

Healthy Sustainable Ministry

Background

An outcome of the 37th meeting of the Qld Synod was that work needed to be undertaken to further the conversation regarding healthy sustainable ministry. The progression of this work had not been specifically assigned to any group within the presbytery or synod office space. Therefore, by mid-2024 the need to advance this work was pressing in order to inform the 38th Synod in Session regarding what the approach to healthy sustainable ministry could be across all presbyteries within the Qld Synod. As such, the presbytery ministers agreed to assume responsibility for this work to develop a draft approach for consideration by the Placements Committee, Presbytery Synod Interface (PSI), Presbytery Members and Committees.

The presbytery ministers have developed the following draft paper which has two distinct focal points:

1. An outline of what areas of ministry are, and are not, covered in an approach to Healthy Sustainable Ministry. This outline has sought to provide high level differentiation between the various areas relevant to the conversation regarding healthy sustainable ministry.
2. A set of qualities that give definition to what the focus of healthy sustainable ministry is. These qualities are aimed at being integrated into all relevant ministry areas, including the formation of people for ordination, ministry of pastor and lay preacher.

Understanding specified lay and ordained ministry in the UCA

Ordained Ministry

Throughout scripture and the tradition of the church God has called women and men to provide specific leadership in the ongoing ministry of Christ within the world. In the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) this leadership occurs through lay and ordained ministries. The UCA's ordained ministries of Deacon and Minister of the Word are shaped by specific functions and relationships. Furthermore, ordination, as a specific ministry within the whole body of Christ, is formative for the identity of those serving God in this way.

Healthy, sustainable ministry practices within the UCA require a broad understanding of the identity, function and relationships particular to ordained ministry. This understanding creates a space into which the qualities of healthy sustainable ministry are integrated.

Identity

The identity of a minister is important to explore before considering what a minister does and how they relate with the church and wider community. Who a minister is speaks to ontological considerations or questions of being. Does ordination change the identity of a person and their sense of self?

The identity of a minister emerges from being a new creation, reconciled to God through the work of Jesus Christ. As a new creation they are incorporated into the church through baptism. The UCA holds to the truth that within its life “every member of Christ is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant.”¹ In this way the identity of a minister doesn’t change as its grounded in being a follower of Jesus. Christ continues to minister within the world. It is through the Holy Spirit that God gifts the church to participate in Christ’s ongoing ministry of reconciliation through worship, witness and service. The missional imperative of this ministry is that “in Jesus Christ ‘God was reconciling the world to himself’ (2 Cor. 5:19 RSV). The work of Jesus to reconcile people to God, renewing and redeeming relationship between creator and creation, involves men and women being set apart vocationally, for life as servants of this ministry of reconciliation.

A minister leads within and through the church as a servant of Christ and a leader of God’s people. To this end, the predominant identity of a minister is that of a servant leader. This is where the change in identity emerges. It is important to note that when the identity as a servant leader is diminished, perhaps because of the detrimental impact of the functional and relational demands of ordained ministry, a minister can trade their identity as a servant leader for being an enslaved facilitator of the church’s programs or self-serving sole contractor needing employment. Neither of these positions generate healthy, sustainable ministry practices. The health and fruitfulness of ordained ministry stems from holding fast to the truth of being both a leader and a servant of Christ. The identity of being a servant leader is the returning point for all ordained ministers when questions arise as to who they are in ministry.

Central to being a servant leader is the setting apart by the church of Deacons and Ministers of the Word as ministers of the gospel. They are transformed by it and share in the ongoing ministry of Christ to accomplish reconciliation, renewal and redemption between the whole of creation and God. Therefore, a minister’s identity is inextricably shaped by the narrative of God’s good news in Jesus Christ. Competing narratives will emerge to challenge a minister’s identity. People from within and beyond the church will provide their opinions about who they think the minister is,

¹ UCA Basis of Union Paragraph 13

often based on what the minister does. Healthy ministry requires a narrative about who the minister is that is grounded in the gospel. This liberates ministers from falling prey to the expectations of others, perfectionism or workaholism. Unhealthy narratives twist identity and bend the functions and relationships within ordained ministry into damaging placements. To this end, ministers need to continually engage in the sources that inform the gospel narrative, especially a deep engagement with scripture and the sacraments. These are the reference points for the narrative which grounds and protects the identity of a minister as servant leader. Furthermore, it is the gospel narrative that shapes the truth with which the minister leads others. One way of understanding this can be considered as follows:

