
- x There was concern about the capacity of presbyteries to conduct regular reviews of Lay Preachers in terms of time and personnel. [This seems at odds with the recognition that Lay Preachers are relied on more regularly, and raises questions about what Presbyteries see as their primary responsibilities – in this instance the oversight of people in specified ministries.]
- xi Where the five yearly consultation on the life and witness of a congregation is done well by a presbytery, Lay Preachers can and should be reviewed in this process.
- xii Some people are of the view that reviews need to take place more often than every five years – annually or every two or three years.
- xiii Such processes should be more organic – part of the ongoing life of a congregation that encourages, strengthens and equips its members and leaders.

F. Conclusions

64. The Working Group sought to conduct an inquiry which was evidence-based, collecting information about the present situation from a range of individuals and councils of the church. We believed that it was important to seek responses not only from accredited Lay Preachers, but also from across the Church that they seek to serve. While the views of Lay Preachers are essential for this review, they need to be considered alongside those of other leaders and councils.
65. Given the significant amount of data was collected and analysed, the lack of response from many presbyteries is puzzling. Informal feedback from some presbytery leaders suggested that the report findings were self-evident, and hence a response was not needed. However, other factors such as communication or other priorities may have contributed.
66. The proposal to the 2009 Assembly raised questions regarding the many 'non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers. In relation to its terms of reference, the Working Group deemed it vital to gain information about these people. This was in order to understand how and why they serve in comparison with accredited Lay Preachers, and to consider what incentive they might need to become accredited, and indeed, whether this was likely or desirable.
67. The main findings from the 2011 research were reprinted earlier in this report. To some extent these are repeated here along with findings from the 2012 survey.

The Role of Lay Preachers

68. **The review affirms the vital role of accredited Lay Preachers** in serving the Uniting Church at the present time, and suggests it is likely to increase in importance in some areas. We also recognise that there are many congregations who rarely or never seek the services of Lay Preachers, for a range of reasons.
69. **A significant proportion of Lay Preachers say they are taking on additional tasks**, particularly due to the lack of availability of ordained Ministers and the general need for leadership in congregations. This is a significant issue requiring further discussion. While the existing definition of the role of Lay Preachers provides some scope in terms of actual duties, it cannot be said that it is adequate in defining the breadth of the ministry as it is being practiced. The simplest way forward is to request presbyteries to ensure that any additional duties (eg. pastoral care, teaching, funerals, sacraments, administration) are agreed between the congregation/s, the Lay Preacher and the Presbytery. Presbyteries would then need to exercise appropriate oversight and take account of the Lay Preacher's competencies and training. Some respondents were in favour of a broader specified ministry of lay leadership, however our attempts even to imagine this led quickly to definitions very similar to the ministry of Pastor.

70. **The Working Group agree that the title “Lay Preacher” does not describe the role in a way that is necessarily clear, or indeed appealing.** However we are not able to suggest a better alternative at this point in time. Indeed, to change the name may be more trouble than it is worth. Nevertheless, the Church’s use of the word “lay”, meaning ‘non-ordained’, as distinct from *laos*, meaning the whole people of God, continues to be a problem. “Lay” is not a category that has warrant either biblically or in terms of the Basis of Union and its underlying theology. Its continuing use represents problems in relation to our understandings of ministry and our resourcing of the education of the whole people of God.
71. **There remain serious questions about the form of such a specified lay ministry for the future.** The National Church Life Survey indicates that the UCA has the oldest age profile of any denomination, and the Working Group suggests that the character of our worship is a factor in this. The small amount of research involving young people seems to ‘ring true’ with youth workers with whom we spoke informally. While the ministry of Lay Preacher is currently of value in its present form, we believe that the invitation for young adults to serve and learn as leaders is a broader challenge for the church, one not solved easily by a Lay Preacher recruitment drive. For this reason we wish to encourage experimentation in the ways that young people are drawn in to leadership, equipped and supported. Secondly, the Working Group has questions about whether the ministry in its present form is best suited for the range of emerging, ‘fresh expressions’ of faith communities across the Uniting Church.
72. To use the language of the Church of England in the UK about congregational life, **we see the immediate future in worship leadership as something of a ‘mixed economy’**, namely, people being equipped and serving in more than one particular way. We do not see a more rigid regulatory approach as being helpful for the church. Rather, to quote from the New England North West Presbytery submission, we see “an approach to accreditation which encourages, affirms and rewards rather than requires a minimum standard which earns permission to lead worship and preach.”
73. In relation to lay leadership, **the primary challenge to the church is in the ‘culture’ of its congregations**, to be encouraging and equipping people to offer and develop their gifts in service as the Spirit leads, and according to local need. The issue is firstly not about training or accreditation, but about the small steps that people take in learning to lead, relying on mentors for guidance and a formative climate of encouragement, constructive feedback, and spiritual nurture. [The nature of the surveys was such that we heard from those who are actively involved in lay leadership, not from those who are denied the opportunity.]
74. **Confusion about the role of Lay Preachers in relation to the role of Pastors would seem to be primarily about a lack of understanding of the ministry of Pastor.** However, in the light of the broader role and additional duties performed by some Lay Preachers, presbyteries should consider designating these roles as non-salaried Pastor appointments.

