

# The Ministry of Lay Preacher

UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA, NATIONAL ASSEMBLY



## Report of Review Findings



This Report has been prepared on behalf of the Ministerial Education Commission as part of a national review of the ministry of Lay Preacher.

**Is the role of Lay Preachers changing?**

**Why aren't more people becoming Lay Preachers?**

**Are our forms of training adequate?**

**Do Lay Preachers receive enough support and oversight?**

**What about the many lay leaders who are not accredited?**

**Does the ministry of Lay Preacher need strengthening, reforming, or is it irrelevant?**

This report has been prepared on behalf of the Assembly Ministerial Education Commission as part of a national review of the ministry of Lay Preacher. The paper presents findings from several national surveys conducted in 2011. Some options regarding the future are presented.

**Responses to these options are sought by 21 May 2012** from Councils of the church; bodies involved in the training and support of lay preachers and worship leaders, and individuals, including accredited and 'non-accredited' lay leaders and ordained Ministers. Those who have participated in previous surveys are asked also to respond to this survey.

Respondents are encouraged if at all possible to submit their responses online as this greatly assists the compilation and analysis of responses. The online response form will be available from 19 March 2012 at:

[www.surveymonkey.com/s/LPReview](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LPReview)

**IMPORTANT:** Do not paste the above link into a search engine such as Google. You need to type it directly into your WWW browser's address space at the top of the window.

Responses may also be mailed to:

Lay Preacher Review,  
c/- Uniting College,  
34 Lipsett Tce., Brooklyn Park SA 5032.  
08 8416 8420

Email enquiries to [mec@unitingcollege.org.au](mailto:mec@unitingcollege.org.au)

## I. Overview

Church members regularly offer vital leadership in worship across the Uniting Church, in urban, suburban, regional and rural communities. Some are accredited Lay Preachers and many are not. Since church union in 1977, there has been little change in either the Regulations concerning the ministry of Lay Preacher, or the national Rules for training. At the same time, it is evident that significant changes have occurred in:

- the size and age structure of congregations
- forms of worship and preaching
- how and where ministries are exercised
- the multicultural nature of the church
- the resourcing of rural congregations
- the size and staffing of presbyteries
- the structuring and resourcing of education for lay ministry

In addition there have been significant developments in society in terms of education, communication, the well-being of rural communities, and our recognition of cultural differences.

In July 2009, the Ministerial Education Commission (MEC) and Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) agreed to a review of the ministry of Lay Preacher.

The review has been overseen by the MEC's Working Group on Lay Specified Ministries – Mr Craig Mitchell (Convenor), Rev Sandy Boyce, Dr Rodney Fopp, Mr Jim Hayward and Ms Lynne Taylor (Research Officer). A final report will be brought to both the MEC and ASC in mid-2012.

### Nature of the Review

**The aims of the review are to assess the role, selection, training requirements, and oversight of Lay Preachers.** This includes investigation of where and how they serve, the effectiveness of selection and training methods, and how support and oversight work in practice. Alongside this, the review team has sought comparative information about lay worship leaders and preachers who are not accredited as Lay Preachers. It is recognised that many people who have not become accredited as Lay Preachers also offer their rich leadership gifts to the church.

**Responses were sought from accredited Lay Preachers, Lay Preacher candidates (trainees) and 'non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers who lead most or all of a worship service at least quarterly. Thus this is not a survey of all lay leaders, but only those who are regularly involved in leading worship and preaching.** Surveys of presbyteries, ordained ministers and church councils were also conducted. This document provides a summary of the key findings.

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## 2. The Role of Lay Preachers in the Uniting Church



Lay Preachers have served the Uniting Church faithfully and well in diverse settings – within their own congregations, in aged care facilities, at youth services and camps, as occasional preachers in other congregations, and as regular preachers and worship leaders in congregations with no resident ordained minister. Some have served for over 60 years, having started with one of our 'parent' denominations. Others, both young and old, are new to this ministry.

Lay Preachers bring their own life stories, leadership styles and faith perspectives to worship in ways that are significant and valued. Their experiences of selection and training, of serving and support, of the communities in which they serve and the gifts that they bring, are rich and varied. They express the hope that their ministry is used by God and valued by the church.

The Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational Churches each affirmed lay

people who were gifted to preach, and authorised them to lead worship and proclaim the Word in their local church. When the Uniting Church was formed, the importance of the role of lay preachers was affirmed.

The role of Lay Preacher in the UCA was largely shaped by its significance within Methodism. The growth of Methodist movement in the 18th century revolved around three activities – the preaching of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, participation in small group meetings where people shared experiences of discipleship, and sharing Christian faith through singing and reading. Wesley expected that preaching would be done by ordained ministers, but as the movement grew, lay people with preaching gifts became needed. Over time, these local preachers came to hold an important place in the structure of the Methodist Church.

In the Methodist Church in Australia, Local Preachers were recognised as having leadership within their congregation and circuit, being ex officio members of the Leaders' Meeting (overseeing the life of the Congregation) and the Quarterly Meeting (with oversight of the Circuit).

In the UCA Basis of Union the ministry of Lay Preacher is recognised as one of the specified ministries of the church, alongside the ministries of the Word, Diaconate, and

Elder. The Basis of Union identifies the particular role of Lay Preachers as having a responsibility to encourage a 'fuller understanding of the obedience of Christians'.

The ministry of Lay Preacher is described in Section 2.8 of the Regulations, with requirements for appropriate selection, training and review. Lay Preachers are able to serve in the congregation of their membership and in other congregations as invited by the resident Minister. Because of their responsibility for spiritual leadership in the congregation, in early years of UCA, Lay Preachers were ex officio members of Parish/Elders Council. Lay Preachers may be elected to presbytery membership

According to the Regulations, Church Councils are involved in discerning the call and suitability of a person to become a Lay Preacher. Presbyteries are responsible for their candidature, accreditation, oversight and review. The Ministerial Education Commission (MEC) approves Rules for training and assessment, including areas of learning, with each Synod responsible for establishing bodies to direct and assess such training. Synods and Presbyteries may arrange for the formation of Lay Preachers' Associations. The UCA has a National Lay Preachers' Committee with representatives from Synods' Lay Preachers' Associations or Committees.

(Thanks to Rev. Dr. Graham Vawser for assistance with this section.)



# 3. Survey participants

Information was gathered from Councils and individuals about the current situation along with responses to some initial questions about the future. Some unsolicited submissions were also received, and these will be considered alongside the responses to this discussion paper.

## Survey of Presbyteries – 21 responses

WA, SA, Pilgrim Presbytery, QLD 5, NSW/ACT 9, and VIC/TAS 4. The lack of response from almost half of presbyteries meant that it was not possible to get a national picture of how many Lay Preachers currently serve.

## Survey of Lay Leaders – 979 responses

470 Lay Preachers, 424 other (non-accredited) lay worship leaders and preachers, 64 candidates for the ministry of Lay Preacher. NSW/ACT 363, Northern 19, QLD 157, SA 119, VIC/TAS 229, WA 92.

## Survey of Ministers – 100 responses

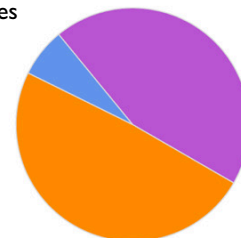
NSW/ACT 20, Northern 4, QLD 22, SA 15, VIC/TAS 38, WA 1. Responses were sought from ministers who relate directly to Lay Preachers in congregational or wider roles.

## Survey of Church Councils – 208 responses

NSW/ACT 67, Pilgrim 3, Northern UAICC 1, QLD 44, SA 21, VIC/TAS 72, WA 0.

### Lay Leaders Survey Responses

- Accredited Lay Preachers
- Lay Preacher Candidates
- 'Non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers



## A national profile of lay preachers and worship leaders

### Who are the Uniting Church's accredited Lay Preachers and 'non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers? Who are our Lay Preacher candidates (trainees)?

Our national survey of 979 leaders provides some key insights. [Note that percentages have been rounded for ease of reporting.]

**Gender** - The group was 54% male and 46% female.

**Age** - Over one third of respondents were aged over 70 years and almost two-thirds were aged over 60 years. The age structure of lay leaders who completed the survey was similar to the age structure of attenders of Uniting congregations surveyed in the 2006 National Church Life Survey (NCLS).

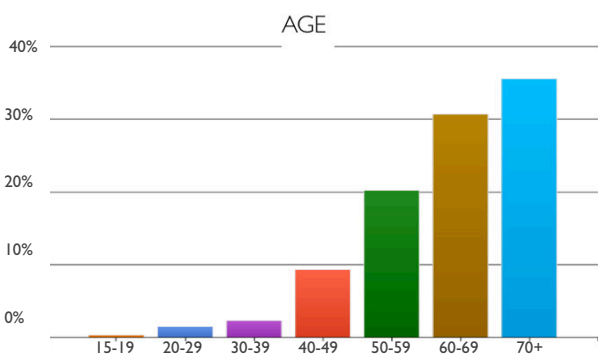


The vast majority of lay worship leaders are long-time church members. Some newcomers to the UCA are finding their way to becoming accredited Lay Preachers. Almost one quarter of leaders under the age of 40 have been Uniting Church members for five years or less. [Note: The study used the term *member* rather than *attende*e or *confirmed member*.]

**Qualifications** - Almost half of respondents have a bachelor's degree or post-graduate qualification. About half of all respondents have a theology or ministry qualification (including Lay Preacher studies), including almost one-third of 'non-accredited' lay leaders. Respondents were considerably better qualified than the general population. They were also better qualified than UCA members surveyed in the 2006 National Church Life Survey.

