

REPORT ON

**Ministry
in the
Uniting Church
in Australia**



Report of the Task Group on Ministry of the Church
to the
Sixth Assembly, Uniting Church in Australia
1991

From the General Secretary

This document is one of the most important ever produced by the Uniting Church in Australia.

It is the official report of the Task Group on the Ministry of the Church to the Sixth Assembly, the national triennial council of the Uniting Church which meets in Brisbane, 14 - 20 July 1991.

Decisions on each of the recommendations, most of which have far-reaching significance for the shape of ministry in and by the Uniting Church, will be made by the 1991 Assembly.

This report is a substantial revision of the draft "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*", issued in October 1990. In the months until February 1991 around 500 written comments were received on the draft report from church councils and members. The report has been revised in light of those comments.

It is precisely because of its importance that the Assembly Standing Committee wishes to make the report widely available before the Assembly. The intention is that presbyteries, and any other interested church councils or church members, have some opportunity, albeit limited by the practicalities of time and distance, to consider the report and make comment to members of the Assembly. Each presbytery has appointed two representatives to the Assembly and there are other representatives appointed by synods and Assembly bodies. It is hoped these Assembly members will be able to take part in many discussions on the report prior to 14 July 1991.

As the church discusses this report and its recommendations I need to make one point very clear. **No presbytery, synod or Assembly body has any right to instruct its representatives how they are to vote on any recommendation.** According to our understanding of the action of the Holy Spirit, Assembly members must be free to listen to the debate at the Assembly and vote according to their consciences. Assembly members are therefore obliged to listen very seriously to the comments of the church prior to the Assembly, but are not to come to the Assembly "under instruction" nor with closed minds, for there must always be an openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, right to the point of decision when the vote is taken.

Whatever the outcome of the Assembly's deliberations, the Uniting Church owes a big debt of gratitude to the members of the Task Group, especially to their convenor, the tireless Shirley Maddox.

Further copies of this report are available from the Assembly and synod offices at a cost of \$5.00 each.

I commend the report to all in the Uniting Church in Australia.

Gregor Henderson
General Secretary
30 April 1991

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Introduction...

Establishment of the Task Group

At the Fifth Assembly of the Uniting Church in 1988, as part of the Assembly's response to the report of the Standing Committee on the Diaconate, the following resolution was passed (88.27.5):

To direct the Standing Committee to arrange for a study of the changing patterns of ministry and what is and will be required to equip the whole people of God for their ministry and mission in a changing world, in the light of the gospel, taking account of -

- the work in progress in some synods,
- the possibility of ordination to the Ministry of the Word with diverse commissionings,
- the role of the local congregation in mission,
- the Commission on Doctrine's study on ordination, and
- the Commission for Mission's study on non-stipendiary ministries

and in the light of that study to bring a proposal on the diaconate to the 1991 Assembly. (88.27.5).

The Task Group on the Ministry of the Church was established by resolution of the Standing Committee (minute 88.63.v) to:

- a. establish a research study on changing patterns of ministry, including the ordained ministry, from the basis of the one ministry of Christ;
- b. study past Assembly reports and decisions;
- c. consult widely with groups involved in aspects of ministry, including: deaconesses, non-stipendiary ministers, youth workers, lay missionaries, lay preachers, lay pastors, frontier ministries, theologians, ministers of the Word, lay administrators, partners in mission;
- d. investigate ecumenical, international and Third World forms of ministry, including diaconal and non-stipendiary ministry;
- e. investigate distinctive patterns of ministry in Australia;
- f. envision elements in the emerging shape of ministry for the church in the next ten years;

Non-stipendiary ministry

- g. take into consideration in the study the Third Report on Non-stipendiary Ministries prepared by the Rev Dr John Brown;

h. advise the Standing Committee by March 1989 on processes whereby recommendations 2(b) and (d) attached to the Third Report on Non-stipendiary Ministries can be addressed;

Episcopacy

i. consult with the committee which is to receive responses on the episcopacy proposal;

Youth Worker

j. include in the study the requirements of Assembly Resolution 88.31.3(c) relating to the ministry of Youth Worker, and offer advice to the committee which will be appointed to receive comments arising from Resolutions 88.31.3(b) and (c);

Diaconate

k. reconsider the possibility that the Diaconate may be open both to lay and ordained members;

l. present to the Standing Committee a fresh proposal on the Diaconate, with a view to recommendations for the attention of the 1991 Assembly.

Rev Dr Graeme Ferguson was appointed Task Group convenor and Rev Shirley Maddox co-convenor.

During sabbatical leave in 1988 - 9, Dr Ferguson undertook the research study called for in the Standing Committee minute. The three research papers he wrote during that year laid the foundation for the Task Group's work. During Dr Ferguson's study leave overseas and after his call to St David's Presbyterian Church in Auckland, New Zealand, Mrs Maddox acted as convenor. Ms Alison McRae was a consultant with the Task Group.

The Task Group as constituted at the end of its period of work was:

Rev Dr Ian Breward
Rev Dr John Brown
Deaconess Beverley Fabb
Dr Peter Kaldor
Ms Carolyn Kitto
Rev Shirley Maddox
Rev Dr Stephen Reid
Rev Marilyn Smith
Rev Dr Ian Williams

Each of these people was selected by the Assembly Standing Committee because of their particular gifts, skills and experience. It has proved to be an extremely hard working,

enthusiastic and competent group of people whose response to the task arose out of their commitment to Jesus Christ and to the church he constitutes.

Not least among the gifts they brought were patience, humility and good humour. All had other large commitments in the life of the church. None was able to give full-time attention to the Task Group's work for more than a few days at a time. I believe their ability to carry out the mandate given them by the Assembly Standing Committee is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Uniting Church.

The members of the Task Group wish to thank Ms Gillian Stone from the Assembly Secretariat for her skill, efficiency, patience, interest and sure eye for detail in preparing the many typescripts of this report, and to thank the General Secretary, Rev Gregor Henderson, for his unfailing encouragement and support as the task progressed.

Rev Shirley Maddox
Convenor 5 April 1991

The process

In addition to Dr Ferguson's research papers, the Task Group had before it working papers prepared by Task Group members, the documents listed in Appendix 1, submissions from interested individuals and case studies of innovative ministries gathered by Task Group members and others during travel not funded by the Assembly.

The Task Group met on eight occasions for a total of 18 days. In addition, the members engaged in two rounds of consultation with the church.

The first round occurred between June and August 1990. During this time, consultations were held with presbyteries and parishes from every state as well as with groups (e.g. patrol padres, lay preachers, lay pastors, youth workers, ministers of the Word, deaconesses, people employed by parishes and presbyteries, synod and Assembly staff) and individuals. Lay preachers requested that the Task Group make no suggestions about their ministry until a national meeting had been held. Their wishes were respected. In all over 2,000 people read and discussed the draft report with members of the Task Group during the first consultation round.

The second round of consultations occurred between September 1990 and February 1991. Two thousand copies of the discussion paper "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*" were distributed at synods and sold through the Assembly office. About five hundred responses were received. These came from individuals, presbyteries, parishes, councils of elders, and the Assembly Commissions on Doctrine, Ecumenical Affairs and Ministerial Education.

Progress reports on the work of the Task Group were presented at Assembly Standing Committee meetings. The members of the Task Group wish to thank the Standing Committee for its ongoing critique of the Task Group's work and for the suggestions and comments which helped advance the Task Group's work.

Preface

Since the inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia in 1977 an enormous amount of work has been done in working through what it might mean to live as the people of God whose life together is shaped by the *Basis of Union*.

Some of that work has been done in parishes by individuals, councils of elders and so on. Many investigations and reports have been made by committees, task groups, commissions and boards of the Assembly and synods.

It is not the intention of this report to re-do or restate all that work. Nor is it possible for this Task Group to address and resolve the wide range of contentious issues of doctrine identified by respondents to the discussion paper, "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*". The task of articulating the gospel belongs to the whole church and to those charged with the restatement of faith in the Commission on Doctrine and its related synod bodies. The purpose of the Task Group is to fulfil the terms of reference given by the Assembly Standing Committee (see pages 4 - 5), taking into account previous decisions of the Assembly, work already done by individuals and church bodies, and remaining faithful to the *Basis of Union* in an examination of the way the ministries of the Uniting Church are ordered, so that the church may become more flexible and responsive to gospel imperatives in the last decade of the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first.

In our tradition, order is always subordinate to faith, but cannot be divorced from it. Restructuring ministry will not of itself make the Uniting Church vibrantly alive. That is the work of the Holy Spirit who brings the gospel to life in the church and gives life to forms of order. Because we are part of God's new creation the gospel of Jesus Christ invites us to become co-workers in the mission of God to transform and gather up the whole creation into the fullness of the promises of Christ (Ephesians 1: 10).

The Task Group is convinced that there are many signs of new life in the Uniting Church but these are sometimes impeded by the rich heritage of order given us by the churches which came into union in 1977. In years gone by they had re-ordered their ministries, channeling the energies of members into forms of ministry like elder, deacon, lay preacher, deaconess. The task at hand is to release and channel the energies of the people of God in our own time in response to the gospel of Jesus Christ and in a form

appropriate to our present Australian context so the converting and hopeful word of the gospel can be heard inside and outside the church and the power of the sacraments released.

Responses to the discussion document, *"A Vision for Ministry in Australia"*, revealed diverse and strongly held opinions about what form of order is most needed to facilitate renewal of the Uniting Church.

The Task Group is persuaded that part of the answer lies in recognition of the gifts for ministry in the whole people of God and in ordering our varied ministries and gifts in the light of those gracious gifts of God. For whatever the theology of ministry may be, in too many congregations ministry is still identified with what the minister of the Word wants done or 'how things have always been done here'. We believe both the gospel and the Australian context demand that we work hard to break out of that cultural captivity, so we can live by grace and not by custom.

Overview of this report

The church in every age is called to renewed faithfulness to the gospel of Jesus Christ. In every age the people of God entrust themselves to the energy of the Holy Spirit as they respond to that call to faithful discipleship.