75. In relation to lay presidency, **the Working Group does not agree with the view that all Lay Preachers should receive authorisation to celebrate the sacraments.** However, some presbyteries should be more willing to give authorisation for lay presidency as needed for congregations and faith communities to maintain their sacramental life. There is also value in Lay Preachers learning about the nature of the sacraments, whether or not they are likely to become presiders.

Recognition and Promotion

76. The review received strong comments from Lay Preachers regarding the need for this ministry to be better recognised, understood and promoted. **We agree that the ministry of Lay Preacher should be celebrated, affirmed, and encouraged as a means of service.** Our hope is that it may be better promoted as a significant ways of serving the church.
77. The survey found that almost one-quarter of lay worship leaders under 40 years of age (accredited and non-accredited) had been in the Uniting Church for less than five years. **The Uniting Church might consider how newcomers become aware of the opportunities to serve and learn in the church** – what range of options are presented, and what barriers may exist. Some respondents indicated that recognition of prior learning in other denominations was a problem. Such recognition needs to go alongside the need for people to learn about the theology and ethos of the Uniting Church.
78. The review indicates that **better local recognition of ‘non-accredited’ lay worship leaders and preachers may be helpful.** This does not necessarily mean establishing another specified lay ministry. It may mean recognising, affirming and supporting worship leaders in a manner similar to people in other leadership roles (youth leaders, Sunday School teachers, etc.) The issue here is that recognition and support are more likely to lead to people growing in their confidence and gifts. Rather than being in competition with an accreditation system, this may in fact lead to more people feeling able to ‘take the next step’.
79. **The vital role of ordained Ministers in encouraging and guiding people into service and leadership** was established in the findings. Not surprisingly, other lay leaders are also important in the process of ‘call’ into service. There is an issue here about people being helped to move beyond occasionally leading one element of worship (“Will you lead the prayers this week?”) to a broader leadership role, with growth in skills, understandings and spiritual maturity.

Education and Training

80. **People prepare to be Lay Preachers while they are actively involved in leading worship and preaching,** whether or not they are candidates. On-the-job training appears to be the norm. This increases the likelihood that people will complete their training over an extended period of time. It also means that they will most likely be

growing in competence over that time through their practice of ministry. They may or may not be well supported, and may or may not be receiving helpful feedback or coaching.

81. **The Working Group supports a competency-based approach to learning** on the basis that competency consists of both skills and underpinning knowledge. We also recognise that not all of the desired attributes of Lay Preachers are ‘competencies’, and that a person’s character and spiritual maturity need to be developed and assessed as part of their formation for a specified ministry.
82. In the light of comments received, **we recommend the framing of new Rules for Training and Formation, including a new national framework for Lay Preacher training, formation and assessment.** This would involve framing of standards or outcomes rather than the current, broad list of subject areas contained in the existing Rules. Such standards may be in the form of **competencies** and **formation** requirements, the former providing a basis for assessment criteria. Some of the work done by the MEC in relation to Pastor competencies may be helpful in framing these.
83. A national standards framework does not necessarily require a uniform curriculum, yet does not prevent collaboration among synod education agencies. The review affirmed the need for **multiple flexible pathways in training that recognise people’s prior learning and levels of competency.** Such training might be modular, such that people could complete different units at different times. If people’s prior learning and competency are recognised, then not every person would need to complete every learning unit.
84. **A flexible approach requires competent educators to be able to design learning to suit particular groups in context.** The critical principle here is that a uniform curriculum does not guarantee quality education, which is more likely to be achieved by competent educators, regardless of the curriculum. Synods and presbyteries are served already by many excellent people. Maintaining and developing a national network of lay educators is a key aspect of the future strategy.
85. *“The once-for-all-time training program leading to a once-for-all-time accreditation which has served the church well in the past will be of less benefit in the future. A commitment to lifelong learning in a framework of discipleship growth provides the best context for the formation of lay worship leaders, lay sacramental providers and accredited lay preachers.”*
New England North West Presbytery
86. The approach recommended by some respondents, and currently being developed in several synods, is to see **Lay Preacher training within a broader context of education and formation for adult Christians as disciples and leaders.** Rather than offering discrete training for the ministry of Lay Preacher, the starting point is education for adults in Christian faith from a UCA perspective. This reflects what New England North-West Presbytery called “a broadly based, accessible, readily achievable foundation course which traverses biblical, theological and practical skills which

would be enriched over time through the completion of additional modules.” Such an approach is not simply about casting the net wider in order to recruit more Lay Preachers, rather it recognises that in many congregations there is insufficient capacity or opportunity for people to explore faith as adults. Regional and distance learning are two ways to address this.