**Language and Culture** - 97% of those surveyed named English as the only main language they spoke at home, with the other 4% listing Afrikaan, Tagalog, Samoan, Bisaya, Fijian, German, Hindi, Kunwingku, Macedonian, Tamil, Tongan and Vietnamese (32 responses in total). Only 36 people indicated that their cultural or racial background was other than Caucasian or European.

The lay leaders' survey, which was offered only in printed English, did not gather sufficient responses from leaders for whom English was not their first language. While the review team sought advice on how best to consult with people from different language and culture groups, ultimately the Review team lacked the resources for such consultation. The hope of the review team is to encourage face-to-face conversations with a range of cultural and language groups regarding the content of this discussion paper.



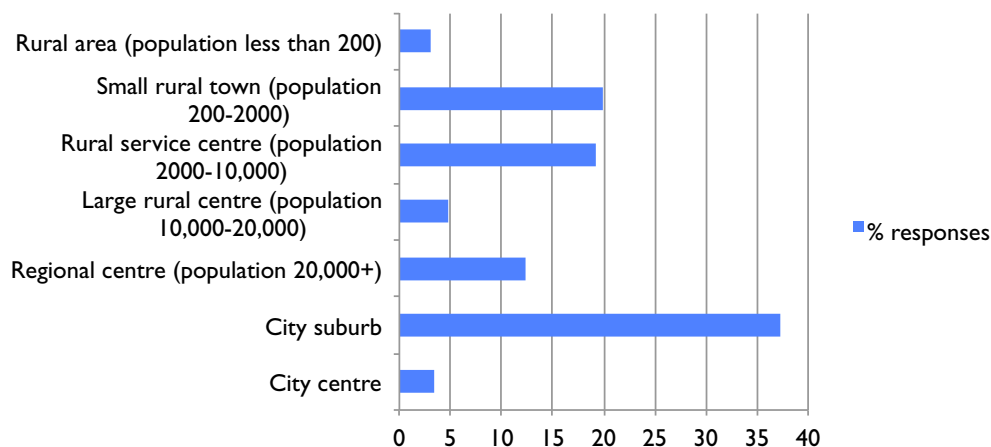
	Lay Preachers	'Non-accredited' lay leaders	Lay Preacher candidates
Under 60 yrs	18%	45%	63%
Under 50 yrs	6%	17%	34%

### Involvement in the Uniting Church

	Lay Preachers	'Non-accredited' lay leaders	Lay Preacher candidates
5 years or less	2%	7%	11%
6 to 20 years	7%	18%	27%
20 years plus	91%	76%	61%

# 4. Where and how lay leaders serve

**Primary location in which you lead worship or preach**



Leaders were asked how often they usually led worship or preached in a range of settings.

Lead in...	Their 'home' congregation				Another UCA congregation			
	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Quarterly	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Quarterly
Lay Preachers	5.0%	9.4%	38.2%	79.8%	1.3%	5.0%	24.3%	64.9%
'Non-accredited' lay leaders	4.6%	11.1%	42.4%	85.8%	0.2%	1.7%	8.7%	28.2%
Lay Preacher candidates	6.3%	27.0%	61.9%	82.5%	1.6%	6.3%	20.6%	42.9%
ALL	4.9%	11.3%	41.6%	82.7%	0.9%	3.6%	17.1%	47.1%



The large majority of people surveyed lead at least quarterly in their home church, with candidates most likely to lead more often. 'Non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers have high levels of involvement in their home churches. Accredited Lay Preachers are the most likely to be leading further afield.

Lead in...	Their 'home' congregation				Another UCA congregation			
	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Quarterly	Weekly	Fortnightly	Monthly	Quarterly
Age less than 40 yrs	13.2%	21.1%	47.4%	86.8%	0.0%	0.0%	10.5%	39.5%
Age 40-69 yrs	4.9%	12.2%	42.3%	82.6%	1.0%	4.2%	16.7%	46.0%
Age 70+ years	3.6%	8.4%	39.2%	81.3%	0.9%	3.3%	18.7%	49.7%
ALL	4.8%	11.2%	41.4%	82.3%	1.0%	3.7%	17.2%	47.0%



Those aged under 40 are more likely to lead weekly in their home congregation. They are also more likely than older respondents to be involved in leading worship and preaching at schools, camps and conferences and churches of another denomination. Lay leaders over the age of 70 (whether accredited or not) are the most likely to be leading at aged care facilities.



## 5. Church location, size, and form of ministry

**In what kinds of churches are lay people frequently leading worship and preaching? Is there an ordained minister in close proximity for encouragement and guidance?** [The term *lay leaders* is used here to refer to all respondents, whether or not they were accredited.]

### Rural communities

While the survey sample of lay leaders was well spread across city, suburban, regional and rural communities, the majority of respondents were from regional or rural settings. 64% of city leaders were men, while 61% from rural towns of less than 2000 people were women. Not surprisingly, rural towns of up to 10,000 people in size were more likely to have a resource minister or lay ministry team than a resident ordained minister. Rural areas with less than 200 people were more likely to have a lay ministry team or some other ministry arrangement, including individual lay leaders, invited preachers, interim ministers and retired ministers.

### Suburban churches

Over one-third of those sampled lead in suburban churches, and two-thirds of these are not linked to other congregations. Two-thirds have a resident ordained minister. However 55% of suburban leaders said that the church in which they lead has less than 50 people.

### Small churches

63% of lay leaders regularly serve churches with less than 50 people, mostly in churches of 20-49 people. The majority of accredited Lay Preachers (82%) lead most frequently in congregations with less than 75 people in worship, with just over half in worship services with less than 50 people. Very few lay leaders from churches with over 150 people indicated that they preached or led most of a worship service regularly. This does not necessarily mean that church members aren't involved regularly in leading some aspects of worship.

Churches of less than 50 people are most likely to be linked with one or more other congregations as part of a 'cluster' (60%). The smaller the worshipping congregation, the greater likelihood that there is a resource or 'cluster' minister or lay ministry team. (Although 45% of churches with less than 50 people in worship had a resident ordained minister.) Just over half of lay leaders served in congregations that were linked with one or more other churches.

### Leaders' ages

Leaders aged over 70 years are most likely to be in churches of less than 50 attending, particularly those with less than 20 people in worship. Leaders under 40 are more likely to be involved in churches with over 50 people in worship. Leaders

aged 40-69 were fairly evenly represented across all church sizes.

### Form of ministry

Just over half of all accredited Lay Preachers surveyed preach at least monthly, with about 90% preaching at least quarterly. The majority of surveyed leaders are involved in preaching, leading prayers and Bible readings monthly or quarterly. Younger leaders and those more recently trained are more likely to be involved regularly in leading music and preparing multimedia.

About one-third of leaders with no specific training in preaching and worship preach monthly or more frequently. 62% of accredited Lay Preachers with no such training preach at least monthly.

Rather than merely completing training requirements, candidates are learning 'on the job' over an extended period of time. A key finding of the study is that 60% of surveyed Lay Preacher candidates preach or lead at least monthly in their home congregation (a further 20% quarterly).



## 6. Additional duties

About half of the Lay Preachers surveyed and of Lay Preacher candidates said that they performed additional duties as part of their role. Lay Preachers serving with a resident lay Pastor were most likely to have additional duties (63%), and those serving with lay ministry teams the next likely (54%). Those who had been trained since 2000 were more likely to be asked to perform additional duties than those trained earlier or with no training.

The main responses were as follows.

### Pastoral Care

**About half of the Ministers and Church Councils surveyed said that their accredited Lay Preachers provided pastoral care as part of their duties.** However only 2% of Lay Preachers themselves named this. The reason for such a discrepancy is unclear. It may be that Lay Preachers were thinking of formal

duties attached to their role, whereas others with whom they work see their pastoral role as important, whether or not it is formalised. (The form of the survey question may be an issue here as well.)



### Sacraments

**According to the lay leaders' survey, 30% of Lay Preachers have approval to celebrate the sacraments, along with 22% of other lay leaders.**

Older leaders and those who are long-time church members are more likely to have sacramental responsibilities. **One-quarter of leaders who have been in the UCA for three to five years celebrate the sacraments.** As expected, lay leaders are most likely to have permission to celebrate the sacraments if their congregation has a lay ministry team or lay Pastor. Smaller towns and congregations, are more likely to have lay leaders conducting the sacraments (48% of leaders in rural areas with less than 200 people, 43% of leaders in towns of 200-2000 people).

## Funerals

One in five Lay Preachers conduct funerals as part of their regular duties, along with only about one in ten non-accredited leaders. Not surprisingly, Lay Preachers are most likely to be leading funerals in rural areas of less than 2000 people. Of all leaders who provided details about frequency, about one-third said that they conducted funerals 'occasionally' or 'as required' without providing further information. Another one in five indicated that they perform this role less than five times a year. Five leaders stated that they conduct funerals at least fortnightly, and another six more than monthly. Further information is needed about the frequency and circumstances in which lay leaders serve in this way.

- Leading worship in aged care facilities
- Maintenance and gardening



## Organisation and Administration

Lay leaders are involved in a range of team worship planning activities, with worship committees and worship teams. 16% of accredited Lay Preachers said that they either participate in or lead worship planning groups. 39% of ministers and 44% of church councils say that their Lay Preachers fulfill additional organisational or administrative roles. (The specific nature of their duties was not requested.) Church Councils reported that such roles were most likely in congregations of less than 20 people and rural towns of fewer than 10,000 people.