Baptism is the sign of our universal ordination, for this act signifies our new birth by the Spirit, our new identity as disciples of Jesus, and our new relationship to one another as participants in the one fellowship of Christ. Ordination to pastoral ministry, therefore, is embedded in the Spirit's universal calling of all to the ministry of the church. (Stanley Grenz *Theology for the Community of God* 2000)

The identity of a minister as a servant leader, grounded in the gospel narrative is formed and refined by sacrifice. Ordained ministry is sacrificial in that those set apart within the church by ordination are foregoing vocations, careers, status and other opportunities for the sake of being lifelong servants of Christ's ongoing ministry in the world. Healthy ministry involves the uncomfortableness of sacrifice, giving up everything that might limit opportunities for ministers to serve Christ wherever they might be sent. It is the sacrificial heart, inherent in being a follower of Jesus, that compels a minister to declare that my life is not my own but Christ's.

It is the servant posture that informs the functional and relational dynamics of ordained ministry. Effectively, ordained ministry is at its best when the identity and self-understanding of a minister shapes ministry practice through the relational dynamic of being Christ's servant within the church and the world.

Function

The Basis of Union points to ordination being undertaken "personally on behalf of the Church" (*Basis of Union*, para. 16). Functionally, ordination is considered a representative ministry through a covenant relationship between God, the minister and the church. This can be understood as follows:

"Ministers exercise their responsibility to Christ and the Church by representing Christ to the people and the people to Christ. This representative ministry incorporates a range of particular functions including focusing, modelling, supervising, shepherding, enabling and empowering the general ministry of the Church" (UCA Assembly *Doc.Bytes Worksheet 5: Ordination*).

The functions of this representative ministry are outlined in the UCA regulations. The regulations specify that a minister is to undertake the following duties:

DUTIES OF A MINISTER (See Para 3, Constitution)

2.2.1 (a) Within the ministry of the whole Church, Jesus Christ calls men and women to proclamation of the gospel in word and deed through the ministry of the Word and the ministry of Deacon. This calling is exercised by:

- (i) preaching of the Word;
- (ii) presiding at the celebration of the sacraments;
- (iii) providing for other persons to preside at worship and/or preach within the pastoral charge in which the Minister is in placement;
- (iv) witnessing in the community to the gospel of Jesus Christ;
- (v) guiding and instructing the members of the Church and equipping them for their ministry in the community;
- (vi) nurturing candidates for baptism and confirmation;
- (vii) pastoral oversight and counsel wherever needed;
- (viii) serving in the community, especially among those who are hurt, dis-advantaged, oppressed or marginalized;
- (ix) careful attention to administrative responsibilities;
- (x) due observance of the discipline of the Church;
- (xi) the enhancement of the Minister's own gifts for the work of ministry;
- (xii) pioneering new expressions of the gospel and encouraging effective ways of fulfilling the mission of the Church.

(b) Every Minister shall participate fully and regularly in the public worship of God and the mission and fellowship of the Congregation with which the Minister is enrolled (See Reg. 2.9.3).

(c) Every Minister shall report annually to the Presbytery with which the Minister is enrolled on the ways in which the duties of a Minister as prescribed in Regulations 2.2.1(a) and (b) are being exercised

These responsibilities are expressed in a wide range of ways within various ministry contexts across the whole life of the church. The duties of a minister form the criteria for establishing a ministry placement within the UCA. They are also pivotal for shaping the Assembly Formation Standards for Ordained Ministry Candidates, the Ordination Charge (see an example at appendix 1) and the UCA Code of Ethics.