87. If this approach is taken, then the MEC (or the new Education for Ministry Working Group) could continue the kind of **oversight of training** stated in the existing Rules. ie. Synod MEBs or equivalent approve curricula within their synod, and the MEC or (EMWG) reviews curricula periodically. Matters of ‘quality control’, maintenance of standards and approval of trainers require further discussion in order to clarify the roles of the Assembly, Synods and Presbyteries.
88. **The Working Group affirms the notion of gradual learning ‘steps’ towards accreditation as a Lay Preacher.** This does not simply mean allowing people to undertake their training over several years. Rather it would involve describing incremental levels of competency, and designing training (and possibly assessment) accordingly. In a sense, this is what the previous Coolamon courses provided. Thus a new national framework would allow for flexibility in terms of duration, style of learning and delivery.
89. There is a demonstrated need for **learning in languages and styles that are appropriate to particular cultural groups.** This is not simply an exercise of translating training materials. It requires understanding of the participation of lay leaders in worship leading and preaching; culturally appropriate forms of teaching, learning and assessment; suitable curriculum resources; and understanding of issues related to accreditation and oversight.
90. The above issues also relate to **‘fresh expressions’ of church** in varied cultural settings. This is not simply an issue of worship styles, but of the nature and place of worship in the life of a faith community, the forms of leadership being exercised, and the shape of the community’s mission.
91. Given the stated difficulties of geography, time and cost in relation to training, **the provision of online options is essential.** Since the Assembly no longer provides distance education, it is highly desirable that synod education agencies collaborate in this area. This would seem to be a highly desirable outcome. The Assembly Worship Working Group is also a possible collaborator.
92. **The role of ordained Ministers as mentors, guides and trainers within congregations needs further exploration.** A case can be made for better equipping and resourcing Ministers and other suitable leaders to offer basic worship leader training in congregations as part of their ongoing ministry. This may involve the provision of training resources and a train-the-trainer approach as needed.
93. There are some difficulties regarding accreditation of Lay Preachers in terms of completion of required studies, portability of ‘credit’ for study, and certification. Part

of the difficulty of portability for credit has been differing interpretation of the MEC Rules by Synods, along with the fact that one College/Synod has operated in the VET sector. Essentially, with the closure of Coolamon College, each Synod now manages its own accreditation of studies (a situation allowed for in the current Rules). Our hope is that **a clearer national framework of competencies / learning outcomes will help to address the issue of cross-credit**. However the MEC (or EMWG) and Synod MEBs will need to do further work on this.

94. The question of available courses for training was raised at a number of points in the review. **The Assembly needs to determine whether and how approved courses (and providers if relevant) are promoted nationally**. This is necessary in order to clarify the 'portability' or 'cross-credit' of completed study units for candidates. It may also lead to reduction of unnecessary duplication of resources.
95. **We recommend that the Assembly (MEC or EMWG) produce a national certificate**, issued to presbyteries to present to candidates on the completion of candidature requirements. The certificate would be issued in accordance with revised MEC Rules, which would need to describe the mechanism for determining completion.
96. The review highlighted the **willingness of Lay Preachers to undertake continuing education, provided that it was accessible and deemed relevant**. The 2011 surveys are helpful in identifying the kinds of learning that lay leaders see as helpful. While presbyteries and synod currently collaborate well in delivering regional training opportunities, there were enough calls for more accessible training to indicate that improvements might be made. Online and multimedia learning resources for continuing education were also requested.