## Teaching

About 20% of ministers and church councils said that their accredited Lay Preachers have some kind of teaching or education role. Such leadership is most likely in churches with 75-99 people attending worship. Lay preachers themselves named small group leadership and involvement in youth and children's programs among their other duties.

## Other Duties

Only a very small proportion of accredited Lay Preachers are wedding celebrants. A range of other roles and activities were listed by Ministers, Church Councils or Lay Leaders themselves as being part of the duties of Lay Preachers, including

- Chaplaincy
- Membership of Church Council or Elders
- Music leadership



Some of the roles may have been expected of people in their role as Lay Preachers, while others were performed for other reasons.

Both Ministers and Church Councils indicated that the primary reason that additional duties were expected or required of Lay Preachers was due to the individual's particular gifts.

A secondary reason was that ordained ministers were not readily available, though they were relatively nearby. A further reason given was the expectations of the congregation or agency.

Additional reasons for extra responsibilities included:

1. to share the workload
2. too many preaching places to cover
3. lay leadership is valued
4. deliberate program to involve lay people
5. it's seen as normal for them to do so
6. shared leadership with Council and Elders
7. ministry vacancy
8. support for neighbouring congregations
9. personal commitment and choice
10. the congregation has chosen to have only lay leadership

Many Lay Preachers perform a range of additional duties. Some duties, such as celebrating the sacraments, may be related to location and the availability of ordained Ministers. Others may be due to more than one factor: For example, serving by conducting funerals, organising worship, administrative tasks, and teaching, may result from a combination of the gifts of the individuals, the availability of ordained ministers, and the size and location of the congregation.

The key issue here is about how often additional duties are added due to the match between an individual's gifts and local needs. If so, to what extent should such responsibilities be formally acknowledged by the presbytery and/or church council in terms of expectations, support, ongoing training and evaluation?

"With my patients I may conduct commitment services (betrothal), funerals, bedside sacraments for patients, families and friends, develop prayer rituals and skills, help patients prepare for their funeral, baptisms of hospitalised babies, blessings and anointment."

# 7. How is the ministry of Lay Preacher regarded?

Lay leaders, Ministers and Church Councils were asked about how accredited Lay Preachers were regarded. Lay leaders were asked about the perceived views of their congregation/s.

**How is the accredited ministry of Lay Preachers generally regarded in your congregation?**

## Positively

accepted welcomed highly regarded important  
affirmed favourably respected vital  
valued appreciated

About **two-thirds** of accredited Lay Preachers and candidates said that their congregations view this ministry positively. About **half** of non-accredited lay leaders said their churches had a positive view. The perception of the ministry of Lay Preacher is clearly favourable, although not unequivocally so.

## Negatively

someone to 'fill in' not well  
an undervalued appendix not highly  
one step below Elder not respected  
with deep suspicion

A very small percentage of all lay leaders (about 4%) said that their congregations viewed this ministry negatively.

## Ministers' and Church Councils' views

Ordained ministers and Councils were asked to respond to a series of statements regarding accredited Lay Preachers on a scale from **Strongly Agree** to **Strongly Disagree**, with **Neutral** in the centre.

(Note: The sample group ministers and churches consisted of those who are actively involved with Lay Preachers.)

The majority of Ministers and Church Councils **agreed** or **agreed strongly** with the following statements:

- Our accredited Lay Preachers are highly valued by the congregations whom they serve.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers are competent in worship leading and preaching.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers have a good understanding of Uniting Church theology.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers display a good understanding of the local suburbs or region they serve.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers welcome guidance or direction from ordained minister/s.

Most Church Councils **agreed** or **agreed strongly** with the following statements whereas most Ministers either **agreed** or were **neutral**:

- Our accredited Lay Preachers regularly involve other church members in leading worship.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers keep up to date with recent biblical scholarship.

## Indifference or Ignorance

lack of awareness that the ministry exists

lack of differentiation from other leaders

affirmation that lay leaders were equally valued

**One in five of all leaders' churches are perceived to be indifferent towards or ignorant of this ministry.** According to these leaders, the ministry of Lay Preacher was not well understood, highlighted or differentiated. The reasons varied from a general lack of awareness (the ministry is not acknowledged, affirmed or promoted) to the fact that a range of lay people were involved in worship leading and preaching and those with accreditation were not given special recognition or status alongside others.

## Other Responses

We don't have any Lay Preachers (3% of responses)

I don't know (4% of responses)

Other (9% of responses)

- Seen as 'second best' to a 'real' minister

- More about individual competency or quality of leadership than accreditation status

- Our accredited Lay Preachers are competent in using a range of preaching styles.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers have access to a good, current library of resource materials.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers welcome constructive feedback from the congregation.

Most Church Councils **agreed** or **agreed strongly** with the following, whereas Ministers were more likely to be **agree**, be **neutral**, or **disagree**:

- Our accredited Lay Preachers regularly involve other church members in planning worship.
- Our accredited Lay Preachers attend relevant training events at least annually.

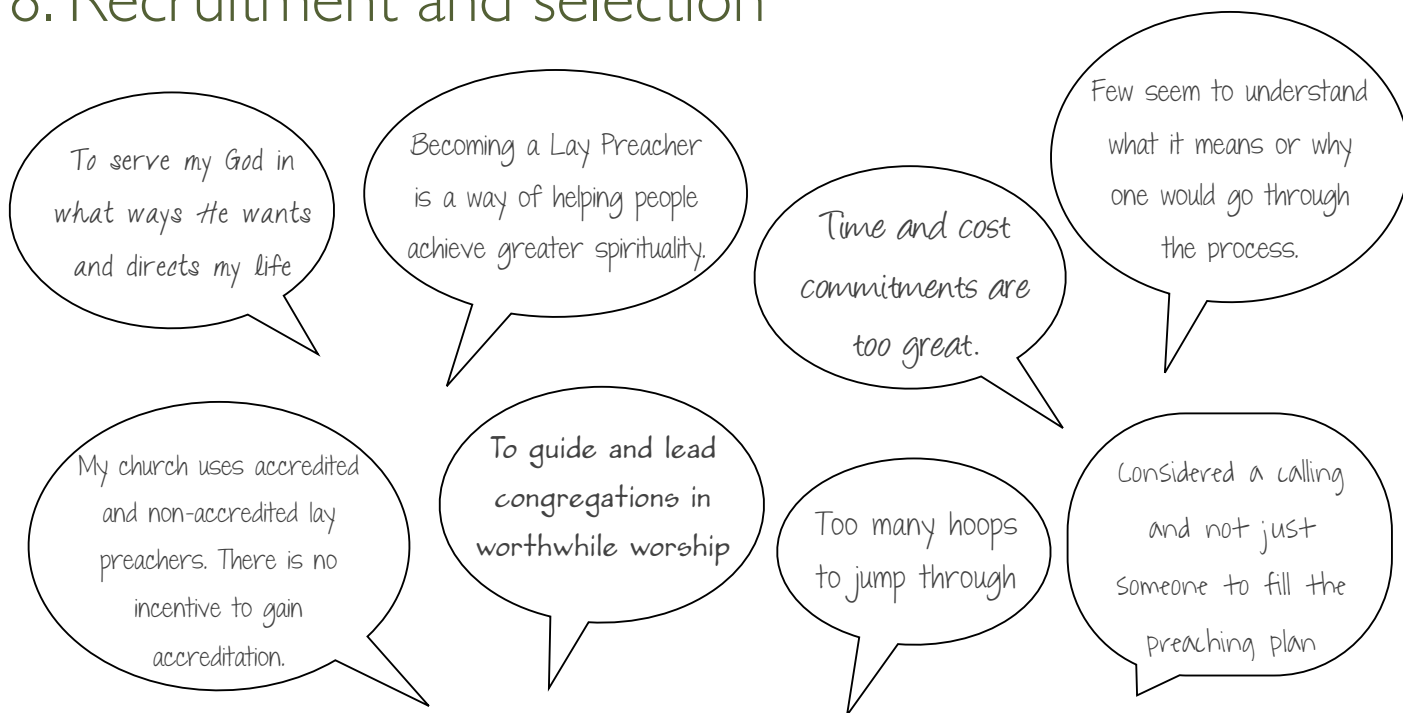
Most Church Councils **agreed** or were **neutral** regarding the following, whereas most Ministers were **neutral** or **disagree**:

- Our accredited Lay Preachers are skilled in using multimedia in worship appropriately.

The views of Church Council and Ministers were overwhelmingly positive with regard to Lay Preachers' leadership of worship and preaching, their sense of UCA theology, their local wisdom, and their openness to guidance. On most questions, Ministers were somewhat less enthusiastic about Lay Preachers' abilities than were Church Councils. **There were no areas in which the majority of Ministers or Councils either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statements.** It is also worth noting that almost 30% of Church Councils did not know whether or not their Lay Preachers attended ongoing training.



## 8. Recruitment and selection



### Beginning to Lead

#### What prompts 'non-accredited' lay leaders to begin leading worship or preaching?

Their most common responses, in order, were:

#### 'Non-accredited' lay leaders

1. Asked or encouraged by a Minister
2. Shortage of preachers and worship leaders
3. Felt a sense of call from God
4. Seeking to develop and use my gifts

There was relatively little difference in importance among the above four factors. Women leaders who were non-accredited were significantly more likely than men to be prompted by a shortage of available leaders. Men were slightly more likely to be prompted by a minister; women by a member of the congregation or church council. Women were more likely to be seeking to develop their gifts or deepen their faith.

Two-thirds of accredited Lay Preachers and candidates were involved in worship leading and/or preaching prior to becoming candidates. Such involvement provides the opportunity to test and develop gifts, gain confidence and be informally assessed by others.