In the light of the imperatives of the gospel and the context in which we find ourselves at the turn of the century in Australia, the Task Group on the Ministry of the Church brings recommendations which will, we hope, assist the church to witness to the sovereign grace of God in this place and time.

The recommendations fall into five main groups:

- An affirmation of the primary mission focus of congregations and members in the various networks and communities of which they are a part. The various streams of ministry which we propose are designed to enable the church to respond more effectively to the gifts of the people and the promptings of the Spirit.
- In a changing social context, the recognition of several new or renewed models for ministry. These include:
 - proposals for a renewed diaconate,
 - reaffirmation of the ministry of lay preacher,
 - recognition of the ministry of youth worker,
 - recognition of a ministry to be termed 'Community ministers',
 - a perspective on the ministry of the Word,
 - clarification of the role of lay pastors.
- A range of suggestions to introduce greater flexibility into ministry in Australia's socially diverse

Chapter One

Mission and ministry...

communities. These include proposals for some flexibility in stipendiary issues and suggestions about who may preside at the sacraments.

- A broadening of options for the equipping and formation of members, with opportunities for equipping indigenous leaders from a variety of cultural contexts.
- Support for development of a variety of forms of development of theological education by extension (distance education).

1.1 *The mission of God*

The gospel of God, revealed in Jesus Christ, graciously offers us new life. The purpose of God's mission in the world is to reconcile all creation, so that all may live in a community of justice, freedom, hope and love, like that revealed in the life of the trinity whose persons are bound to each other by mutual love, unity of purpose and love for the world. Our sinful self-centredness, destructive use of personal gifts and the blessings of creation are transformed in the kingdom. In Christ, we dare to hope and pray for the renewal of creation, because the Spirit enables us to cry 'Abba' even when we are most hopeless and isolated (Romans 8: 15). We live in hope because the Holy Spirit is a pledge and foretaste of that coming reconciliation and renewal which is the end, in view, for the whole creation (*Basis of Union* #3).

The mission of God to which we are called is grounded in the finished work of Christ, even though we only partly understand its implications for us. By sharing in the ministry of Christ as high priest and servant, we are enabled to grow into the significance of our baptism and know the sustenance of the Lord's Supper. We are messengers and witnesses who live both in the world of sin, law and death and in the new creation where faith, hope and love are sustained by worship and give rise to the service of our daily lives.

As sharers in the mission of the triune God, we are called to avoid conformity to the world, for we are a royal priesthood summoned to declare the marvellous deeds of the One who called us from darkness to light (Ephesians 5: 8). Yet we live in a world that manifests many signs both of rebellion against God and of the good gifts of God's creation. We too manifest in our lives both the goodness and the fallenness of creation.

Equally we are called to live hopefully because God is with us in the midst of disaster, war, depression and personal trial. God is not absent from the world waiting for us to

Christianise it by sacral actions and presence. God is with us in the whole creation, including the ordinary affairs of our daily lives.

None of us perfectly embodies God's mission, but our worship points beyond our limitations to the one who calls and sustains us, reminding us that there is nothing more fundamental than announcing what God has done in Jesus Christ.

At times God's mission is hidden from sight, yet we are graciously reminded that God brings new life when we least expect it, especially when we share the way of the cross, and are so bereft of our own resources that the Spirit can bring us new life. Mistakes may be frequent, but God graciously enables us to begin again according to our limited perceptions of God's purpose. We are always stretched by the tension between our vision of what the kingdom could mean and the stern realities of an all too human community shaped by an overpowering culture.

1.2 The mission of the church of God

"The mission task of the church is found in the call to proclaim Christ crucified and risen, and to embody in our life a foretaste of the kingdom. It is a task which is always carried out in response to what God has done in the self emptying of Christ for the salvation of the world." (*Reflections on Australian Society and the Mission Task of the Church: A Report of the Uniting Church in Australia, Commission for Mission, 1987, p.1*).

God calls the church to bear witness in word, sacrament and deed to the graciousness of God who offers to all people new life in the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. The church is called to live now as both a sign and a foretaste of the community God has promised, at peace with one another and God. As well, the church is called to seek, pray and work for a world community of peace, justice, freedom and hope in which all people can share. In doing this the church will need to stand with those who are marginalised and struggle against forces of evil which frustrate God's purpose and destroy human community. The church will name God at work in the world, point to the places where it believes salvation is occurring, call people to repentance, offer God's forgiveness and nurture them in their life of faith and worship.

The church confesses that God is central to its understanding of life. It worships God as the central act of its life. In our worship we confess our failure to live according to our hope, announce the freedom God graciously gives, and celebrate the promise of the new creation and the signs of its presence among us now. The church does all this by grace, trusting in God who gives the Spirit to sustain and equip the people of God for their participation in God's mission in the world.

Being called to share in God's mission of bringing all to completion in Jesus Christ is an enormous privilege. We, in the

Uniting Church in Australia, must risk living the way of Jesus, who reveals the justice, mercy and magnificence of God and invites us to share in the action of his Spirit in bringing that life to fruition in every part of Australian society.

We are called to share God's gifts to us with our neighbours in every nation, as stewards of a fragile planet, inviting them to experience the liberating power of Jesus and the Word of God. The final word is not despair in the face of oppression, disaster and the slowness of change, but hope because of the love we see revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, and in his brothers and sisters everywhere. We believe that the love of God, made known in the Trinity, is the future of the whole creation.

1.3 The ministry of Christ

The scope of Christ's ministry is splendidly described in Ephesians and Colossians - "that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ" (Ephesians 1: 10, cf. Colossians 2: 9 - 15). This service is the foundation of God's people, who live between resurrection and the final consummation of all things as a royal priesthood. Their sphere of ministry is the world, for the work of Christ abolishes frontiers between sacred and secular. All belongs to his lordship, which is seen most clearly in his servanthood (Mark 10: 45).

As risen One, Jesus equips all his disciples to share his ministry through the gifts of the Spirit conferred in baptism. Growing into that ministry is a lifelong task. Its fullness is seen in the ministry of the whole people of God, expressed in worship and service, nourished by Word and sacraments. There have been a variety of ways in which the church catholic has been ordered to embody Christ's ministry but without the ministry of Christ, there can be no church.

The Task Group's proposals reflect that conviction, as well as seeking to discover new ways in which the Spirit can order our life during the next decade. Our ministry must not be identified with Christ's ministry, but is nevertheless wholly dependent on it as we seek to take account of the forms ministry should take in Australian contexts.

1.4 The ministry of the church of God

Ministry is derived from God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Baptised people are called and commissioned by God to share in the ministry of Christ, which is to the whole creation.

The ministry of the church is a sharing in the ministry of the One who constitutes the church as his body, receives its

worship, nourishes it with the sacraments and gives it life and energy through the Spirit (*Constitution #11*).

As the risen One Jesus commissions all of his disciples by gifts of the Spirit to share his life. Sharing the life of Christ involves witnessing to Christ's call to repentance and faith, baptising in the triune name, teaching all that Jesus commanded, celebrating the Lord's Supper, pronouncing or withholding forgiveness, building up the flock, empowering them to live as a community of love, justice and mercy which witnesses to the love and mutuality of the Trinity, and sustaining them in healing the wounds of creation as they are revealed as the sons and daughters of God (John 20: 21 - 23, Philippians 2: 1 - 5).

There have been a wide variety of ministries in Christian history. The New Testament abounds in apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, helpers, administrators and interpreters of tongues, as well as evangelists, elders, deacons and bishops. All of these ministries are from God, bearing witness to the headship of Christ in church and creation (Colossians 2: 6 - 12, Romans 12: 3 - 8, Philippians 3: 20, 21).

The suggestions in this report seek to encourage the Uniting Church to embody this variety and fullness of ministry.

The premise of this report is that every Christian is commissioned to share in the ministry of Christ, by virtue of being in Christ through faith and baptism, and is sustained by the Lord's Supper (*Basis of Union #7*). We all share in the mysterious reality of the church, constituted by Christ, ruled and renewed by Christ its head, so that it is rightly described as a body with many members, given many functions (1 Corinthians 12: 1 - 12, Romans 12: 1 - 13).

Ministry is being in Christ and is not amenable to restructuring which takes no account of the hidden divine foundations of our life together. Yet even a glance at churches in cultures different from our own confirms that every church reflects something of the assumptions about organisation and authority which are dominant in the culture of that place.

The church has a constant struggle to find its identity in Jesus Christ in such a way that disciples are freed from those parts of their culture which work against the gospel. This has implications for the Uniting Church in multicultural Australia and for ecumenical relationships.

Ministry is both a divine gift and human response. Getting the balance right is a constant task and privilege. All are called to priestly and serving ministries by virtue of their membership in Christ. The church in all its organisational aspects - local, presbytery, synod and the Assembly - will need to be ready to reshape its community life where necessary to bear witness to the mission of God.

Within the body of Christ, Christians have different and complementary roles, but all minister to each other. Those who

are specially commissioned to be ministers of Word, sacrament and pastoral care are called by God and given to the community to upbuild its members' gifts in the exercise of their daily vocation. (By 'vocation' the Task Group means not only paid work, but all aspects of their lives lived out in the presence and service of God.)

Despite the strength of that theology in the scriptures and the *Basis of Union*, too many congregations have their life shaped by the priorities of their ordained minister, rather than the minister's service being shaped by the vocation of the members. That is not to say those called to leadership may not lead, still less that ministers should not challenge congregations to enlarge their vision in response to God's call to share in ministry and mission. Rather it is a reminder that all baptised people stand together in the presence of God, that the agenda for their life together is a many faceted gift of the Holy Spirit in response to God's love for the world (John 3: 16) - not least that world in which the people find themselves day by day.

Re-ordering ministry will not alone change those long-followed patterns, but can make an important contribution to the release of members' energies for the sake of the world for which Christ died and intercedes at the right hand of God (Hebrews 8: 1).