Oversight and Support

97. The surveys indicated that **most Lay Preachers are rarely or never reviewed, either by their Presbytery or by a Church Council**. At the same time, they indicate an openness and desire to receive constructive, practical, encouraging feedback.
98. **The role of the Presbytery in providing oversight and support for Lay Preachers seems critical**. Some presbyteries see this as a vital responsibility and manage this accordingly, while other presbyteries see this as unmanageable due to limited resources. **The removal of this presbytery responsibility from the new UCA Regulations needs to be redressed**.
99. It is evident that some presbyteries have developed active and effective means of recruiting, training and supporting Lay Preachers (See **Appendix B** as an example). Hence it is recommended that **the practices and learnings of such presbyteries be described as a resource to assist other presbyteries**.
100. **Regular, constructive, informal feedback should be received by Lay Preachers** in the course of serving congregations, whether from church members, other lay leaders, other Lay Preachers, or Ministers. This is preferable to Lay

Preachers merely being subject to an occasional review by the Presbytery. We believe that both regular feedback and occasional, more formal review are essential and that congregations and presbyteries could be assisted by appropriate resources and guidelines.

101. Given the significant variation in the size, structure and staffing of presbyteries, **the Working Group favours an approach whereby presbyteries determine the most appropriate ways to provide oversight, review and support for Lay Preachers.** However, at the very least, a review of the service of Lay Preachers should be included in the periodic consultation of the life and witness of a congregation (as was provided for in previously in the UCA Regulations). A critical issue for both oversight and feedback is the incidence with which Lay Preachers serve regularly beyond their 'home' congregation, sometimes in multiple congregations on a regular basis,
102. **Both Lay Preachers and 'non-accredited' lay leaders indicated a desire for mutual peer support.** Lay Preacher Associations can provide an important means of support, communication and continuing education. Lay leaders indicated a desire for support that was 'closer to home', and some saw Lay Preacher gatherings as inaccessible (only for accredited people, unsuitable times and locations, or having an unappealing 'culture'). The flip side is that both LPAs and presbyteries indicated that they promote and provide activities and gatherings, and Lay Preachers choose not to attend. There is no simple solution to this, other than presbyteries and synods seeking to find ways to support and resource Lay Preachers and other lay leaders in ways that best suit their geography and resources. While it is possible that online resourcing and networking may have some value, the stated need was for face-to-face support.
103. **The issue of financial support was raised by both accredited Lay Preachers and candidates-in-training, in relation to study costs (fees and resources), travel to training events, and travel for worship leadership.** This issue has increased in significance with more Lay Preachers travelling regularly to serve rural and isolated congregations. While synods have policies in relation to occasional leadership of worship services, and many congregations willingly provide financial support, this is not offered universally, and Lay Preachers are reluctant to ask or insist. The National Lay Preachers' Committee has been working on a way to address this issue. Study support is a more complex question, best addressed within synods.
104. The National Lay Preachers' Committee raised the question of national co-ordination regarding the ministry of Lay Preachers. We would agree that communication between the NLPC (which reports directly to the Assembly General Secretary) and the MEC has been limited. These two bodies have differing functions, membership and accountability. **We recommend that the Assembly Standing Committee review the responsibilities of the NLPC and its location within the Assembly structures** (It currently reports directly to the Assembly General Secretary).
105. With the establishment of the Education for Ministry Working Group, it

seems timely to consider whether the current MEC Working Group model (namely, a committee based in one synod, moving synod each triennium) is best for the future. Given the high degree of national collaboration among synods' lay education agencies, a different approach might be more beneficial for the work of the EMWG.

G. Proposals

That the Standing Committee

1. receive the report;
2. reaffirm the significance of the ministry of Lay Preacher for the life and witness of the Uniting Church and to invite congregations and councils of the church to celebrate the service of Lay Preachers;
3. encourage presbyteries, church councils and Ministers, in the light of Paragraph 13 of the Basis of Union,

...It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ... The Uniting Church will thereafter provide for the exercise by men and women of the gifts God bestows upon them, and will order its life in response to God's call to enter more fully into mission.

to

- (a) encourage members whose gifts are in worship leading and preaching to develop and exercise their gifts;
 - (b) seek to provide support and resourcing for the development of such gifts;
 - (c) offer local opportunities for affirmation and recognition of those who serve in these ways;
 - (d) seek to offer encouraging and constructive feedback to those who serve in these ways;
4. request Synod Secretaries to discuss the differences in systems and levels of remuneration and financial assistance for Lay Preachers and candidates across Synods in terms of training costs, travel costs and preaching/leading fees, and bring a recommendation to ASC regarding
 - (a) the possibility of reducing the degree of discrepancy
 - (b) ways to encourage presbyteries and congregations to follow such guidelines
 - (c) sources of financial assistance (eg. study scholarships or subsidies);
 5. request the Education for Ministry Working Group to
 - (a) review the responsibilities and accountability of the National Lay Preachers' Committee in the light of its responsibilities;
 - (b) in consultation with synod education agencies, to work with Assembly Communications to prepare a promotional strategy relating to the ministry of Lay Preacher;
- a. to consult with MEBs, presbyteries which were identified in the Review as providing effective support and oversight, a range of culture and language groups, and the National Lay Preachers' Committee to develop Guidelines for presbyteries in providing oversight of, and support for, Lay Preachers, including
 - (i) suggested goals and strategies for promotion and recruitment
 - (ii) suggested goals and strategies for support and encouragement