#### What prompts leaders to seek to become accredited Lay Preachers?

Following are their responses, in order of frequency:

### Accredited Lay Preachers

1. Felt a sense of call from God
2. Asked or encouraged by a Minister
3. Seeking to develop and use my gifts
4. Felt a need to be better equipped to lead

In terms of sense of call and encouragement by a Minister, there was no significant difference by gender. However women were significantly more likely than men to be seeking to develop their gifts, wanting to deepen their faith or wanting to be better equipped to lead.

### Lay Preacher Candidates

1. Felt a sense of call from God
2. Seeking to develop and use my gifts
3. I had been leading and it seemed like an appropriate next step
4. Felt a need to be better equipped to lead

Men were more likely than women to identify a sense of call as the primary reason (77% and 67% respectively). Of those who felt a need to be better equipped, 64% were women and 29% men. Women were more likely than men to want to deepen their faith or respond to a shortage of available preachers.

The evidence suggests there are multiple factors, both internal and external, that prompt a person into leadership. Personal encouragement, the need for leadership, a sense of call, and a desire to be more effective, are all significant.

While similar factors also cause people to take the next step towards becoming accredited Lay Preachers, the key elements are a sense of call along with encouragement from a Minister.



### Difficulties with Accreditation

Overall, 7% of accredited Lay Preachers and 31% of candidates said they had experienced "significant difficulties with the selection and accreditation process." This amounted to 10% of both groups in total. Of those who began training since 2000, 27% experienced significant difficulties. Those from the Northern Synod and Western Australia most commonly cited difficulties, while those from NSW/ACT were least likely to do this. (Note: The WA and Northern Synod samples were extremely small.)

48% of male candidates experienced difficulties compared with 13% of female candidates. 36% of those in cities and 30% of those in rural communities of less than 10,000 people said that they had difficulties with accreditation.



# 9. Training leaders

National oversight of training for accredited Lay Preachers is exercised by the Ministerial Education Commission (MEC) on behalf of the UCA Assembly. The MEC approves Rules for study for this specified ministry. These were last amended in 1995. A copy can be obtained here (the following is an abbreviated WWW link to the PDF document on the Assembly website.)

<http://tinyurl.com/LPRules>

The current rules broadly specify study in Biblical studies, theological studies, worship and preaching, in addition to gaining practical skills. Courses of study and assessment are determined by each Synod and are approved by the MEC, who appoints a Working Group on Lay Specified Ministries to exercise responsibilities on their behalf.

Competency in preaching and leading worship is also required, and is achieved both through formal training and through practical experience overseen and assessed by the presbytery in consultation with the Synod Lay Preachers Committee or equivalent. This usually involves some form of coaching or mentoring along with development and assessment of competency through leading a series of worship services.

In the past few years there have been significant changes in Lay Preacher training, with all Synods adopting new or revised training programs and methods. This has resulted in fresh approaches in most, perhaps all, presbyteries. In particular, resources developed by



the former ELM Centre in NSW have been used and adapted in most Synods. Some presbyteries, such as Moreton Rivers in Queensland, have developed new training programs themselves. The offering of Lay Preacher training in rural and regional centres has been a significant movement across the country, with Synod agencies and rural resource ministers playing key roles in this. There is a clear recognition that training needs as far as possible to be accessible and include both biblical and theological learning and skill development.

With the closure of Coolamon College, the Assembly contracted Uniting College in SA to continue to provide a distance education course (until 2012) and new units were subsequently developed. Both Uniting College and some synods have begun offering multimedia resources as part of their training.

The intention of the MEC is to review both the Rules and existing training courses following the current review, and feedback on current courses is welcome.

## Experiences of training and assessment for Accreditation



***“The training we received was well presented and well attended by people throughout the Presbytery.”***

In all synods apart from the Northern Synod, people primarily receive training for Lay Preacher accreditation in group settings (66% of respondents), with individual distance learning being the second most common (40% of respondents). [This data applied to people trained since 2000.] The small sample from the Northern Synod identified one-to-one coaching or mentoring followed by group learning as the most common approaches. Not surprisingly, only 6% of people indicated that they had participated in online learning. To date this option has not been readily available in the UCA.

Respondents were asked to identify the most helpful aspects of training. The details of these responses will be reported to the

MEC and Synod MEBs. Overall, the most helpful aspects of training were:

1. Reading and resource materials
2. Theological foundations
3. Depth of teaching
4. Interaction with other learners

People aged 70 and over most commonly appreciated reading and resource materials, while for those in their 20s, engaging teachers and practical examples were preferred. Those in their 50's were the most appreciative of Internet resources. These figures reflect not only the quality of learning methods but also issues of access.

### Improvements

Those trained since the year 2000 were asked about improvements to the particular training they had undertaken. Providers of training included Synod education agencies, synod and presbytery staff, other ordained ministers, Morling College, Australian College of Ministries, Paradise College of Ministries, Willow Creek, Christian Heritage College, Tabor College, and Bible College of SA. It was clear from people's responses that some had undertaken courses that no longer exist, such as the Coolamon College course.

### ***“Maybe some advice on sermon preparation and delivery...”***

While responses varied greatly, the most common suggestions concerned (not in any particular order):

- More practical training and experience in worship leading and preaching, including leading a small group prior to leading a congregation
- More exploration of a range of preaching styles and approaches
- More exploration of contemporary and alternative worship approaches and of worship that includes children
- Focus on pastoral care, particularly in relation to funerals
- Training in the use of digital presentation software and methods
- Greater opportunity for people in rural areas to participate in face-to-face learning opportunities
- More current textbooks and resources
- Better quality multimedia resources
- Online learning options
- More opportunity for ongoing feedback during the learning process
- A more in-depth exploration of the Uniting Church and its Basis of Union

Further comment on these matters is included in the section on barriers to accreditation.

## Views regarding training

Ministers indicated varying degrees of familiarity with the Lay Preacher training offered within their Synods, with the majority being **moderately, very or extremely familiar**. Church Councils were considerably less familiar with the training provided, with most being **slightly familiar** (34%) or **not at all familiar** (29%).

**To what extent are you satisfied with this training curriculum and approach for your local leaders?**

	Ministers	Church Councils
Extremely satisfied	14%	3%
Very satisfied	22%	37%
Moderately satisfied	42%	39%
Slightly satisfied	17%	19%
Not at all satisfied	5%	2%

**Why do you see the training as satisfactory?** (responses ranked)

Ministers	Church Councils
1. Theological foundations	1. Theological foundations
2. Reading & resource materials	2. Depth of teaching
3. Interaction with other learners	2. Reading & resource materials
4. Depth of teaching	4. Practical examples

Both groups expressed much lower levels of satisfaction with the use of media, online resources, and feedback from teachers.

A considerable range of additional comments were received. Their diversity appears to reflect differences in curriculum, approach and personnel, and also differences in context and expectations.

*"Very successful in engaging people in adult learning styles within a contemporary church context."*

*"My preference is for lay leaders to be assessed and trained close to where they live, but face-to-face by qualified people."*

*"Found the material interesting but valued a local mentor to help him explore the content."*

*"The education is OK, but it does lack the scholarly rigor that ordained ministry requires. The bar is perhaps set a little low."*

*"The lay preacher course is focused on non-indigenous groups."*

*"Synod and presbytery-based training appears to have shown considerable flexibility in meeting local needs."*

*"I have deconstructed two lay preacher units. I think they try to pack in too much. This is inherent in an 'everything up front' process of formation and accreditation."*

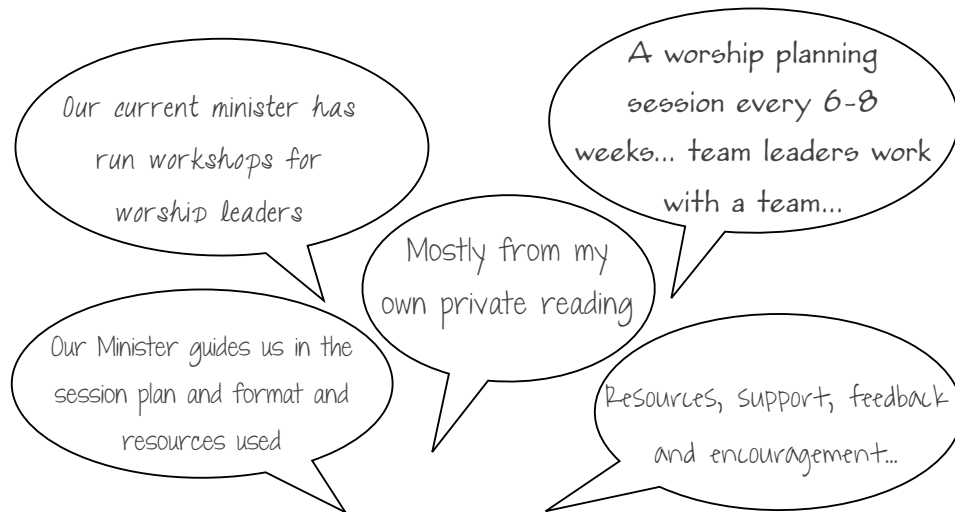
*"Not sure about how practical some of it is."*

*"The need for training in contemporary worship is the key issue for our future."*

*"Excellent and passionate teachers."*

*"For some the curriculum is at a high academic level and not understood by people with basic educational standards."*

## Learning to lead locally



Many lay worship leaders and leader, both accredited and non-accredited, develop confidence, skills and understandings about worship through local experience in their home church or nearby. Leaders cited a range of regular activities that supported their growth in leadership capacities:

- worship team planning meetings
- feedback within planning groups
- mentoring or coaching from Minister
- resources provided by Minister
- regular feedback from Minister
- personal reading
- locally hosted worship seminars
- opportunity to practice through leading
- personal encouragement from church members
- leaders' retreats

- observation of the example of Ministers and other lay leaders
- peer review and encouragement
- financial support from church council to participate in training
- leading Bible studies and devotions in small groups
- congregation paying for resources such as books
- minister providing Biblical and theological background
- availability of worship resources such as MediaCom materials
- being upheld and supported in prayer

**The most common response from leaders was that encouragement and affirmation from the congregation and other leaders was vital.** Coaching or mentoring, regular participation and resourcing were also significant. Not surprisingly, a significant dimension of lay leaders' development appears to take place 'on the job', and the role of Ministers and other lay leaders is important in terms of both guidance and confidence-building.