Separation of our lives into the 'church part' and 'other parts' encourages a kind of privatised religion which is relegated to personal and family life, while the rest of life is governed by other values. The *Basis of Union* asserts the Lordship of Christ over the whole of life (*Basis of Union* #3). To live in this way is at the same time fulfilling, joyful, demanding. Sections 3.2 (The ministry of all believers) and 3.3 (Commissioned ministries) of this report suggest how members can support each other in the ministries Christ calls them to.

The Task Group supports what the *Basis of Union* says about the ministry of the Word (*Basis of Union* paragraphs 14a, 4, 6) and its place in the life of the Uniting Church. There are extensive regulations which govern that ministry (*Regulations* 2.1.1 - 2.7.25). Statements by the Commission on Doctrine and books and articles by scholars of the Uniting Church explore the dimensions of this ministry. The ministry of the Word is by now so generally accepted and securely founded that there is no need to argue that case here.

It is clear from the *Basis of Union* that ministers of the Word are not called to perform all the tasks of ministry themselves while other members of the church observe (though sometimes ministers of the Word suspect that some other members of the church may view things in this way!).

Encouraging all the people of God to witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ in every part of their lives is not an

attempt to get others to be and to do what rightly belongs to ministers of the Word.

This report seeks to:

- encourage and enable all the people of the church to grow into the ministries to which God calls each one;
- encourage baptised members to look carefully at the unspoken assumptions about ministry and mission which shape their lives as individuals and as a company of believers, and
- provide a context in which the Uniting Church will be able to enter more fully into the variety of ministries and structures outlined in the New Testament.

1.4.1 Baptism and ministry

Replies to the paper "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*" underline what a significant expansion of meaning is attached to baptism.

Many see it as the 'ordination' of every Christian to share in the mission of God. That needs much more explanation and we recommend that the Commission on Doctrine be asked to produce a statement spelling out how baptism provides the context for proper understanding of ordination or commissioning, because there is still too much inherited thinking which does not appropriately relate ordained ministry and the ministry of the whole people of God.

1.4.2 The church in the world

The church, the community of those reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, is not separate from the world but present in the world through the networks of relationships in which all people, including church people share. The church is but one agency through which God is at work to fulfil this future for the world.

The mission of God is often hidden from our sight, or revealed in unexpected places, as God in the freedom of the Spirit works in the hearts of people who have no formal allegiance to Jesus.

The church is distinguished from other agencies by its conscious acknowledgment of God as the One who created all things, who is revealed in Jesus Christ, and who is now renewing the world through the Spirit. Moreover the church invites others to be set free by God and become disciples of Christ so that they may joyfully share in God's mission in the world.

The context of ministry...

It is to these great affirmations of the faith that members of the Uniting Church bear their witness in their words, their relationships and the values they reflect in their daily work in every sector of the Australian society. Their witness is crucial to the ministry of the church in Australia (Matthew 5: 13, 14).

2.1 The ecumenical context

The roots of the Uniting Church are in the ecumenical movement, our existence is one of that movement's fruits and the Uniting Church lives in the context of the present reality of participation in the world wide Christian community. The Uniting Church bears its witness in fellowship with and in the presence of Christians of many traditions, some of whom make a commitment to bear witness within the fellowship of the Australian Council of Churches and others who do not.

The Uniting Church is committed to "seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit" (*Basis of Union* #1). In Australia there seems no immediate prospect of further steps towards organic unity being taken, although the Australian Council of Churches is currently negotiating to receive a number of churches into membership or at least a closer form of association. In these circumstances bilateral negotiations on specific and limited agendas between the Uniting Church and other churches remain important. Reports like this one need to be aware of the ecumenical implications of the recommendations they may make.

This Task Group believes it has taken adequate account of the best ecumenical writing on the ministry of Christ. Given the limitations of time for this work and space to report it, we have attempted to move in the direction suggested by our Uniting Church heritage, while taking far more seriously the implications of baptism as the basis for all Christian ministry in Christ's name. We have consulted *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, (WCC, Faith & Order Paper No. 111), the official reply of the Uniting Church to that document and the partial agreement with the Lutheran Church of Australia. The Commission on Ecumenical Affairs has supplied us with copies of comments by their dialogue partners in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches and from the Churches of Christ to the discussion paper, "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*".

In addition we have read widely in material from other churches about the renewal of ministries, in particular about the renewal of the diaconate and the establishment of a system of 'non-stipended' 'community ministers'.

We have taken for granted the commitment of the *Basis of*

Union to seek a wider unity in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to work within the faith of the catholic church. We see the report as a contribution to the further elucidation of the faith. All this has been done with constant attention to the New Testament witness concerning theologies of church and ministry (e.g. Romans 12, 2 Corinthians 5: 16 - 21, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, Matthew 28: 16 - 20, 1 Peter 2: 9, 1 Timothy 3, etc.).

Taking the ecumenical context seriously also means that we are willing to embody God's purpose for our common life in new forms of order, even if it means that we seem to other churches to have gone past the present boundaries of Christian unity, as we did with the ordination of women.

Ecumenical commitment certainly means listening to and dialogue with other churches, but it does not mean being a prisoner to their cultural and theological perspectives, any more than we expect them to be limited by our perceptions of the gospel where they are constrained to walk a different way. Commitment to unity does not mean absence of disagreement and conflict. It means that we continue to explore such issues under the lordship of Christ, recognising that even in our own church, the boundaries of faith and order are not agreed: the responses to the discussion paper made that plain.

That should not deter the Assembly from using this report as a basis for seeking further obedience to the will of God, even if that were to mean some conflict within our own fellowship and with other churches. In fact we do not believe that the paths we suggest will indeed have such a dramatic effect, because there are such substantial continuities with our heritage and with many components of ecumenical theology.

For example, non-stipendiary ministries, which are close to our proposed community ministry, have already been implemented among Anglicans in north Queensland, north west Western Australia, North America and in the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom. A full account of these developments can be found in the paper prepared by Rev Dr John Brown for the Assembly Standing Committee, August 1988, *"Non-stipendiary ministries: Third report"*, distributed for discussion in the church.

The research of Ms Alison McRae during overseas study leave in 1988 - 9 and by Ms Carolyn Kitto in Canada, Britain and the United States in 1990 as well as extensive reading indicate active steps toward the renewal of diaconal ministries in a number of churches overseas and active research into diaconal ministry in a number of theological centres. Several Anglican dioceses in Australia have moved to renew a permanent diaconate (among them Melbourne and North Queensland).

The ecumenical implications of fulfilling the ministry of the whole people of God are clear. One cannot talk about God's mission in the world without taking serious account of God's

call in Christ for a reconciled world and church. God's call to reconciliation is central to the Uniting Church's understanding of itself and its place within the universal church.

Congregations are encouraged to explore ways in which they may engage jointly with other churches in worship, nurture, service and mission. They are called to take seriously the presence and worship of Christians from Asia and the Pacific in Uniting churches, and to undertake the adventures and discipline of the Spirit to which the presence of these brothers and sisters in the faith challenge us.

2.2 The Australian context

We may expect that the following factors will feature in the changing context for ministry in Australia over the next decade.

Urbanisation will continue with a concentration of people in the large cities. This will be boosted by continued immigration, and movement from some rural areas, as the rural economic situation becomes more difficult.

There will be continuing growth of new outer suburbs, and urban growth along coastal areas, such as the corridor from Brisbane to the Queensland/NSW border. This will call for the Uniting Church to establish new churches in new urban areas, house churches and other forms of small group life, and flexible times for worship. Many faith communities in the large cities will be work-based or interest group-based rather than being formed by people in a particular geographical locality.

The size and number of **migrant ethnic communities** will grow. So also will the numbers of the ethnic organisations and congregations, calling for additional ethnic ordained ministers.

The growth of multi-ethnic congregations is possible with the growing numbers of English-speaking second generation migrants, but it is difficult and requires hard work. Those congregations which choose to go in that direction will require resourcing. Dealing with issues of racial justice will require strong justice and service ministries.

Economic reform and industrial change may mean industries will continue to close down, resulting in on-going employment problems, re-training and job insecurity.

The ministry of the Uniting Church must include finding, hearing and ministering to the unemployed, and holding accountable to the gospel, those who are determining policies in government, companies and the education sector.

The take-over of profitable Australian companies by multinationals is likely to continue, leading to a sense of powerlessness and confusion. The distance between "haves" and "have nots" will grow, given the understanding of social welfare as a safety net rather than a right.

The last two decades have brought a major change in the traditional division of gender roles in society between women and men. This trend is likely to continue, with more women in the work force, women in leadership roles in the professions, women in trades and professions that were formerly seen as provinces of men, and vice versa, and shared responsibilities in the home. Women in full-time employment will be less likely than women not in paid employment to have time available for church activities. There will be less voluntary work.

Mobility of people will continue; movement of bank and company employees, public servants, teachers, people taking long-service and other leave, people seeking work, people moving to retire. Adequate ministry by the church will require means for maintaining and establishing meaningful contact with transient people. The ministry of Christians in the work place assumes great importance.

It is critical that every worship service provides opportunity for people to hear the gospel and receive the transforming grace of Christ. Making contact with retirees coming into an area, devising ministries to the retired as well as providing ministry opportunities for them, is important.

The **de-population of rural areas** is likely to continue given the tough competition for markets for primary products and the growth of larger company-owned properties. This will lead to a further decline in the small country towns.

Young people will continue to move to the cities. It will be difficult to maintain ministers of the Word with smaller, poorer populations. Links between city and rural parishes may help to overcome misunderstandings and to continue stipended ministries in some marginal rural parishes.

The development of non-stipended ministries as in New Zealand and the United Kingdom could be helpful. Joint parishes with other denominations and regional patrol ministries of ministers of the Word or of deacons are other options.

The Aboriginal struggles for land and control of their own lives will continue. Local Aboriginal communities will require evangelical pastoral ministries, and community organising/ community development ministries. Adequate support for the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress from the rest of the Uniting Church will be essential.

The family patterns of recent years will continue although we may experience some swing back to more traditional family

life. Many people will live singly, or live together unmarried. Short marriages, divorce, re-marriage and blended families will probably remain commonplace.