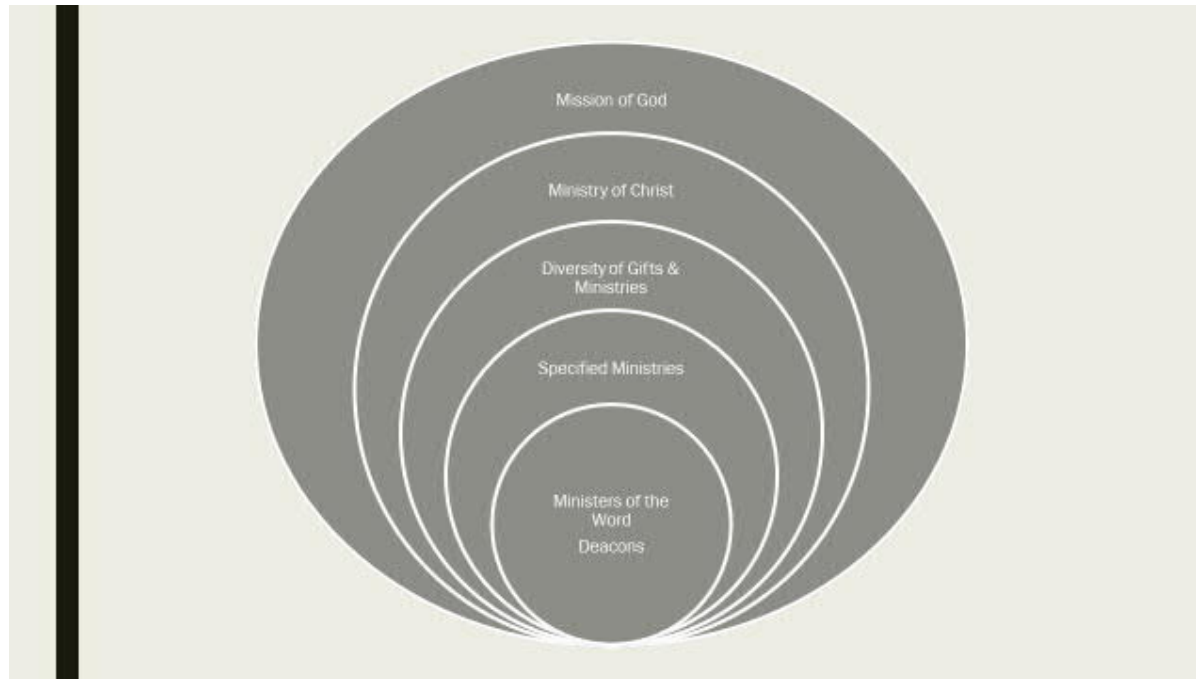
The functional responsibilities of ordained ministry share similarities with the Ministry of Pastor. In certain contexts, a non-ordained person can undertake a ministry placement, fulfilling the duties of a minister. Therefore, the fundamental point of differentiation between a Pastor and Minister occurs within the Ministers identity and relationships rather than the functional aspects of ministry.

Relationships

The character of any leader is of greater importance than their competencies. The character of a Minister as a servant leader, within the ministry of Christ, embodies a way of being that seeks what is best for God's reign in the world. Healthy, fruitful ministers will live in the power of the Holy Spirit. This forms and shapes their character, bearing within their relationships qualities such as those "fruits of the spirit" outlined in Galatians 5:22-23. Therefore, the work of the Holy Spirit in bearing fruit within the character of a minister shapes the nature and sustainability of the pastoral relationships they enter into.

The love of God, revealed in Christ and generated through the Holy Spirit within the Christian life is the most fundamental quality within every relationship shared by the minister as a servant leader. The worship, witness and service of the Minister lovingly flows along a range of relational lines. Firstly, Ordination brings about a change in the relationship between the Minister and Jesus Christ. As a disciple, a follower apprenticed to Jesus Christ, there is a particularity to the calling and responsibilities that God places upon a Minister. This places paramount importance on the Minister following the way of Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, in their relationship with God. In this way ordination "recognises the special form which the ordained person's discipleship to Jesus Christ will henceforth take. In the laying on of hands by representative members of the church, the Holy Spirit's strengthening is powerfully symbolised and effected, both in the moment of ordination and in the exercise of ministry to which it points forward." (UCA Assembly *Affirmations on Ordination* 1997)

Secondly, Ordination impacts the relational dynamic between the minister and the Church. The diagram below reflects the understanding that ordained ministry emerges out of the body of Christ. The body of Christ, gifted and empowered to serve does so in the power of the Holy Spirit so that God's people can share in the ongoing ministry of Christ to reconcile the world to God, which is God's mission.



Andrew F Dutney <https://andrewfdutney.com/2017/08/23/ordination-in-the-uniting-church-in-australia/> Accessed on 5th February 2019

The nature of the relationship between the minister and church shapes their identity and is expressed through the various functions that they undertake. This is outlined as follows:

The question is often raised whether ordination is about function or a change of the person in themselves. It is a matter of a new relationship in the body of Christ. This new relationship recognised and established by ordination is normally for life, and the Uniting Church maintains that it is with the whole Church catholic [universal], not just within the Uniting Church. With this new relationship come particular responsibilities. “These will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church” (Basis of Union, para.14(a)). Ordained ministers have a

particular role in the formation of individual Christians and for the body of Christ as a whole. God gifts ordained leaders to the church. (UCA Assembly Doc.Bytes Worksheet 5: Ordination)

Thirdly, the Minister fulfills a representative relationship in the wider community. Therefore, “as heralds and ambassadors, ordained ministers are representatives of Jesus Christ to the community and proclaim his message of reconciliation” (WCC *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* 1982).