# 10. Feedback, support and review



Almost all lay leaders receive regular, informal feedback from the congregations whom they lead. However 70% of accredited Lay Preachers say they have never been formally reviewed by a Presbytery, and 33% have never received feedback from a Minister.

10% of Lay Preachers say that they have been reviewed by their Church Council at least annually, with a further 10% having been reviewed within the last five years. The vast majority, then, have

rarely or never been reviewed by their Church Council or Presbytery.

According to the UCA Regulations, oversight of Lay Preachers is the responsibility of the both the Church Council and the Presbytery.

*At the time of any consultation on the life and witness of a Congregation in accordance with the provisions of Regulation 3.4.5, the Church Council shall review the list of Lay Preachers recognised within the Congregation, and shall enquire as to whether they continue to perform the ministry to which they have been accredited. The result of that review shall be reported to the Presbytery. (From Reg 2.8.8)*

## Role of Ordained Ministers

The UCA Regulations do not specify a formal role for ordained Ministers in relation to accredited Lay Preachers other than in relation to their normal role in providing for the leadership of worship within their 'pastoral charge' and "guiding and instructing the members of the Church and equipping them for their ministry".

However many Ministers are involved regularly in the recruitment, equipping and oversight of lay leaders for worship planning and leadership.

**How often do lay leaders receive review or feedback from a Minister?** Ministers themselves indicated the following:

Frequency	Accredited Leaders	Non-accredited leaders
At least quarterly	53%	57%
Annually	7%	9%
Every 5 years	17%	20%
Never	13%	12%

Several Ministers said that they rarely or never get to see lay people leading worship as this occurs while the Minister is elsewhere. In comparison, 25% of Church Councils said that their accredited Lay Preachers never receive feedback, and 28% indicated the same for their non-accredited leaders.

Ministers, Church Councils and Lay Leaders were asked to respond to a series of statements about the role of Ministers. This table indicates the percentage of respondents who **agreed** or **strongly agreed** with each statement.

	Ordained Ministers	Church Councils	Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates	Non-accredited lay leaders
<i>Ordained Ministers should actively be encouraging gifted lay people to participate in worship leading and preaching.</i>	99%	98%	99%	97%
<i>Ordained Ministers should actively be encouraging gifted people to become Lay Preacher candidates.</i>	72%	72%	94%	67%
<i>Ordained Ministers should regularly be involved in mentoring/coaching lay leaders in worship leading and preaching roles.</i>	94%	91%	96%	93%
<i>Ordained Ministers should regularly be involved in conducting formal training sessions for lay leaders in worship leading and preaching roles.</i>	73%	49%	67%	67%
<i>Ordained Ministers should regularly be involved in evaluating lay leaders in worship leading and preaching roles.</i>	87%	67%	79%	78%

Lay leaders say that feedback helps when it includes

- affirmation
- appreciation of efforts involved in preparation
- indication of areas for improvement
- a reminder of the need for continuing education
- assessment of my vitality of call
- how people have connected with the themes
- encouragement that the Holy Spirit has used their ministry
- growth in integrity and faith
- comments from people who are more experienced
- includes questions of clarification

Ministers see themselves as having a vital role in encouraging people to lead, and this is supported by Church Councils.

*"The tap on the shoulder is most important to encourage people to take the first step and provide the opportunity to start taking small parts in worship and reflect on what has occurred and learnt."*

*"Many people are not confident in their gifts and can benefit from genuine affirmation, especially if there is a good relationship, therefore trusting the affirmation and encouragement."*

*"The congregation are happy to just get them to preach without training. It takes trained people to name the importance of education."*

*"If the Minister doesn't make it clear that he/she welcomes the involvement of the laity, no-one will force the issue."*

## Review by Church Councils

While the UCA Regulations indicate that Church Councils ought to be involved in formal review of accredited Lay Preachers periodically, in practice this seems rarely to be the case.

Church Councils were asked, "**How often do lay leaders receive formal review or feedback from the Church Council?**"

At least...	Lay Preachers & Candidates	Non-accredited leaders
Quarterly	3%	5%
Annually	2%	1%
Every 5 years	16%	7%
Never	58%	68%

As indicated previously, the above information is similar to reports from lay leaders themselves.

**According to both Church Councils and lay leaders, informal feedback from the congregation occurs frequently.** However, a significant number of lay leaders indicated that such feedback, while appreciated, was insufficient or unhelpful.



A key issue here is that lay leaders are often seen as part of the community whom they serve. One Council responded "*This is a small community where everyone knows everyone well. Compliments occur often and if the person was not doing the job they would not be asked again.*"

Only a few Church Councils indicated that they have regular processes for planning and feedback involving meetings with the Minister or with worship teams or other lay leaders.

A significant number of Church Councils indicated support for more formal and frequent reviews. However other congregations indicated that their existing process, most likely informal feedback, was satisfactory. A few respondents indicated strongly that their Church Council was not sufficiently skilled to evaluate their lay leaders and that this should be a Presbytery responsibility.

**The role of Church Councils in the regular review of Lay Preachers and other lay leaders of worship clearly needs further specification.** To whom is a Lay Preacher responsible? The congregation? The church council? Ordained Ministers? The presbytery? How are support and oversight shared by these bodies?

## Review by Presbyteries

In terms of oversight of accredited Lay Preachers, the responsibility of presbyteries does not cease when a Lay Preacher is commissioned. As indicated, the Regulations provide for periodic review and reporting to Presbytery. (Regs 2.8.6 and 2.8.8)

Lay leaders were asked, "**How often do you receive formal review or feedback from the Presbytery?**"

At least...	Lay Preachers & Candidates	Non-accredited leaders
Quarterly	1%	0%
Annually	3%	1%
Every 5 years	8%	5%
Never	69%	71%

Accredited Lay Preachers were **significantly less likely** to be subject to formal review by Presbytery or Church Council if they were serving alongside an resident Minister or cluster/resource Minister, as compared with serving with a lay ministry team or (lay) Pastor.

The following table indicates the frequency of formal reviews of **Accredited Lay Preachers** by their presbyteries, based on the location in which they serve (pop = population).

	Quarterly	Yearly	5 years	Never
Rural area (pop under 200)	0%	0%	17%	67%
Small rural town (pop 200-2000)	0%	3%	13%	63%
Rural service centre (pop 2,000-10,000)	0%	7%	12%	55%
Large rural centre (pop 10,000-20,000)	7%	0%	13%	53%
Regional centre (pop 20,000)	1%	1%	9%	65%
City suburb	2%	3%	5%	65%
City centre	0%	0%	0%	67%

## Ways that feedback could be improved

**Lay leaders were overwhelmingly in favour of more intentional, constructive and regular feedback.**

They suggested the following:

- a more formal process of review
- criteria for evaluation
- participation by Ministers in regular feedback
- involvement of Church Council and Presbytery
- peer feedback from other Lay Preachers and lay leaders
- discussion of different approaches to worship
- an occasional survey for the congregation to complete
- a review at least annually
- some training or preparation for local people in giving constructive feedback
- feedback from people who are knowledgeable or skilled
- a written copy of the review details and help in following up on suggestions made



# 11. Ongoing learning

Overall, leaders are most keen to learn more about **Biblical background, preaching styles, and theology**.

The most popular topics by age group were:

- 15-39 years and 60-70+ years: **Preaching styles, theology and Biblical background**
- 40-49 years: **Contemporary worship, Biblical background and 'alternative' worship**
- 50-59 years: **Biblical background, preaching styles and contemporary worship**

Leaders in their 40's were the most interested in receiving training in the use of multimedia in worship, contemporary worship and 'alternative' worship.

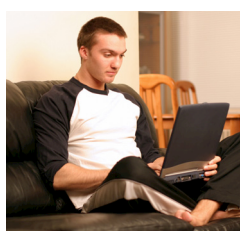
Training in leading funerals was more of interest to rural leaders than city leaders. Leaders in larger rural communities (population 10,000+) and medium-sized towns (2,000-10,000) were the most interested in learning about contemporary worship and the use of multimedia.

**Biblical background was the most common request, regardless of whether or not a leader had any prior training.**

Apart from Biblical studies, 'non-accredited' leaders expressed interest in learning about preaching styles (50%), preparing prayers and liturgy (43%), contemporary worship (39%) and theology (37%). Accredited Lay Preachers were further interested in theology (51%), preaching styles (47%) and multimedia (42%).