Domestic tensions, domestic violence, the cycle of child abuse and youth homelessness are likely to continue. This calls for openness and compassion in ministry, as well as ministries of service and justice.

Australian society is an aging society. This will increasingly affect provision for aged care, pensions, leisure time, and the community costs of health care. It affects family structures and political decisions (e.g. "grey power"). The age range of people in congregations will increase and will call for flexibility in finding opportunities for and affirming voluntary and paid ministries of early retirees.

The recent **concern for the environment** represents a continuing search for meaning and a different value system.

The church needs to continue to examine its own theological traditions and the values it espouses in order to respond creatively to this search. In the light of threats to the fragile ecological networks that sustain life on this planet God calls the church to a renewed theology of creation and courageous action.

In Australia, there are many **cultures**. Some of these are related to different generations, for example youth, the culture of the 20 to 45-year-olds and cultures relating to the life stages of people over 45. In addition, each ethnic and religious group has its own culture. People of many faiths live side by side in big cities.

If the church is to commend the gospel in these cultures then it will need to engage in training and study as rigorous as that which we required of people going overseas as missionaries in former generations. Its style of worship and outreach will need to become more adaptable. Most of our present models of ministry in the Uniting Church are not making much contact with the so-called blue-collar workers, or with the under 45's.

The regional context. The Uniting Church is committed by the *Basis of Union* to bear witness to a unity of faith and life which transcends national and racial boundaries. The ministry of the Uniting Church thus takes place in a region which is changing rapidly. Parts of Asia are experiencing rapid industrial and economic growth. Pacific Island states, on the other hand, are more and more at the mercy of powerful neighbours.

The greatest challenge faced by the Christian church is a form of **secularism** which sees no place for the church or religion in the public, business and industrial spheres of life, but rather relegates religion to the realm of private life and morality.

The ministry of the whole people of God...

If the church is to turn this trend around it will need to listen more carefully to the Christians who have to make decisions daily in the public, business and industrial spheres. It will need to provide them opportunities to share experiences and resource each other in the struggle to build a more compassionate, just and ecologically-sensitive society.

2.3 *The imperative of mission*

The gospel of Jesus Christ and the context of contemporary Australia demand that the church have an over-riding concern for mission. In this last decade of the 20th century, our life as a nation is marked by great cultural diversity, enormous human need and rapid change. Congregations find themselves in many very different social contexts.

But while there is diversity in the expressions of church life in our communities, in all places the church exists alongside many other social organisations that offer friendship, security, identity and values for living.

The distinctive message and contribution of the Christian church is often not recognised. In many cases it is the church's styles of ministry which distance it from the day to day concerns of people even though we hold that God is in the world, and active in the lives of people.

To be 'in mission' means being with people in ways that touch their lives so that the presence of God who offers new life in the power of the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ is made known.

We live our lives in relationships with family, work, study, friendships, recreational activities and geographic communities, as well as being part of local congregations. Congregations will be helped to grow in their mission as they help people to reflect on and express their faith in all of their life situations.

3.1 *The four streams of ministry*

Where the river flows, is a book and video by Peter and Sue Kaldor. They explore some of the ways Australians are reaching out with the good news of the gospel.

They write: "strategy itself is no substitute for the gospel or for dependence upon God" (p. 192). Strategy, structure and organisation are necessary responses to the gospel and the context, and arise out of dependence upon God.

The investigations of this Task Group highlight the variety of ways in which Uniting Church parishes and agencies organise their life, so as to respond creatively to the demands of the gospel and of their context. The stories abound. They are all different.

Churches in many kinds of communities - in remote areas, in the inner city, in country towns and distant suburbs, in mono-cultural communities and multi-cultural ones through chaplaincies, community based ministries, parish based ministries, teams of ordained and unordained people with complementary skills and areas of work, pioneering ministers working on their own, in a host of other places and other ways - respond sometimes timidly, sometimes adventurously to the call of God to witness to the gospel in their own place and time.

Reflecting on these stories, the Task Group has found it helpful to think of the ministries of the church as falling into four streams. These are not entirely separate. They may overlap and have a few fuzzy edges, but the Task Group believes the "four streams" provide a way of speaking about the ministries of the church which will enable us to plan more effectively and respond more effectively to the gifts of people and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

These streams are not arranged in a hierarchy. They describe people and structures which already exist somewhere in the Uniting Church. All are necessary and each one needs the others. These categories, or "streams" of ministry are Commissioned, Employed, Specified and Ordained ministries. There are other ways in which this ordering task could be done. This schema seems to offer some advantages in understanding the way people are gifted and called in the Uniting Church in this time, and allows some clarity in speaking about them.

Commissioned ministries

All baptised people are commissioned for God's service in their baptism. Throughout their lives new gifts and graces will be called forth by the Spirit.

As a local congregation identifies the gifts and skills of the members for mission and identifies the hurts and hopes in the community, they will need to recognise and set aside people within the congregation for these tasks and callings. All members are called into this stream of ministry. Some may be commissioned in a more public way to be in mission in their daily work as well as for tasks within the congregation.

Employed persons

The Uniting Church is often required to employ people, who may or may not be members of the Uniting Church, for particular responsibilities requiring specialist skills and training. By valuing these people as part of the church's ministry, we can nurture them in their faith and vocation

which may, in turn, enhance their view of their work place and their participation in the ministry and mission of the church.

Specified ministries

Some members of the Uniting Church feel a call to ministry and offer their gifts, abilities, skills, faith and calling to be used by the Uniting Church. If this felt call from God is validated by the church, these people are sent by and held accountable to the church.

A process for the formation, accreditation and recognition of these people and ministries is proposed.

Ordained ministries

Within the Uniting Church are some who are called to the ordained ministries of the church. These ministries are among the specified ministries of the church and are expressed as ministry of deaconess and ministry of the Word. People called to these ministries will be trained, accountable to and set apart by the church for the exercise of this ministry.

Leadership that discerns, encourages, guides and allows the gifts, skills and abilities of people to be released is essential. This will be best expressed through people working together in mission rather than in a hierarchical top-down management system.

Leaders in the Uniting Church will be people who model styles of ministry which themselves express the nature of God's service to the world in Jesus Christ. These models of ministry will be diverse, and demonstrate that there are many ways of sharing in God's mission.

3.2 The ministry of all believers

The vision of ministry contained in this report is centred on equipping the whole people of God for God's mission and ministry in the world. The specific recommendations are given as ways to release, equip and encourage the whole people of God for their respective ministries. In doing so, it is our conviction that the freedom, faithfulness and effectiveness of the ministry of the whole people of God can be enhanced and renewed.

The *Basis of Union* affirms that through baptism the people of God are initiated into Christ's life and mission in the world (*Basis of Union* #7). Members are "engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant" (*Basis of Union* #13). The Spirit endows members with a diversity of gifts and there is no gift without its corresponding service (*Basis of Union* #13).

Together with unbaptised people who love the Lord, all baptised people are called to witness to the reconciling love of God in Jesus in worship, in love shown and service given, and in their faith in the grace of God in Jesus Christ and his

invitation to discipleship articulated as best they can.

This is not a part-time or optional way of life. The new life in Christ of which St Paul speaks (Ephesians 4: 17 - 23, Philippians 4: 4 - 7, 1 Corinthians, e.g. 6: 19, 20) is the whole of life and is to be expressed in every facet of everyday living including work and leisure as well as worship and church activities.

In an enormous variety of life situations the people of God, by the grace of God, with joy, with pain, with hope, with laughter, in faithfulness and failure, live out the life of Christ in them day by day: this is their ministry and mission.

3.3 *Commissioned ministries*

The Task Group proposes to call the ministries which belong to all believers and arise out of the life of congregations *ommissioned ministries*, not so as to set up a bureaucratic structure or to limit the range of ministries of individuals or congregations, but so as to have a way of speaking about, naming, celebrating, developing the most fundamental ministry to which Christian people are called - the expression of the new life in Christ in every part of life.

How can the church help people recognise the gifts God gives to each believer? How can it nurture those gifts and empower people to use them? How can the church support people in their lives in Christ as they live day by day? How can the church remind people of their call to witness and serve in the world and support them as they do it? How can the church mediate God's forgiveness when they fail? How can the church hold before its members the presence of Christ among marginalised and suffering people and encourage them to join Christ there? How can the church accompany people through the sometimes painful growth in faith and the new beginnings in life and hope that God offers?

In worship, in the sacraments, in the fellowship of the congregation, through pastoral care and Christian nurture the church accompanies people on the journey of discipleship holding before them the hope and the challenge of living faithfully as God's people, sharing in the ministry of Christ.

One aspect of the church's task is to help people recognise and celebrate the places in their lives where they are sharing in the ministry and mission of Christ and encourage them to respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit there.

People participate in the ministry and mission of Christ in a myriad of ways, for example when they participate in family life, share the lives of sick or disabled people through care and friendship, in friendships of all kinds, in daily

employment or unemployment, in leisure, in sport, in all kinds of creative activities, in work in the community, participation in church activities ... the list is endless. These activities do not lie outside the ministry and mission of God's people: they are the stuff of their ministry and mission.

Of special significance is daily work.

People will be at mission when they understand that their occupations, whether paid or unpaid, may be a calling from God to service to the wider community. This applies as much to process workers, workers in the service industries, tradespeople, professional people, those who draft public policy, those who serve the community in the public service, as to those who work at home. The quality and nature of the articles they produce and the work they do bear witness to the values they espouse.

Whether employed or unemployed, people help to establish the power of God's love and make the community a more or less compassionate and caring place by the way they relate to colleagues, neighbours and family. Gifts and skills in crafts and time spent in community service can be an offering to God and an expression of ministry. The decisions people make as public servants, politicians or managers make the society either more just or less equal. At the same time it must be recognised that some work causes other people to be oppressed. The conditions of some work are oppressive.