Finally, the relationship between the Minister and their family is vital for healthy, sustainable ministry. A minister is set apart as a servant of Christ, called to sacrificially follow God sending them to various contexts but not at the expense of marriages, parent/child relationships and other familial relationships. Therefore, the placement of ministers needs to ensure that the expression of God’s love in and through the church is experienced by the minister and those within their family.

Differentiation of Ministries within the UCA

The ministries of all followers of Jesus are essential to the life of the church. The differences between lay and ordained ministries can be considered in terms of identity, function and relationships.

Identity

The ordination of a minister in good standing within the UCA is recognised throughout the whole of their life, even into retirement. The designation of a person as a pastor within the UCA is only relevant while they are undertaking ministry within either a placement or ministry location. Once the placement or ministry location concludes the UCA no longer designates them as a pastor. The identity of a lay preacher is not specific to one local ministry context and can be a designation given until such time as the person stops exercising this ministry. The designation of lay preacher identifies that the person is permitted to preach and lead worship but not extend their ministerial duties beyond these areas of proclaiming the gospel and bearing witness to the Christian faith.

In all these ministries there are different opportunities to provide leadership within a ministry context. The expectation of ordained ministers is that they will exercise leadership within their local context and within the wider life of the church throughout the whole of their active service in ministry. Pastors can provide leadership to specific groups of people within a ministry context or to all within the pastoral charge. They are not expected to provide leadership across the wider life of the church in the same way as ministers. Furthermore, the leadership of pastors ceases in this specified ministry when their role concludes. The lay preacher leads, primarily through the preaching of the word and the conducting of a worship service.

Function

The functions of ministry are distinct for each specified ministry. In certain circumstances the ministry functions of a pastor may look similar to that of an ordained minister. This is especially the case when a pastor is exercising ministry within a placement.

A minister or a lay person can apply for and be called to a ministry placement, although preference is usually given to an ordained person. Whereas only a lay person can apply for and undertake a role in a ministry location. A ministry location is typically designated as such because it does not require a person to undertake all the duties of a minister. A placement is created on the basis that it does require a person to undertake the various duties of a minister. A healthy approach to a lay person fulfilling the duties of a minister is to give due consideration as to how they might be encouraged and empowered to move through ordained ministry formation if fruitful ministry is emerging. This changes the conversation from simply being concerned with the functions of ministry to a longer term call to ordained ministry within the church.

Relationships

All people in ministry respond to Christ's loving invitation to share in relationship with God. A vibrant, deep and genuine relationship with God is essential for all ministry practitioners.

The points of differentiation are evident within the ministry practitioner's relationship with the church. A minister has a covenantal relationship with the church which, through ordination, involves a lifelong vocational commitment to lead within various placements and to serve within the wider life of the UCA. In turn the church also has a commitment to the minister in terms of supporting the ministry that they undertake. There are times when a minister's ordination might be recognised by another denomination in order for them to undertake ministry within that context. Alternatively, the reception of ministers allows for those ordained outside the Uniting Church to be received as ministers into the denomination.

A pastor typically has a relationship with people in the ministry context they are commissioned into. This is only for the time of their ministry after which their relationship with the local and wider church as a pastor ceases.

A lay preacher can have a long relationship within one congregation or amongst a number to which they are regularly invited to preach and lead worship. Typically, there are limitations on which congregations a lay preacher will be required to serve in, usually because a minister or pastor is already undertaking ministry there.

Therefore, there are similarities and differences across the various ordained and lay specified ministries. Understanding this is essential in building healthy sustainable ministry practices into each of these ministry areas.

Qualities of Healthy Sustainable Ministry

There are certain qualities that underpin a culture of healthy sustainable ministry. These qualities relate to ministers, pastors and lay preachers.