- (iii) suggested goals and strategies for education, formation and continuing education
- (iv) suggested goals and strategies for provision of feedback and review
- (v) ways in which any additional duties requested of individual Lay Preachers may be addressed in terms of competencies and oversight, including mention of the ministry of Pastor as an appropriate option in some circumstances
- (vi) ways in which the “Code Of Ethics And Ministry Practice For Lay Preachers In The Uniting Church In Australia” may be promoted and used as a tool for reflection and review
- (d) include in the Guidelines produced in response to 6 (c) consideration of the training, recognition and oversight of other (‘non-accredited’) church members who lead worship and preach regularly,
- (e) collaborate with Synod Lay Education agencies and a range of presbyteries to
 - (i) develop a national strategy for the education and formation of lay people for preaching and worship leading in the context of Christian discipleship in the light of the report findings by March 2015, including
 - (1) revised ‘Rules’ for education and formation of Lay Preachers
 - (2) a national competency framework and national assessment framework *, allowing for (but not requiring) the option of VET sector accreditation for training courses
 - (3) guidelines for ministry formation for lay preachers and worship leaders
 - (4) a national certificate of recognition for Lay Preachers**
 - (5) a tiered or incremental approach to competency development
 - (6) modular learning with a range of delivery approaches and teaching styles
 - (7) varied learning approaches for people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities
 - (8) a range of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment
 - (9) options for online delivery
 - (10) consideration of the provision of resources for local mentoring in worship leading and preaching by ordained Ministers and others
 - (11) tools for feedback or review of Lay Preachers within presbyteries
- (g) review education and training programs offered within synods during 2015 in co-operation with MEBs.
- (h) consult with the Assembly Worship Working Group about the possibility of expanded provision of online resourcing of worship leaders and preachers, covering a range of worship and preaching styles, with particular attention to the needs of smaller congregations

That the MEC request MEBs:

- 6. to encourage their lay education agencies and/or staff to work with relevant synod and presbytery staff to foster ways in which young adults may be both encouraged to exercise their gifts in worship and preaching and be better equipped to do so.

7. recognising that not all lay people who lead worship or preach will become accredited Lay Preachers, to encourage their lay education agencies to work with presbyteries to foster ways in which lay leaders might be networked for mutual encouragement and learning.

Appendix A - Respondents to 2012 Survey

a. Responses from Councils, Committees and Associations

Assembly: 1 response

Worship Working Group

(An individual response was received from the Secretary of the Christian Unity Working Group)

Synods: 5 responses *

WA Commission for Education for Discipleship and Leadership (CEDAL)

SA Leadership Development Council

SA Synod Standing Committee

VicTas Synod Lay Preacher Training Committee (Lay Ministry Reference Committee)

Pastoral Relations Committee of Pilgrim Presbytery of Northern Australia

* NOTE: Responses from WA, SA and Northern Synod have been counted as Synod responses rather than Presbytery responses.

Presbyteries: 7 responses

Bremer Brisbane Presbytery

Central Queensland Presbytery

Macquarie Darling Presbytery

Mid North Coast NSW Presbytery (Central Zone & PRC Members)

Presbytery of Gippsland Education Committee

Presbytery of Port Phillip West (Victoria)

Presbytery of Western Victoria

Church Councils / Congregations: 22 responses

Adamstown, Ballarat - Brown Hill, Busselton, Charlestown/Whitebridge, Coolum Beach, Cunamulla, Fremantle Wesley Mission, Goondiwindi, Herberton, Hervey Bay, Kilcoy, Kyabram, Laurieton/Bonny Hills, Magnetic Island, Mansfield, New Lambton, Skipton St Ballarat, Tamworth, Toronto Church Council, Warragul, Wesley Kangaroo Point.

Lay Preacher Associations or Committees: 7 responses

National Lay Preachers' Committee

Lay Preachers' Association, WA

Lay Preachers' Committee of SA

Lay Preachers' Committee of Yarra Yarra Presbytery, VicTas Synod

Presbytery of North East Victoria Lay Preachers' Committee

Queensland Synod Lay Preachers' Association

Synod of Vic-Tas Lay Preachers' Association

b. Responses from Individuals

A total of 218 responses were received from individuals. In several instances, individuals also completed responses on behalf of groups.