All, whatever their employment or unemployment, encounter the difficulties and ambiguities of discipleship and witness in daily life. For example, the economic reform and industrial change in our society, mentioned in the previous chapter, provide important challenges to Christians to testify to the requirements of God's justice for all. Christians within these situations of decision-making in the work place are in strategic positions of missionary ministry, which require ethical decisions to be made, not in some abstract or academic way but on-the-run in complex situations.

To support the ministries of Christians in the work place, resources for education in specific areas of employment and professional life will be needed. Deacons and lay preachers who are actively engaged in the work force, ethicists and theologians who understand the context of the work place, and appropriate courses from lay training centres will be among the resources necessary to support people in ministries in the work place.

People will also be expressing this missionary ministry when they use their creativity to care for the earth and its peoples, and in art, craft, music, writing, dance, drama and hobbies. Other expressions of ministry will focus on building relationships between people, caring for family and neighbours, exercising hospitality, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and taking part in activities helping to establish authentic community life within local and regional areas.

Local congregations need to find ways to remind people of the call to service and to acknowledge and celebrate their ministries. Of course, this is done Sunday by Sunday in worship, especially in preaching, in the offering, prayers of intercession and in the blessing, benediction and dismissal at the end of the service. It is done in special services when congregations use the Covenant Service (*Uniting in Worship, Leader's Book*, The Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly Commission on Liturgy, pp. 66 - 74) in worship.

But there are many other opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate people's ministries and the ministry of the whole congregation inside and outside the life of the parish.

Such opportunities may take the form of services of commissioning or of recognition for people who undertake particular tasks within the life of the congregation and the wider church (elders, Sunday school teachers, child carers, members of choirs and church committees or councils, youth leaders, communion stewards, member of presbytery and so on) in the family and in the community at large.

Sometimes, a parish or congregation may, after setting its directions for mission, recognise and commission certain people whom they recognise as having the gifts and abilities necessary to carry out this mission.

For example (and these are only examples) a parish called to mission among young people may support with prayer and practical help a member who is a teacher in a local high school in participating in a Christian group among teachers and students. Or a parish called to ministry among homeless people may support with prayer and practical help one of their members who works in a refuge for young people or women or homeless men. Sometimes, people who already work in such areas may ask a congregation to support them in this way.

It may be appropriate to make this support clear by an acknowledgement of the ministry during a service of worship, by prayer or laying on of hands or other suitable words or actions. It will often be appropriate for such a person to receive pastoral care through a support group or a prayer partner from the congregation. Courses offered by lay training centres and agencies of the Uniting Church and sister churches can help in the development of gifts and skills. Elders and ministers of the Word or deacons can encourage participation in these.

It is important that both the person and the congregation be enabled to recognise these ministries as valid parts of the ministry of Christ, which are not added on to the tasks necessary for the efficient running of the church or secondary to them, but part of the total, faithful ministry committed to this congregation or parish by Christ. For this reason it may be necessary to free such people from other tasks in the church so they may do this task well.

We recognise that more is involved in encouraging such ministries than simply naming, celebrating and supporting them. We are aware of studies indicating that members do not always see their worldly calling as a vocation for ministry (*The laity in ministry. The whole people of God for the whole world.* (Ed). Peck & Hoffman, Alban Institute, 1984). Clearly the church has a vital educational task in order to fully acquaint its members with the nature of their ministries in the world.

It is the Task Group's conviction that such an educational task can be enhanced by the kinds of proposals for commissioned ministries that we have suggested.

In some parishes where a number of people work in the same area (e.g. health, education, public service, business) networks for support, reflection and education already exist, pointing to a direction that some other parishes may choose to follow in resourcing their own members for mission and ministry.

Other ministries focus more within the life of the parish. Their purpose is the enabling of the worship of the church, and the equipping of the people of God for their daily lives of witness and service. Examples are the ministries of elder, youth leader, communion steward, parish councillor, greeter, sunday school teacher, gardener, property officer, and so on. These too need to be recognised and supported in some of the ways outlined above.

Individuals believe they are called by God to these ministries, and their call is affirmed by the church on the basis of their gifts, experience and spiritual ministry. Some process of formation for these ministries is important, though the extent, content and depth of education varies from ministry to ministry - e.g. elders and sunday school teachers might participate in short local training courses, parish councillors need to have some understanding of the polity of the Uniting Church, parish secretaries and treasurers may attend suitable lay training courses, flower arrangers may do a TAFE course, and so on. They may be formed for their ministry by participation in small local study/prayer groups and by working together and reflecting on their mission context.

Other processes of formation could include:

- (a) personal and spiritual development by:
 - developing human relationship skills;
 - reflection on gospel values for living;
 - learning about prayer and spiritual disciplines;
- (b) becoming more aware of the distinctive contributions of the Uniting Church to the whole church and its mission;
- (c) equipping members to respond in compassion and service to those experiencing dislocation in family life;
- (d) identifying strategic areas of mission presented by the particular characteristics of the local community.

Many, perhaps the majority of baptised people - and adherents of the church who have never been baptised - will live out their discipleship in quiet ways, not mentioned in commissioning services or prayers of intercession. It is very important these people too be encouraged to recognise what they do as ministry in the name of Christ (Matthew 25: 31 - 40, 46b) and be helped to develop their gifts and skills in those quiet ministries (1 Corinthians 12: 12 - 27) for the glory of God.

The stories told in preaching, the words used in prayer, the issues considered in meetings of councils of elders and parish councils can all uphold people in these ministries and support them in their mission.

What holds these ministries together as a group is that they arise out of the everyday life of members of congregations and are exercised through or in relationship with a congregation or parish. The people who exercise them are accountable to the congregation for their exercise of these ministries.

The Task Force does not agree with some of the replies to the discussion paper "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*" which suggest that the proposed commissioned ministries are likely to lock up the energies of members in a sacred space rather than releasing them for more effective witness and service in their daily vocation. Rather it seeks to take seriously the organic nature of the church as the community of those saved by grace, who confess Christ as Lord, and are gifted by the Spirit for building up the body of Christ and witnessing to the sovereign grace of God (*Basis of Union* #3, 4).

3.3.1 The commissioned ministry of elder

In congregational and parish life in the Uniting Church, councils of elders are called to work with the ordained minister or lay pastor in the spiritual and administrative oversight of congregations.

Some do so with courage, imagination and insight. Some struggle with the breadth of the task and limited resources.

Elders provide significant pastoral care and leadership within the parish, building up the people in love, and assisting the ordained minister or lay pastor in the conduct of worship and the administration of the sacraments. Together with the ordained minister or lay pastor it is their joy and responsibility to discern the signs of God's activity in the lives of the members, in the local congregations and in the community, and following the promptings of the Holy Spirit, encouraging the congregation in their ministry and mission.

These are important tasks, essential for the well-being of the congregation. People called to become elders will have gifts

in pastoral care, be people of vision whose faith is nourished by prayer and studying the scriptures, who make care of the congregation a priority in their lives and lead the congregation forward in mission (*Regulations* 3.1.9 and 3.2.7 b). Elders will need to take up opportunities for education and formation for this ministry. This is an on-going process.

We believe that as God continues to call and gift people for this ministry and as the church continues to call people to exercise these gifts, elders will continue to make an indispensable contribution to the worship and mission of the church.

3.4 Employed persons

From time to time the Uniting Church employs persons with specific skills and training for particular responsibilities.

For example, the church employs nurses in Frontier Services hospitals, teachers in church schools, secretarial and administrative staff, social/community workers in parish missions and other agencies, cleaners and gardeners, and so on. The church and its agencies employs many thousands of such people.

It is not proposed that any bureaucratic structure be set up with regard to people employed by the church. The purpose of having this category in the report is so the contributions, needs and interests of this large group of people can be recognised.

Some have a sense of call about the work they do for the church. Some have none, regarding the church as an employer only. While some church people may regret this state of affairs the fact remains that what they do is often valuable for the work and programs of the church because of the skills and experience they bring to their tasks.

Sometimes, by their skills and experience they enable the church to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit to new endeavours and fields of service. The Spirit is much freer than we sometimes find comfortable, working through people who do not fit our neat categories. Remember Cyrus! (2 Chronicles 36: 22, 23). Sometimes such people take a drop in salary and leave entitlements in order to be employed by the church.

They are selected on the basis of their skills, qualifications and competence and they often apply for their position out of a concern for the people they will be serving, or a desire to work in a particular context, more than out of a sense of call to ministry in the church. It must be recognised that for many people, to take a job in the church often makes it difficult for them to find employment in the future. Often they are in jobs that are funded and regulated by government or other agencies and sponsored by the Uniting Church. These people may or may not be members of the Uniting Church or any other Christian church.

The Uniting Church needs to see these people as making a valuable contribution to its ministry and mission, rather than simply "people we employ to do a job". By valuing them as part of our ministry, we can offer them effective pastoral care which may provide opportunities for them to develop their understanding of the church and its worship and mission. In turn we can learn much from them in terms both of their skills and of their perspectives on life when they come from other Christian and other faith traditions.

They help to keep us in touch with the realities of Australian society. They should be paid according to the appropriate industrial award for their position, and their employers need to be always looking for ways to enable them to develop their skills. They are accountable to their employer.

3.5 Specified ministries

Under its Constitution, the Uniting Church is able to recognise certain "Specified Ministries" (Constitution 2.11), and lay down requirements and procedures for acceptance and oversight of people in specified ministries. At present the ministries specified in this way are ministers of the Word, deaconesses and with some ambiguity, lay pastors (Constitution #12, Regulations 2.7.21).