Church Councils and Ministers were asked what they thought their Lay Preachers and non-accredited leaders most needed to learn. Their responses in order of priority were as follows:

Accredited Lay Preachers		Non-accredited lay leaders	
Church Councils	Ministers	Church Councils	Ministers
1. Multimedia & technology	1. Preaching approaches/ styles	1. Preaching approaches & styles	1. Biblical background
2. Preaching approaches & styles	2. Multimedia & technology	2. Biblical background	1. Theology
3. Preparing prayers & liturgy	3. Theology	2. Preparing prayers & liturgy	2. Preparing prayers & liturgy



**The most frequent ways that leaders learn are through reading and the Internet.** About 26% of leaders access DVDs or CDs at least monthly. 38% attend short training courses at least annually. 44% of leaders stated that Bible study groups (monthly or more frequently) were important. 31% of

leaders attend Lay Preacher gatherings (including locally), whereas about the same proportion rarely or never attend such gatherings.

# 12. Lay Preacher Associations

The formation of Synod and Presbytery Lay Preachers Associations is allowed for in the Regulations. Several synods and presbyteries have active Associations, however we were unable to obtain information from all Presbyteries.

The National Lay Preachers' Committee has twelve members, currently based in Victoria, with each Synod Lay Preachers' Association or equivalent represented. Its functions include developing policy recommendations regarding the ministry of Lay Preacher, liaising with the Ministerial Education Commission's Working Group, liaising with Synod Lay Preachers' Associations, oversight of planning for National Conferences, encouraging continuing education of Lay Preachers, and related dissemination of information.

Of the 21 presbyteries which responded to their survey, 11 indicated that they have Lay Preachers' Associations or similar bodies. While some lay leaders were clearly well aware that their Synod or Presbytery had such an association, a significant proportion are not.

**Does your Synod or Presbytery have a Lay Preachers' Association or similar group?**

	Yes	No	Not sure or no response
Lay Preachers	69%	8%	23%
Lay Preacher Candidates	57%	3%	40%
Non-accredited' lay leaders	27%	6%	67%

Those leaders who connected with such Associations or Committees were appreciative of the following:

- Newsletters and emails with ideas, resources and encouragement
- Annual seminars, dinners or retreats
- Regular 'continuing education' training workshops
- Informal sharing and encouragement from peers
- Connecting with others from a similar cultural background
- Recognition of service
- Some financial assistance for training or books

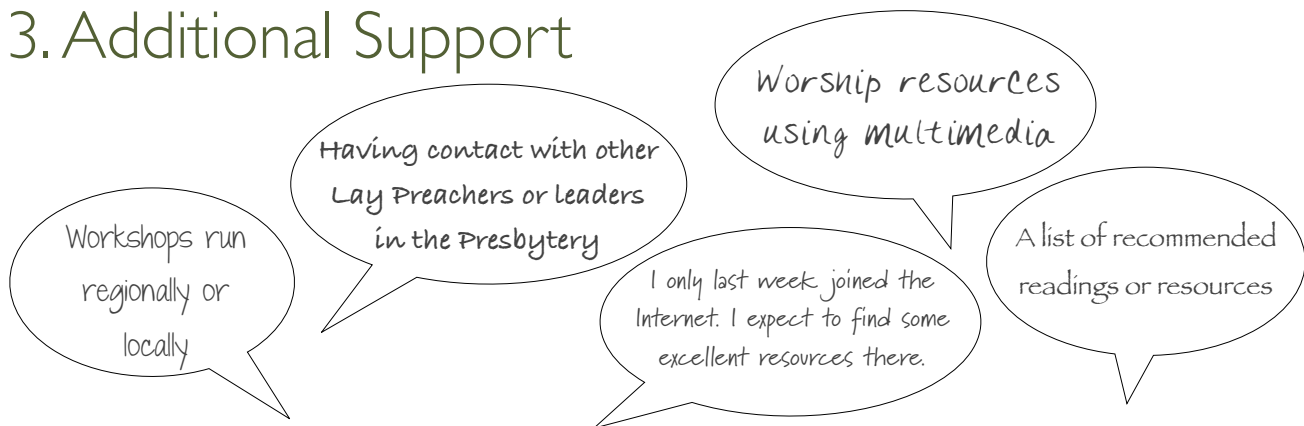
When asked why they didn't attend Lay Preacher gatherings, the most common responses from lay leaders overall were that the **location** or **timing** of such gatherings were unsuitable, particularly for rural people. However, for non-accredited leaders, the primary reason was that such gatherings were perceived to be **not relevant**.

Other reasons given included:

- Cost of travel or attendance
- The time involved, including travel
- Gatherings are only for accredited Lay Preachers (in reality, or at least perceived that way)
- Culture or attitudes of group seen as outdated
- Too busy
- Age - too elderly

**Given the importance of support for lay leaders, the availability (in terms of location and timing), openness and 'climate' of support groups and networks is a critical factor to be considered regionally.**

## 13. Additional Support



Lay leaders were quite forthcoming about the kinds of support that would enhance their ministry of worship leading and preaching. Their responses raise questions for congregations, presbyteries and synod education providers.

The following factors were the most frequently stated (not in priority order):

- Workshops or courses run regionally
- Assistance with music choices
- Multimedia resources
- Contact with other lay preachers and leaders (formal and informal)
- Training regarding technology, including multimedia and digital music
- More support and feedback from the ordained Minister
- Ways to find useful resources on the Internet
- Modelling of different approaches and styles of worship and preaching
- A resource library or financial assistance to purchase resources
- Training online or on DVD
- Mentoring
- Regular feedback and review

**The most common requests were for regional training, gatherings with other lay leaders, and relevant resources.**

## 14. Barriers to Accreditation

**What are the main reasons why some lay worship leaders and preachers choose not to become accredited Lay Preachers?**

*The time commitment involved. People lead busy lives.*

*Lack of information about the steps and available course.*

*The training content or method is too academic or difficult.*

*Fear or lack of confidence regarding both leading and learning.*

*Cost of study or attending training events (including travel).*

*Timing and location of training events.*

*Accreditation isn't necessary in order to lead locally. Institutional endorsement is seen as unnecessary 'red tape'.*

*Older people not wanting to start a course later in life.*

*Some people don't want to serve beyond their local congregation.*

*Lack of encouragement and support to take this step.*

*Non-accredited people are treated the same, so why bother?*

*Questions about the theological emphasis of the training provided.*

The most common barriers are seen to be the time involved and the formal or academic nature of the learning required. While some respondents seem to have an outdated knowledge of the training available, there is a widespread perception that the study is difficult and that many people feel inadequate or too busy to undertake it.

The challenge for the Uniting Church is to resolve the difference between people's stated desire for learning and support with an accreditation system that appears formal, daunting and time-consuming. A key issue here is not only the forms of training, but whether or not a more graduated approach to learning is possible. A further issue is whether competency-based learning and assessment, as has been developed by synods recently, provides a better framework than subject-based learning which may be seen to favour knowledge above practical skills.

While it is clear that Lay Preachers and those whom they serve see value in this ministry, and that most lay leaders wish for additional support, it is less clear whether the current Rules for accreditation and training are sufficiently helpful or flexible for the needs of the Uniting Church. Some clearly see that the standards for Lay Preachers need to be maintained or even increased, given the extent to which they increasingly serve without supervision (or, we might add, review). However others see that 'the bar is too high' and that training is too difficult and prolonged.

Given that many lay people preach and lead worship without accreditation, denominational approval is seen by some as unnecessary. Such a view places the emphasis on local acknowledgement and development of gifts, and does not necessarily devalue training.

There does appear to be a difference between the church's need to recognise certain people as equipped for wider service, and those whom a particular congregation trusts to offer local leadership. It seems clear that most people learn locally as they serve, with formal training and accreditation only seen as necessary or helpful for some.



# 15. Presbytery Responses

Twenty-one of the thirty-eight presbyteries responded to the Survey of Presbyteries.

**NSW & ACT:** Mid North Coast, New England North West, Macquarie Darling, Far North Coast, Illawarra, Canberra, The Hunter, Sydney North, Ku-ring-gai

**QLD:** Moreton Rivers, South Moreton, The Downs, Central Queensland, North Queensland

**VIC & TAS:** Yarra Yarra, Tasmania, Western Victoria, North East Victoria

**NORTHERN AUSTRALIA:** Pilgrim Presbytery

**SA** and **WA** each provided presbytery responses. It is recognised that because of the size of their presbyteries, some questions were difficult to answer accurately.

## Numbers of Lay Preachers

Respondents estimated a total of 821 accredited Lay Preachers serving in 1217 congregations.\* Three presbyteries (Macquarie Darling, New England North West and Moreton Rivers) had more accredited Lay Preachers than congregations. The Downs and South Moreton each had as many Lay Preachers as congregations. It seems highly likely that the incidence of Lay Preachers in these presbyteries reflects intentional recruitment within congregations and co-ordinated training by presbytery and synod leadership and staff. Western Australia had the lowest proportion of accredited Lay Preachers in relation to the number of congregations, with only 24 Lay Preachers and 145 congregations. [\*Some presbyteries indicated that they counted each preaching place or included faith communities in their count.]

## Age and Gender

The age profile of Lay Preachers as reported by presbyteries was similar to the survey of Lay Preachers themselves. Over 90% of the accredited Lay Preachers in The Hunter and Yarra Yarra are aged over 70 years. Only four presbyteries reported more female Lay Preachers than males (Central Qld, North Qld, The Downs and Western Victoria). Tasmania and New England North West have the highest proportion of male Lay Preachers (73% and 75% respectively).

## Cultural or Language Groups

Eleven of the presbyteries indicated that all their accredited Lay Preachers were of Anglo background. A further two presbyteries stated that their Lay Preachers were Anglo except for one or two individuals. Three had a mixture of Anglo and Tongan persons, and another four indicated a wide range of cultural backgrounds. There appears to be little correlation between age structure and cultural makeup.