Some of the qualities for the approach to healthy sustainable ministry have been adapted from work done by NCLS in this area². The list of qualities below also include two additions, namely “Professionalism” and “Peacemaking”:

Quality
<p>Spiritual Foundations: A relationship with God expressed in following the way of Jesus is the basis for discipleship. This spiritual foundation shape’s identity, purpose and the fullness of life in Christ. A commitment to personal and gathered spiritual practices is vital for nurturing discipleship</p>
<p>Clarity of Purpose The reason why a person is called into ministry is grounded in being a follower of Jesus, as such specified ministry is an expression of discipleship. This provides a fundamental clarity of purpose which complements the reason why a person engages in a particular ministry placement. Knowing, understanding and embracing these purposes are an essential reference point for sustainable ministry practice.</p>
<p>Sense of Self Knowing who a person is in Christ provides the necessary basis for sustaining identity as a disciple and then as a ministry practitioner. A deep sense of self is not primarily gained from the authority and status inherent in ministry positions or pastoral relationships. Healthy ministry practitioners do not find their worth in the affirmation of others but rather through the grace and love infusing their relationship with God.</p>

² NCLS “Ministry Resilience Foundations” <https://www.ncls.org.au/articles/ministry-resilience-foundations> accessed June 21st 2024

<p>Integration Genuine, healthy ministry practice requires the integration of spiritual giftings, skills, and experiences with corresponding opportunities to serve within the life of the Church. The capacity of a ministry practitioner needs to be engaged and expanded through the expression of their character and competencies in life giving ministry placements.</p>
<p>Supportive Relationships The love, support and encouragement of trusted family members, friends and peers reduces the isolation and potential for burnout in ministry practitioners. Healthy ministry practitioners can readily identify specific people that provide these supportive relationships. Furthermore, sustainable ministry involves practitioners providing peer support to colleagues.</p>
<p>Balance and Boundaries The peace of God provides wholeness to the life of disciples who engage in ministry practice. Balance and boundaries are concerned with maintaining a sense of God’s peace and the gift of living a whole life. This provides perspective to the reality that the tasks and relationships of ministry are not the total sum of life. Engaging in sabbath rest, holidays and re-creational pursuits with others or alone is essential to living in the peace of God. This safeguards against a permanent state of chaos in which the demands of ministry and serving others can fragment life.</p>
<p>Professionalism Ministry is essentially serving God by sharing in the ongoing ministry of Christ. Doing everything unto the Lord compels ministry practitioners to work to the best of their abilities within their specific context. The ministry settings within the Uniting Church require best practice approaches to work ensuring that people conduct themselves with respectful consideration of others, conscientiousness and courtesy, integrity and accountability, fulfilling all tasks with excellence. The humility of ministry practitioners generates vulnerability and allows for taking responsibility when character or competency failures emerge.</p>
<p>Peacemaking The peace of God embodies wholeness. Ministry has the potential to work against wholeness through contributing to personal brokenness, fracturing of relationships, isolation and loneliness and a splintering of hope for the future of the Church. The ministry of Christ is to bring peace, through reconciliation and restoration of people in their relationship with God and others. An important part of peacemaking is working through events and circumstances that have caused past hurts, brokenness and loss. Healthy ministry embraces the need for peacemaking; for allowing Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit to move and bear the fruit of wholeness in the life of a ministry practitioner.</p>

The healthy sustainable ministry qualities are/will be integrated into a range of regulated areas for ministry placements and ministry location positions. Examples of this integration include in areas such as:

- Professional Supervision
- Annual Reporting
- Leadership Formation Pathways

Appendix 1

Ordination Charge

The ordination charge is as follows:

in the name of Jesus Christ, the only Head of the Church, we are here to ordain you as a minister of the Word by prayer and the laying on of hands. As a minister of the Word:

1. you are called to receive the witness to Christ in the holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and to proclaim from them the gospel of Jesus Christ in word and deed.
2. You are entrusted to preside at the sacraments of baptism and the eucharist, instituted by our Lord as signs and seals of the gospel and his gift to the Church; you will celebrate these sacraments with the people of God.
3. Taking Christ the Good Shepherd as your example, you are called to lead God's people in worship, witness and service; to equip them for their ministry and mission; and to work with them in building up the body of Christ.
4. You are called to strive for peace and unity among all Christian people, especially among those with whom you serve.
5. You will receive the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds as safeguarding and witnessing to the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic Church, and use them in worship and instruction.
6. Learning from the Confessional Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia, you will diligently teach Christ's people, reminding them of the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ and the grace which justifies them through faith.
7. You will announce the good news of God in Christ to those beyond the community of faith, stand alongside those who suffer, and work for justice and peace in the world.

8. You will affirm and commit yourself to the covenant made between the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress and the Uniting Church and accept the obligation to serve both First and Second peoples.
9. Relying on the power of the Holy Spirit, you will be diligent in the study of the Bible, you will seek to live a holy and disciplined life and be faithful in prayer.