Despite some discrepancies between the Constitution and Regulations at this point, the Task Group proposes that this nomenclature be employed to identify and describe a number of ministries in addition to those listed above. These are lay ministries already present in the life of the church, for example, lay preachers, youth workers, lay chaplains, along with others which are developing or will develop in the future in response to the work of the Holy Spirit in the church and the community. People who are called to these ministries will:

- (i) have a sense of being called by God to ministry and such call will have been affirmed by the church in the light of their gifts, abilities, experience and maturity;
- (ii) be members of the Uniting Church or another Christian church, committed to the ethos of the Uniting Church, who want to use their gifts, skills and abilities for ministry on behalf of the Uniting Church;
- (iii) exercise a ministry focused on a particular group (e.g. young people), or a particular need (e.g. the sick in hospital), or a particular gift (e.g. administration, teaching, preaching);
- (iv) undergo a period of formation for their ministry. This formation will vary in length and content according to the particular ministry, and may be pre-service, in-service, by theological education by

extension (distance education), long or very short. It will focus on developing an individual's gifts and skills and may involve acquiring a qualification;

(v) upon completion of formation, be accredited by the Uniting Church. Accreditation is affirmation of a person's call to ministry in a service of worship and recognition that a person has met the requirements to be qualified as part of the particular specified ministry. Such accreditation will be recognised throughout the Uniting Church;

(vi) have a sense of collegiality with others accredited to the same ministry;

(vii) often be involved in a team ministry;

(viii) usually be employed by the Uniting Church or an agency related to the Uniting Church, usually in a paid capacity, full-time or part-time;

(ix) where appropriate have their terms and conditions of employment determined by the appropriate council of the church;

(x) have their placement for ministry determined by the appropriate council of the church, which will ensure suitable pastoral care and oversight;

(xi) be expected to engage in continuing education for ministry.

The processes of formation for specified ministries should include a variety of appropriate educational strategies which:

- focus on the way this ministry will further the mission of the church;
- are flexible enough to be done in-service, pre-service or by distance education;
- focus on developing individual gifts and skills;
- are planned by those working in the field who have already proved themselves to be competent;
- include a planning/action/reflection model of learning among other educational strategies suitable for adults;
- offer a range of options from which applicants for accreditation may choose.

Such ministries are to be affirmed in their own right and not seen as "stepping stones" to other forms of ministry.

Specified ministries will have a particular focus on the mission of the church, and work to enable and equip the people of God for their worship and mission. After appropriate formation some people who exercise specified ministries (e.g. hospital

chaplains and youth workers) may be given permission to preside at the sacraments with the people with whom they are in ministry (*Regulations* 3.4.4(1)). It may be necessary to require appropriate education and formation for presiding at the sacraments as prerequisites for exercise of such specified ministries. This matter needs further investigation (Recommendation 9).

Possible specified ministries may include:

- **Youth worker** - ministering with youth and young adults in church and community settings;
- **Children's worker** - ministering with children and families;
- **Missionary** - sent by the church to work in mission overseas or in the Australian context;
- **Administrators** - accountants, managers, personnel officers, secretarial staff employed by the Uniting Church;
- **Educators** - Christian education staff in parish, presbytery, synod and Assembly;
- **Chaplains** - lay people working in hospitals, schools, industry, institutions;
- **Pastoral assistants** - working in parishes as evangelists, pastoral visitors, teaching scripture in school;
- **Lay pastors** exercising a short-term ministry;
- **Lay preachers** accredited by the presbytery;
- **Partners in mission** who live and work in an area where resources for mission are few;
- **Specialised ministries** - such as sociologist, mission strategist, and so on.

The first step the Uniting Church can take in developing specified ministries is to designate the ministry of youth worker as one of the specified ministries of the Uniting Church. This ministry can then act as a model for further recognition of other specified ministries.

3.5.1 The ministry of youth worker

One of the features of contemporary Western culture is the emergence of a youth culture. This stage of life is associated with struggles for identity, meaning and hope as well as a seeking for a role in local communities. Often it is a difficult and traumatic time, as well as a fulfilling one, for young people and their families.

One of the very creative responses that local congregations and other councils and agencies of the Uniting Church have made in order to be in mission with this group of people is to appoint youth workers. This movement has grown to the point where there are now at least 140 youth workers employed by parishes and other councils of the Uniting Church to carry out a ministry to young people.

These youth workers are dedicated, gifted and called. They have offered an enormous amount to the mission of the

Uniting Church, both in terms of their ministry with young people and the way in which they have often pushed us to adapt and develop our life in order to include young people more fully.

Youth workers come from many and varied backgrounds and frequently began their ministry in local congregations. They have grown in their competency and skills for ministry and moved on to other contexts. Some youth workers feel a call for life to this ministry.

The four streams of ministry outlined in this paper offer a backdrop for understanding the place of youth workers, and developing the Uniting Church's ministry with young people further. Youth leaders in local congregations offer ministry to young people.

It will be important for congregations to recognise and affirm this ministry by *commissioning* these people and ensuring adequate support, pastoral care and resources for their ministry. Agencies of the Uniting Church, in particular, will wish to *employ* youth workers in places such as refuges and on the streets. Some people called to the *ordained* ministries of the Uniting Church will wish to specialise and undertake specific training to help them in ministry with young people so that some youth workers will be ordained. Some youth workers will be called and commit themselves to a *specified* ministry of youth worker as set out under specified ministries on pp. 29 - 31.

Adoption of the ministry of youth worker as a specified ministry provides an opportunity for the Uniting Church to order its life for mission with young people by ensuring appropriate training, appointment, employment conditions, accountability and pastoral care for those who work with youth in a range of settings. It is acknowledged that a large number of youth workers are already employed within the Uniting Church and are in need of such oversight and support for their ministry.

Appropriate ordering of this ministry allows parishes, church councils and agencies, and youth workers themselves to work together effectively in missional contexts. When parishes and presbyteries have a clear idea of the 'stream' of ministry which is appropriate for a youth worker in their particular context, it will become easier to locate and appoint a suitable person.

Recommendations about the ministry of youth worker will be formulated when the report of the Assembly Standing Committee's Working Group on the ministry of youth worker has been received.

3.5.2 The ministry of lay pastor

Given the vast distances, climatic variations, cultural and social diversity which characterise Australia, there will always be need in the life of the church for short term ministries and

people with flexibility to move to meet these needs. Such people are valuable. It is likely that these needs will not diminish in the future.

Members of the Uniting Church who might be called to such a ministry are early retirees, people called to serve God through a short ministry and people testing a call to traditional ministry of the Word or of deacon. They will be people with experience in and understanding of the Uniting Church who are in sympathy with directions in which the Uniting Church is moving, and who adhere to the *Basis of Union*. They will be called lay pastors.

The ministry of lay pastor as envisaged in this report will be a genuine lay ministry. To it people bring the gifts, graces and experience gained in Christian living in the work place and in the church. They will receive initial education and formation appropriate for a ministry that will be of limited duration.

The Task Group proposes that normally a lay pastor will not serve in this ministry for more than ten years.

In some states lay pastors have made a significant contribution to ministry in the Uniting Church, especially in places where it was difficult to settle an ordained person because of isolation. This has been so particularly in Queensland. In the past lay pastors, for a variety of reasons, have not been ordained, even though the ministry they exercised was often similar to that of ordained people. However, it must be recognised that isolation from appropriate oversight and inadequate education have contributed to difficulties that have arisen in some settlements.

The Task Group believes that while it is appropriate to encourage some lay pastors to move toward one of the expressions of ordained ministry, this path will not always be possible. Therefore the Task Group makes the recommendations 6(a)-(j) pages 58 - 59 to facilitate the ordering, oversight and exercise of this ministry. In addition, synods will make such by-laws as are necessary to facilitate the ministry of lay pastor in the particular circumstances of ministry in each synod (see also 5.2.2 page 56).

3.5.3 The ministry of lay preacher

Once described by John Wesley as "this surprising apparatus of providence" lay preachers have proudly survived the use and abuse of the church over many centuries. Within the Uniting Church the Spirit of God has moved, gifting people with the ability to interpret the word of God in the light of their daily experience.

This is a genuine lay ministry exercised by people who are called to this task and whose call has been validated by the

church expressed in accreditation by the presbytery (*Regulations* 2.8.1 - 11). They have the gifts and graces for leading worship and preaching and undertake a comprehensive part-time course of theological education and formation to prepare them for this ministry. Once accredited by the presbytery, lay preachers are available to exercise their gift for the building up of the people of God Australia-wide.

Together with deacons it is the particular task of this ministry to help the congregation reflect upon the issues of witness in every day life, especially in the work place, out of their own experience of the work of the Holy Spirit in life, through Bible study and prayer.

The Task Group wishes to encourage councils of elders to seek out those who may have appropriate gifts, particularly younger people, help them to identify their call, recommend to them the appropriate training, and encourage them to exercise their gifts. We urge those responsible for organising and planning worship to call upon lay preachers to exercise their gifts.

3.5.4 Partners in mission

The Uniting Church has recognised that there are different kinds of ministers called to different tasks of ministry and mission. Only some are ordained. Others continue in other jobs to support themselves, yet feel the call of God to be part-time missionaries in areas of few resources. Married or single, young or old, with or without families, these people answer the call to share their lives with others.

In some synods a ministry of partners in mission has been developed.

Partners in mission are people who, upon hearing the call of God, choose to relocate in an area of few resources. Here they enjoy devoting their gifts to the development of the local congregation, encouraging the skills of the individuals in it. Partners in mission are endorsed by the church, trained, commissioned to a particular ministry in a congregation or parish, and then encouraged with support and guidance along the way.

Partners in mission work with a minister of the Word or deacon, strengthening the church in difficult places, influencing the shape and style of the church for years to come. The synod body responsible for mission will be responsible for ensuring appropriate continuing education and formation are available for partners in mission.

The same synod body will accredit them and facilitate their movement into a parish.

The Task Group wishes to encourage synods to explore the ministry of partners in mission.

3.6 Ordained ministries

3.6.1 Ordination

The Uniting Church's current understanding of ordination is the setting apart for service of Jesus Christ of those called by God to the ministry of Word or deaconess.

"Ordination (being setting apart of persons for the specified forms of service known respectively as Ministry of the Word and Ministry of Deaconess) shall be conducted by a Presbytery by prayer and laying on of hands and in accordance with such procedures as may be prescribed by the Assembly." (*Constitution* #14).