## New Lay Preachers

The presbyteries indicated a total of 66 Lay Preachers were accredited within the last five years, with a further 56 currently in training. There was much variation between presbyteries in the number and proportions of new Lay Preachers and candidates. Those presbyteries with the highest 'replacement rates' - numbers of new Lay Preachers and trainees in relation to the numbers of existing Lay Preachers - were in NSW - Macquarie Darling, Sydney North, Far North Coast, QLD - Moreton Rivers, North Queensland, Central Queensland and WA. These presbyteries' recruitment and training strategies are worth investigating.

## Recruitment of Lay Preachers

Presbyteries reported that people become accredited Lay Preachers primarily from a sense of call and encouragement from a local Minister or members of the congregation. Several presbyteries indicated the

involvement of presbytery leadership or other Lay Preachers beyond the congregation in actively promoting this ministry and encouraging particular individuals to consider it. Two presbyteries indicated that the Period of Discernment had helped individuals to discern a call.

## Non-accredited lay leaders and preachers

Presbyteries differ in the proportion of non-accredited lay preachers involved regularly in worship leading and preaching. Sydney North estimated the highest ratio, noting that some congregations may have as many as twenty such people involved in non-accredited lay leadership, and estimating between 100 and 200 involved in their 28 congregations. It seems likely that the largest presbyteries would have difficulty knowing how many people lead locally.

Once again there is little consistency around how such people are trained and equipped. In some cases local ministers provide support and encouragement. Yet many presbyteries stated that worship leading and preaching by 'non-accredited' people would mostly be in congregations without a minister in placement. Some presbyteries indicated that they provided support for such lay leaders. Within some presbyteries worship leaders and preachers are encouraged to attend local training. Some send out resources to leaders by mail, while others highlight the availability of resources from other sources.

## Ongoing Training and Resourcing

Presbyteries described a range of ongoing training and resourcing provisions. These included:

- a Resource Library
- regular training days offered within the presbytery itself
- events and resources provided by Synod agencies and Lay Preachers' Association
- support provided by Presbytery staff
- theological reflection days for all lay leaders
- training or teaching events run by other networks or groups

Several presbyteries did not indicate any particular support. However it was clear from a range of responses that presbyteries rely heavily on events provided by Synod education agencies or Lay Preacher's Associations. Concerns was expressed that where such support is unavailable, or unlikely to be in the future, it will fall to presbyteries to provide this themselves.

Ten of the presbyteries indicated that they have some sort of Lay Preachers' Association, gathering or events. The Mid-North Coast NSW appears to have a well-established local lectionary-based process that resources its lay preachers and leaders well.

## Main Issues concerning Lay Preachers

Apart from concerns relating to aging of Lay Preachers, recruitment and supervision, **the primary concerns of presbyteries relate to training.** In particular, these include:

- location of training in terms of time and cost
- availability of suitable people to conduct local training
- training curriculum and approach that is progressive or incremental and not too daunting
- availability of distance and online learning or conferencing
- the need for training to help form people in UCA theology and worship approaches
- the broadening role of some Lay Preachers where there is not a resident Minister and the resultant need for recognition and training
- the need for training materials in languages other than English

## 16. Hopes for the future



### What are your hopes for the ministry of Lay Preacher?

Lay Preachers and candidates are overwhelmingly supportive of the continuation and development of the ministry of Lay Preacher. They see this ministry as being of value as an expression of the gifts of the people of God, and not simply as a “fill in” when an ordained Minister is not available. The leadership and testimony of church members is seen to bring a vital dimension to the sharing of the Gospel and the building up of others in faith. People describe their joy in being able to preach from the Scriptures, in being used by God in encouraging people and in leading inspiring and challenging worship.

Respondents commented on the scarcity of ordained Ministers, particularly in rural communities, and the growing need for trained and accredited lay leaders and preachers. Some Lay Preachers raised the question of their authorisation to celebrate the sacraments, and whether or not such permission might not be more freely given, or indeed be seen as part of their regular role.

Lay Preachers were keen that their ministry be given greater recognition in the life of the church, and that they receive greater support and encouragement.

Concern was expressed about the age of Lay Preachers and declining numbers in some areas, hence recruitment and training of younger people was deemed a priority. Many spoke of the need to keep learning themselves and to encourage others to do so as well.

Non-accredited leaders expressed a more diverse range of views regarding the future. The majority of comments were supportive of the continuation and development of the

accredited ministry of Lay Preacher and of the need to recruit and train younger people. Respondents also recognised the value of this ministry for smaller and rural congregations. A small proportion of non-accredited leaders expressed a personal desire to receive training towards accreditation.

Some spoke of more general encouragement of the gifts of lay members of the church, and were clearly less interested in whether or not there was a particular accredited role.

A small number of leaders expressed confusion about the relationship between the ministry of Lay Preacher and the ministry of Pastor.

### What would encourage more people to become accredited Lay Preachers?

Lay leaders highlighted a range of issues regarding recruitment, training and support (not ranked in order of priority):

- More and better promotion of the role
- Help for people to discern or discover their gifts
- Easier access to local training
- Distance, online and DVD training options
- Make the training requirements simpler or of shorter duration
- Greater encouragement from Ministers for lay participation
- Gradual gaining of experience and confidence
- Participation in worship planning teams
- Availability of local mentors
- Training in styles and approaches to worship relevant for today
- Better financial assistance for training costs and purchasing resources
- Financial assistance for travel when people lead or preach

Some respondents indicated that it starts with the call of God, which raises questions of how people are helped to discern God’s call, and of the role of other people in this process. A number of leaders emphasised that since call is God’s initiative, we as a church should be praying about this need at this time.

There was also a sense in many comments that when the Body of Christ is vibrant, the Spirit is at work in the midst of it - calling, encouraging, gifting, equipping, and building up. In other words, this is not simply a promotional issue or a training curriculum issue, but at its heart an issue about the spiritual vitality of congregations.

## 17. Cultural Issues

As noted previously, the surveys were unsuccessful in gaining responses from people whose first language is other than English, or whose culture would prefer oral conversation rather than printed questions.

Since the number of such respondents was small, comments relating to cultural and language issues were not surprisingly in the minority. Because of this, it seems important that such issues receive particular mention as they require further investigation in more appropriate ways. Additional information on these issues was acquired verbally from synods’ lay education staff.

### Role

Synods’ staff reported that the ministry of Lay Preacher has a significant status particularly among Pacific cultures. The nature of this requires investigating in terms of whether the scope of responsibilities differs and how the ministry is valued within congregations.

### Training

In New South Wales and Queensland, growing numbers of Lay Preacher candidates from Pacific cultures are being trained. This is notable in terms of participation, training delivery and training curriculum. There are implications for the future development of training programs.

### Support

An ordained Minister reported that he was assisting two candidates from two different cultures to work through the study materials, as English was not the first language of either person. This kind of mentoring most likely occurs in other places as well, and it will remain a necessity while English is the sole or dominant language for training. Presbyteries or Church Councils will need to give consideration as to who might assist people in their studies where language and culture are not adequately addressed.

A few respondents also indicated a desire to meet with other leaders from their language or cultural group for mutual support.

### Resources

Leaders indicated a desire for more worship resources in their first language,



# 18. Considering the future

Lay leaders, ordained Ministers and Church Councils were asked to respond to statements about lay worship leaders and preachers. Some of their responses have been reported previously in this document. These are the responses to the remaining statements. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they **Strongly Agree** or **Agree**, **Strongly Disagree** or **Disagree**, or are **Neutral** about the statement.

## Agree or Strongly Agree

Lay leaders, ordained Ministers and Church Councils were most likely to **agree** or **strongly agree** with the following statements:

### ***The specified ministry of Lay Preacher is vital for the Uniting Church at this time.***

*Strongly Agree or Agree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 98.7%, Non-accredited lay leaders 83.7%, Ministers 68.1%, Church Councils 83.6%.

### ***The specified ministry of Lay Preacher is vital for the life of small/isolated/rural congregations at this time.***

*Strongly Agree or Agree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 98.3%, Non-accredited lay leaders 83.7%, Ministers 85.1%, Church Councils 87.8%.

### ***The Uniting Church should consider some form of local accreditation for lay worship leaders and preachers.***

*Strongly Agree or Agree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 62.5%, Non-accredited lay leaders 65.8%, Ministers 58.1%, Church Councils 51.1% 26.1% of Church Councils were *Neutral*.

### ***Church Councils should have a stronger role in overseeing and evaluating the ministry of the Lay Preachers who serve them.***

*Strongly Agree or Agree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 59.3%, Non-accredited lay leaders 58.9%, Ministers 67.0%, Church Councils 35.2%. 37.4% of Church Councils were *Neutral*, while 21.9% said *Disagree* or *Strongly Disagree*.

### ***Training in worship leading and preaching should be available to all suitably gifted and called persons regardless of whether they seek accreditation.***

*Strongly Agree or Agree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 92.6%, Non-accredited lay leaders 96.5%, Ministers 95.7%, Church Councils 90.6%.

## Disagree or Strongly Disagree

Lay leaders, ordained Ministers and Church Councils were most likely to either **disagree** or **strongly disagree** with the following statements:

### ***The Uniting Church should do away with the accreditation of Lay Preachers.***

*Strongly Disagree or Disagree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 94.8%, Non-accredited lay leaders 54.7%, Ministers 78.5%, Church Councils 75.1%. 25.6% of non-accredited leaders were *Neutral* about this statement.

### ***The Uniting Church should require all lay worship leaders and preachers who lead regularly to become accredited Lay Preachers.***

*Strongly Disagree or Disagree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 49.6%, Non-accredited lay leaders 64.1%, Ministers 53.2%, Church Councils 67.0%. 17.2% of Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates were *Neutral* about this statement and 31.8% said *Agree* or *Strongly Agree*.