"...Since the Church lives by the power of the Word, she is assured that God, who has never left himself without witness to that Word, will, through Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, call and set apart members of the Church to be ministers of the Word." (*Basis of Union* #14a).

The Uniting Church ordains to ministry in Christ's church those whose call to the ordained ministry it has tested and validated.

The service of ordination includes elements of praise, recognition of call, prayer for the Spirit and continuity with the ministry of previous generations.

The last paragraph of the *Basis of Union* #14a commits the Uniting Church to seek for renewed understanding of the way the congregation participates in ordination and of the significance of ordination in the life of the Church. A step was taken by the Commission on Doctrine in 1982 (*Report on Ordination*, 1982 Assembly Minutes) when a series of questions and answers on ordination to the ministry of the Word were presented to the Assembly.

They however did not clarify the position of deaconesses and their ordination/commissioning, or the role of the whole people of God in ordination. The document underlined the centrality of the ministry of the Word to the life of the Church and its basic responsibilities.

There is much ecumenical debate over the meaning and scope of ordination. The Uniting Church has not defined its position in detail but rejects any idea that status and hierarchy are conferred by its ordination services. Ordination must be understood within the ministry of the whole people of God and the Spirit's gifts to all. Ministry is a sharing in the ministry of Christ. Its authority rests on how those called point others to the life of the triune God, revealed by Christ and shared with God's people by the Spirit.

God is the source and goal of our common life, worship,

witness and service. Leadership in the church is a gracious divine gift that embodies, in worship and witness, the justice, mercy and wholeness that come from God alone. These resources sustain us in our daily living, in joy and suffering alike.

Such a ministry of leadership in Christ's name empowers and releases the gifts of God's people in ways that cut across human organisation and institutional church life. That is why the *Basis of Union* speaks of constant reform. As we integrate our catholic, reformed and evangelical heritage and Australian context new forms of institutional life will emerge which by God's grace will facilitate faithful mission, worship and service by the people of the Uniting Church.

Those set apart for the ministry of the Word or deacon bear witness to God's new order, which is always becoming partly visible in new places. That is why we must understand ordination in the Uniting Church as an ordering of ministry that points unmistakably to Christ, but is very flexible and free in the Spirit to take new forms. We understand this ordination to be normally for life.

The Doctrine Commission (*Diaconate*: Minutes of the Fourth Assembly 1985) has a description of ordination (page 77), however it is clear from the replies received to the discussion paper "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*" that members of the church have varied understandings of ordination:

- (a) some want the abolition of ordination and the recognition of baptism/confirmation as the commitment of all to share appropriately in Christ's ministry;
- (b) some seek one ordination for the ministry of the Word only, with a variety of settlements, including some that are specifically diaconal in nature;
- (c) some prefer two ordinations: ordination for ministers of the Word and ordination for deacons/deaconesses. This is the present situation with ministers of the Word and deaconesses;
- (d) some seek many ordinations;
- (e) others favour one ordination with two accreditations. This is the option preferred by the Task Group.

Each of these positions is strongly defended, but as yet there is no sign of a consensus emerging. The Task Group considers that (e) above is the most satisfactory path ahead, for the following reasons.

- One ordination bears witness to the one ministry of Christ and its normative character for all other derived ministries.
- The two accreditations integrate the special ministries of ministry of Word and deacon, and emphasise our conviction that the only practical way to prevent ideas of the superiority of the former creeping

back is to underline the equality of both ministries under Christ.

- Neither ministry is complete without the other, or the other ministries which Christ has given to the body of Christ, but both bear indispensable witness to the fullness of ministry to which we are called. Without a diaconal ministry, the church can overlook the poor and neglect the massive human needs of a broken world. Without a ministry of the Word, the body of Christ is not nurtured and sustained in its nature as gathered community.

In one sense all Christians are witnesses to the Word and committed to service in Christ's name. Yet God continues to call and equip men and women to exercise these ministries in a representative capacity, focussing the implications of each and enabling other Christians to enter into such ministries in suitable ways within their vocation. Without that 'modelling' the responsibility of all becomes the duty of none.

If the Task Group's preferred option is followed, i.e. one ordination with accreditation as either a minister of the Word or a deacon, ordained people of each accreditation could serve in a variety of settlements.

Ministers of the Word may serve in parish settlements, as youth workers, as chaplains etc. Deacons may also serve in a variety of settlements including as chaplains, youth workers and in community agencies. The focus of each ministry would be different. Which accreditation would be appropriate for the person serving in a particular settlement would depend on the nature of the settlement and the education, gifts, graces and sense of call of the ordained person.

This is not a major change from the way settlements are made at present in most synods. However, parishes, committees etc. seeking to call a minister, as well as presbyteries and settlements committees, may need to take very seriously the nature of each settlement, often being more specific than is sometimes the case at present about what the ministry called for in each place is.

This proposal as it affects settlements does not require a heavy bureaucratic superstructure. Indeed all it requires is careful documentation about settlements and ministers - as is already happening in some synods - and a prayerful spirit of discernment among those who wait on the leading of the Holy Spirit in settlement matters.

This approach to ordination and accreditation is not problem free. The church must realise that no reform of structure or order will bring in the kingdom, but this approach has substantial advantages:

- it recognises that overlap between these two major foci of ministry is unavoidable;
- it regularises some of the troubling aspects of settlements in chaplaincies by underlining the importance of personal gifts, experience and preparation for particular kinds of settlement;
- it integrates being and function and avoids sharpening the representative character of each focus of Christ's ministry in such a way that they could be polarised.

This is not ordination to a status, nor does it devalue ministry of the Word. This proposal acknowledges the importance of aligning the two strands of ministry with the variety of functions and office mentioned in the New Testament and early Christian writings.

If it is suggested that we have over-emphasised the place of mission in ministry, we plead guilty. Over-emphasis may be necessary to break out of the strong commitment to the maintenance of the present ordering, which some replies to the "*Vision for Ministry in Australia*" paper demanded, despite the fact that the Assembly has never defined an official position.

We have not foreclosed the discussion about the nature of ordination but have chosen to speak of one ordination which reflects the unity of the triune God. We have also chosen to speak of two strands of ministry (two accreditations) - ministry of Word and ministry of Deacon. Both are gifts of the risen Lord and share with all God's people the great responsibility of pointing to the Saviour.

The church's understanding of ordination and the renewal of the diaconate are two related but distinct issues which need to be determined separately. For this reason the Task Group will present two separate resolutions on these matters (Recommendations 7 and 8).

The Uniting Church needs to receive the gifts of ministry of those called to minister primarily in word and sacrament. The Uniting Church also needs the gifts of those called as deacons to give expression to what it means to embody Christ's authority in service. Word and Service cannot be separated. Nor can they be confused. Both ministries point to and model the ministry of the Word made flesh - Jesus Christ. Both point to and model the Servant of God - Jesus Christ. The Uniting Church needs both to be modelled in its life, to enable the whole people of God to embody more adequately the one ministry of Christ.

3.6.2 The ministry of deacon

The Uniting Church already has an ordained ministry of service - the ordained ministry of deaconess. However, the theological rationale, focus and functions of this ministry have not been clearly defined, resulting in confusion and misunderstanding in the church.

The Uniting Church inherited different understandings of this ministry from the three churches which came into union in 1977.

In some churches the deaconess was involved in a serving ministry among the poor and disadvantaged; in other churches she was a pastoral assistant to the minister of the Word, often preaching and in some cases celebrating the sacraments. Diaconal ministry (the ministry of service) was generally seen as secondary to the ministry of the Word and sacraments. The *Basis of Union* states:

"The Uniting Church recognises that at the time of union many seek a renewal of the diaconate in which men and women offer their time and talents, representatively and on behalf of God's people, in the service of mankind and in the face of changing needs. She will so order her life that she remains open to the possibility that God may call men and women into such a renewed diaconate." (*Basis of Union* #14c).

In 1979 the Assembly declared its intention to "renew the ministry of the Diaconate in terms of section 14c of the *Basis of Union*" (Minutes of the 2nd Assembly 79:22:3a), and reports from the Doctrine Commission which gave a theological rationale for this ministry were presented to the 1979, 1982 and 1985 Assemblies.

In 1985 the Assembly resolved "to establish a renewed Diaconate, to be known as the ministry of Deacon (as defined in the Doctrine Commission's Report of 1985)" (Minutes of the 4th Assembly 85:54:1).

The 1988 Assembly received a report on the implementation of this decision and resolved "that the work of the committee on the responsibilities and functioning of a renewed diaconate has exposed considerations that render its implementation inappropriate at this stage" (Minutes of the 5th Assembly 88:27:3).

The effect of this decision is that the Uniting Church currently has an ordained ministry without a theological rationale, and no accepted statements of its focus and functions. As a result, it is difficult for candidates' committees to deal with applicants who feel God's call to this ministry, for theological educators to prepare candidates for this ministry, and for settlements committees to match ministers and settlements.

Many deaconesses are hurt by the inability of the Assembly to reach agreement on a reshaping of their ministry, especially as other churches in Australia and overseas are moving to renew the diaconate, as the research of Alison McRae, consultant to the Task Group, reveals.

The confusion and misunderstanding of diaconal ministry caused by the Uniting Church's delay in providing a

theological rationale for this ministry cannot be allowed to continue.

Now that ministry of the Word is open to women and men, there is a perception that further attempts to renew diaconal ministry are unnecessary. We do not agree. We want to affirm the fundamental importance of the serving (diaconal) ministry and give it a clearer focus.

The Task Group does not intend to canvass again all the arguments put so cogently by Rev Dr Harry Wardlaw, of the Commission on Doctrine in 1985 (Minutes of the 4th Assembly, pp 73ff.), but rather to extend them in some additional directions.

The importance of deacons is in who they are as well as what they do. The deacon is present in the places where people of all sorts live their everyday lives, as a sign of the presence of God there. Particularly among people who are marginalised, oppressed, suffering, the forgotten, the unlovely, the deacon is a sign of the justice and mercy, judgement and forgiveness, compassion and saving grace, the suffering and victory of God.