## Opinions Vary

Respondents were likely to **agree** or be **neutral** about the following:

### ***The specified ministry of Lay Preacher needs significant reform.***

*Strongly Agree or Agree:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 38.8%, Non-accredited lay leaders 41.0%, Ministers 51.1%, Church Councils 25.7% *Neutral:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 37.0%, Non-accredited lay leaders 35.9%, Ministers 34.8%, Church Councils 43.0%

Lay Leaders, Ministers and Church Councils gave a **range of responses** to the following statements. Note that the tables exclude those who responded *Don't Know*.

### ***The current training and assessment of Lay Preacher candidates requires review.***

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Lay Preachers & Candidates	48.7%	32.8%	10.3%
Non-accredited lay leaders	40.2%	35.9%	2.6%
Ministers	49.5%	31.2%	2.2%
Church Councils	24.1%	42.9%	6.0%

*Don't Know:* Accredited Lay Preachers & Candidates 9.0%, Non-accredited lay leaders 19.6%, Ministers 17.2%, Church Councils 26.9%.

### ***Congregations should encourage all lay worship leaders and preachers who lead regularly to become accredited Lay Preachers.***

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Lay Preachers & Candidates	81.5%	7.8%	10.7%
Non-accredited lay leaders	44.7%	21.9%	33.3%
Ministers	45.6%	16.3%	38.0%
Church Councils	37.1%	25.8%	32.6%

### ***Lay Preachers should only be licensed for a limited period, and then be subject to review.***

	Agree or Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree or Strongly Disagree
Lay Preachers & Candidates	34.2%	25.4%	37.7%
Non-accredited lay leaders	32.5%	25.6%	35.9%
Ministers	43.6%	27.7%	22.3%
Church Councils	26.5%	30.4%	36.4%

# 19. Summary of key findings

Thank you for reading this far! There's a lot in this report. We invite you to reflect on these questions, based on what you've read:

**What positives do you see in the report?**

**What surprises you in the report?**

**What concerns you in the report?**

**What connects with your local situation?**

**What questions does the report raise for you?**

We invite you to note down your responses and discuss them with others who are interested in this Review.

## 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.

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 the vital leadership and service to which ordained Ministers are called, the particular role and contribution of those accredited as Lay Preachers, and the regular, faithful service of many other church members in leading and assisting with worship in a range of ways. Clearly, 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.

We suggest that these three forms of ministry, so to speak, are not only important, but are in fact 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.

Following are our main conclusions from the research undertaken.

### 1. 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.

### 2. If the UCA is to continue the ministry of Lay Preacher, it 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 a specified ministry, it needs to encourage its development and support those who serve.

### 3. 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 significant reform. To affirm this ministry is not necessarily to continue it in its present state. There was significant support for licensing Lay Preachers for a limited period, and also for introducing another form of local commissioning for lay worship leaders.

### 4. 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 needs to be sought more intentionally.

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

The surveys highlighted both 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.

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

There are issues here about leaders' ability to travel distances, their willingness to undergo formal training, their need for financial assistance, and their need to feel valued for their faithful service.

### 7. 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 in their local congregation.

**8. A significant proportion of church members who preach or lead regularly have 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.

**9. 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 in accordance with the leader's gifts. However such duties are also related to the lack of availability of an ordained minister. Expectations, recognition, competency and training are all issues here.

**10. 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 are essential. Recruiting people to seek accreditation also requires local encouragement and support. Ordained Ministers can play an important role here.

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

This information in the report on page 8 requires further investigation.

**12. 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 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.

**13. 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, most probably without sufficient supervision.

**14. 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 clearly less complimentary than Church Councils. This does not seem surprising given their training and leadership role in the church.

**15. 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.

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

Leaders are keen to learn more about Biblical background, preaching styles, theology, contemporary and 'alternative' worship. A key issue is the location and cost of continuing education.

**17. 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. Overall, review by councils of the church seems critical.

**18. 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.

**19. 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.

**20. 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.

**21. 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.



# 20. Responses to the Discussion Paper

Responses to this Discussion Paper are sought from Councils of the church, relevant agencies and committees, and individuals by Monday 21 May, 2012. Based on the responses, the Working Group will prepare a final report with recommendations for the Ministerial Education Commission (MEC). The MEC will make its own response to these recommendations, and subsequently report to the Assembly Standing Committee (ASC) regarding any matters beyond the scope of the MEC's responsibilities. A copy of the final report, along with any resolutions of the MEC and ASC, will be made available electronically on the Assembly website.

Respondents are asked to indicate their 'preferred future' regarding the ministry of Lay Preacher and related matters as described below. There are three possible options (futures), plus a fourth option if respondents wish to describe another way forward. There is opportunity to make comments on additional matters as well.

**Respondents are strongly encouraged, if at all possible, to make their submission online. This saves an enormous amount of time and money in compiling responses.**

**ONLINE RESPONSES:** [www.surveymonkey.com/s/LPReview](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/LPReview)

**IMPORTANT:** Do not paste the above link into a search engine such as Google. You need to type it directly into your WWW browser's address space at the top of the browser window. Email enquiries to [mec@unitingcollege.org.au](mailto:mec@unitingcollege.org.au)

Those who wish to respond on paper, please complete the questions below and mail to  
Lay Preacher Review,  
c/- Uniting College,  
34 Lipsett Tce., Brooklyn Park SA 5032.

## I. Respondent Details (required)

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of respondent (please circle one):

a. Individual response      Accredited Lay Preacher      Ordained Minister      Lay Preacher Candidate      Church member  
Lay church worker (employed)      Pastor / Lay Pastor / Community minister  
Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

b. Council or Committee Response: (please indicate on whose behalf you are responding)

Church Council / Congregation: \_\_\_\_\_ Presbytery: \_\_\_\_\_

Synod: \_\_\_\_\_ Lay Preachers' Association or Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

c. Agency, Network or other body      Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

d. Other respondent      Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** These contact details are collected in accordance with privacy policy of the Uniting Church in Australia, National Assembly.

## 2. Respondent Details (optional)

Gender (circle one)      Female      Male

Age (circle one)      15-19 yrs      20-29 yrs      30-39 yrs      40-49 yrs      50-59 yrs      60-69 yrs      70+ yrs

What is the main language that you speak at home? (eg. English, Korean, Tongan, etc) \_\_\_\_\_

What culture, race and/or language groups do you belong to? \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Options for the ministry of Lay Preacher

Please indicate your preferred overall option from the three below or describe a fourth option if none of the four closely reflect what you wish to recommend. You are welcome to append additional comments if you wish.

- 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: (please describe) \_\_\_\_\_

### 4. The recruitment, training, recognition, support and oversight of lay leaders

The following are not formal or final proposals, but rather a means by which we can gauge responses from the church to some possible ways forward. In the statements below, the term "*Lay leaders*" refers to all lay worship leaders and preachers, both accredited and non-accredited. Please indicate your response to the following statements by writing one of the following after each statement. Please append additional comments if you wish, numbered to correspond to the statements.

SA = Strongly Agree    A=Agree    N=Neutral    D=Disagree    SD=Strongly Disagree    NS=Not Sure	RESPONSE
1. <i>The councils of the church need to provide greater recognition of the ministry of Lay Preacher.</i>	_____
2. <i>The councils of the church need to undertake greater promotion of the ministry of Lay Preacher</i>	_____
3. <i>Ordained ministers need to be better resourced for mentoring and training local lay worship leaders and preachers.</i>	_____
4. <i>'Non-accredited' lay worship leaders and preachers need some form of local recognition or commissioning within their congregation.</i>	_____
5. <i>Accredited Lay Preachers need to receive feedback from their church council/s at least annually.</i>	_____
6. <i>Accredited Lay Preachers need to receive a formal review from their presbytery at least every five years.</i>	_____
7. <i>Church councils and presbyteries would benefit from having the Assembly provide tools to assist them in undertaking reviews of Lay Preachers.</i>	_____
8. <i>Lay leaders in small, rural and isolated churches need to receive stronger encouragement, support and oversight from presbyteries.</i>	_____
9. <i>Lay leaders need to be provided with more flexible, gradual pathways towards Lay Preacher accreditation.</i>	_____
10. <i>Lay leaders need training that recognises and builds upon their competencies, rather than requiring a fixed study program.</i>	_____
11. <i>The Uniting Church needs to maintain the current educational standards for the ministry of Lay Preacher.</i>	_____
12. <i>Lay leaders need simpler training courses that may lead towards further learning for accreditation.</i>	_____
13. <i>The training for lay worship leaders and preachers needs greater emphasis on contemporary worship and preaching styles.</i>	_____
14. <i>Presbyteries and synod education agencies need to collaborate more closely in order to provide more regional training opportunities.</i>	_____
15. <i>The Assembly should collaborate with synod education agencies towards the provision of online learning and resources for lay worship leaders and preachers.</i>	_____
16. <i>Synods should review the levels of financial assistance provided to lay worship leaders and preachers for training, travel and resources.</i>	_____
17. <i>Presbyteries should organise more regional or local gatherings for mutual encouragement and mentoring of lay worship leaders and preachers.</i>	_____
18. <i>The Assembly needs to undertake further research to identify what kinds of leadership development and recognition are helpful for young people.</i>	_____
19. <i>Accredited Lay Preachers need Church Councils and presbyteries to provide clearer expectations and support in relation to any additional duties expected of them.</i>	_____
20. <i>The Uniting Church should authorise all Lay Preachers to preside at the Sacraments.</i>	_____