Moreover, because the deacon works for the most part outside the institutions of the church, the deacon is a sign for the congregation, scattered as they go about their daily work and ordinary lives, of the presence of God in the world. Together with lay preachers, deacons reflect in the gathered congregation, in a disciplined and informed way, on what it is like to bear witness and what it costs. They work with the ambiguities of witness every day. In response to the deacon's presence the members of the congregation are encouraged to tell their own stories of being God's people at witness, facing the costs and ambiguities, naming the powers and principalities. Together the minister of the Word, the deacon and the people hear the word of God in scripture and wrestle with what it means to be the people of the crucified and risen Lord.

Ordained deacons hold before the church the model of service among those who suffer, and call the members to engage in such service. In their ministry they model Christ the servant. The distinctive function of the deacon is to hold up service as central to all Christian ministry. (Mark 8: 34- 38, Luke 4: 16 - 21, John 13: 3 - 15, Philippians 2: 7, Matthew 20: 26 - 28)

This role is uniquely Christian and has no counterpart in secular organizations. The deacon's mandate is to give embodiment to our Lord's teaching that the greatest shall be servant of all and to lead the church in implementing this teaching. The secular world does not and cannot make sense of this.

Australia is undergoing rapid social change. In that process new groups of hurting and disadvantaged people emerge with bewildering frequency. The needs multiply, but the ability of

the church to meet them does not. In service the church is not simply about trying to meet every human need.

Rather the question must always be asked, "How does this service serve the gospel?". The service to which Christians are called, which the deacon models and of which the deacon is a sign, is itself a sign of the kingdom - present, anticipated and looked-for. It is witness to the inbreaking kingdom of peace and justice, the kingdom foreshadowed in the new community in Christ's blood entered in baptism and celebrated in the Holy Communion, the kingdom which is already and not-yet (*Basis of Union* #3, lines 23 ff).

The deacon brings to bear the integrated understanding of a trained practical theologian, and an informed critique, identifying those areas of service which serve the gospel and opening the eyes of the congregation to what goes on around them, even the limitations of their common life. (Acts 6: 8 - 15)

Yet, the Spirit empowers us for self-forgetful service because we see the face of Christ shining in the face of broken and bewildered people who remind us that all are made in the image of God, regardless of the state of their body, mind and spirit and no matter how hopeless their situation. Such service in the name of Christ reveals the utter graciousness of God's saving activity in Christ. Deacons model and "represent to the church its calling as servant in the world" (*Baptism, Eucharist & Ministry*. WCC Faith & Order Paper No. 111, Chapter III. c. 31).

Deacons in the Uniting Church are called:

- to be, along with the scattered members of the congregation, a sign of the presence of God in the everyday world;
- to be especially aware of the places in the community where people are hurt, disadvantaged, oppressed, or marginalised and to be in ministry with them in ways which reflect the special concern of Jesus for them (Deuteronomy 15: 7 - 11, Matthew 25: 31 - 46);
- to recognise, encourage, develop and release those gifts in God's people which will enable them to share in this ministry of caring, serving, healing, restoring, making peace and advocating justice as they go about their daily lives (Micah 6: 8, Titus 3: 8);
- to serve in the manner of Christ alongside marginalised and impoverished people in solidarity with them as they struggle for human dignity and justice. This ministry of deacon is motivated by a vision of the justice of God which protects and defends the disadvantaged (Isaiah 58: 1 - 12, Isaiah 61: 1 - 3 John 8: 2 - 11, Hebrews 13: 1 - 3);

- to be a sign, in the church and in the community of the kingdom in which all things are made new (Revelation 21: 1 - 7).

Deacons will frequently serve in areas of life which are socially exposed, on the frontiers of the church's activities, in places and among people remote from the experience of ordinary church-goers. Their work will often require them to be vulnerable. They will spend a significant part of their time in places where their presence will be open to misunderstanding. They will be at risk not least from the self-righteous who will condemn or be indifferent. They may not easily find a place within the institutionalised structures of the church. They will be open to discouragement and burnout.

Deacons will need support structures that are light and flexible, that maintain them within the love and care of the church, that sustain without constricting, in loving and supporting community.

Above all deacons will need to be part of a worshipping community in which they both give and receive, encourage and are encouraged, where together with others they drink deeply from the streams of living water which flow from the crucified, risen, ascended Lord, being refreshed, renewed and sustained in love.

Deacons will have a liturgical role appropriate to their distinctive ministry. While primary responsibility for the leadership of congregational worship lies with the minister of the Word and elders, the deacon may for example share in the intercessions for the needs of the world or give the dismissal. While preaching is not the major focus of a deacon's ministry, they may preach from time to time, focussing especially in a prophetic way on the proclamation of justice and the compassion of God (Acts 6: 8 - 15, 8: 26 - 40). The deacon works collegially with the minister of the Word to listen and hear, wrestle with and understand what is needed for the gospel to be proclaimed with power.

Deacons will have authority to preside at the sacraments. They will usually do so in the context of their ministry with broken and marginalised people. They will preside at the celebration of the sacraments within the gathered congregation only in collaboration with the ministerial team and the council of elders.

Many people in the Uniting Church do not need to be convinced of the centrality of service in the life of the Uniting Church. They are already engaged in serving ministries as part of their everyday work (e.g. social workers, teachers, lawyers, prison officers, police officers, administrators, homecare workers etc.) or in voluntary community activities (e.g. meals on wheels, hospital visitors, home tutor scheme, language teachers, providers of foster and respite care etc.) or through the church (visiting the sick, through opportunity shops, helping provide low-cost meals etc.) or in the home. The issue

to be addressed is how these ministries can be affirmed, resourced, nurtured and developed and the people engaged in them sustained in love.

This Task Group believes a renewal of the ministry of deacon will provide models for this ministry and resources for members engaged in it. For the foreseeable future, not every parish will have a deacon. But deacons working in other church or community settlements will be points of reference for parishes/congregations and individuals who wish to take up the ministry of service in a more focussed way and signs for them of the presence of God in everyday life.

It is not proposed that deacons will do all the necessary serving tasks on behalf of the Uniting Church or deprive members or ministers of the Word of opportunities for serving ministries. On the contrary, deacons will constantly remind the church of the serving dimensions of the ministry of Christ, sharing "the essential nature of self-emptying community, offering (themselves) for the healing of pain and suffering, exposing evil and undermining every power, except the power of holy love" (*The Diaconate*, Minutes of the Fourth Assembly 1985, page 77). Deacons point to those areas of community life where new needs are emerging, and by their own radical commitment to ministries with poor and disadvantaged people challenge the church to effective action. Their experience, expertise and spirituality will guide and sustain the church as it moves into new areas of service.

The changing shape of our society indicated briefly in Chapter 2 will require us to develop further our ways of engaging in serving and justice ministry. How do we minister appropriately to people newly marginalised in our society and those who are victims of social change, in a way that is caring of those who are hurt, empowering to those who are crushed or seeking change, and prophetic to the community at large? Deacons will help the church to face these questions and assist in leading congregations into effective mission.

There are already people in the Uniting Church, ordained to the ministry of the Word or deaconess, who carry out radical serving ministries among disadvantaged people. The renewal of the ministry of deacon will allow the serving ministries of the church to take their proper place in the Uniting Church's life and encourage the recognition, education and settlement of people who are called to this ministry.

3.6.2.1 *Some questions commonly asked*

A. Where will deacons work?

Deacons will work in the church and community in ministries of service and justice amongst broken and marginalised people. They may be settled in parishes, presbyteries, synods, or the Assembly, or with a church

agency or program. At times they may be given permission to take up positions in community or government agencies in which their diaconal ministry can be exercised.

B. Who will appoint deacons?

They will be appointed by and held accountable through presbytery to the Uniting Church for their ministry. Settlements, whether church or community based, will be made through the settlements committees of the Uniting Church. There will need to be flexibility in the terms of the settlement.

C. How will a deacon be related to a congregation?

Every deacon will be a member of a congregation. Within this congregation the deacon will play an important part, by constantly reminding the church of its call to a mission of service in the world, sharing with them the joy, pain, and brokenness they encounter in their ministry, and enabling the congregation to wrestle with how to be faithful to the gospel in the specific struggles for justice in their own community and witness in the work place.

D. How many deacons will there be?

After the establishment of the renewed diaconate, all serving deaconesses will be invited to join the renewed diaconate or become ministers of the Word. Serving ministers of the Word will be given an opportunity to be accredited as deacons if they feel God is calling them to this form of ministry.

A committee set up for the purpose will review the education and experience of deaconesses and those ministers of the Word who wish to become deacons, recommending what additional education or formation may be appropriate for each one. It is not yet clear how many people God will call into this ministry.

E. What about people who want to remain deaconesses?

They may do so, but no more people will be ordained as deaconesses.

F. How will deacons be paid?

Some will be paid from government or community resources. Some will be paid by parishes, presbyteries, synods or the Assembly. It will be important to be flexible in making and funding diaconal ministries so that deacons can serve in areas of need and not just where they can be afforded. Parishes may choose to support a deacon in service outside the parish boundaries altogether.

G. How will deacons be supported emotionally and spiritually?

This is a vulnerable ministry. People engaged in it will often find themselves in situations of risk and even of danger to body, spirit and emotions. They will need the strong support of the Uniting Church both through its organisational structures - particularly by presbytery pastoral relations committees - and through the personal ministries of members and congregations, just as deacons will support Christian

people in their serving ministries.

H. How will deacons relate to ministers of the Word and church members?

They will relate as colleagues, supporting and encouraging each other in a community of love. It is not possible to know at the beginning how a ministry will, by God's grace, develop.

What seems likely is that while a deacon may be appointed as the only ordained person settled in a parish, more often a deacon will be part of a team of ordained people in a parish, be related to several parish teams or be appointed by a presbytery and related to a presbytery team.

I. What is the distinction between deacons and ministers of the Word?

The distinction lies in the focus of their ministries and in their training and formation.

The ministry of the minister of the Word is launched from the presence of God in the gathered congregation where people worship, know themselves loved and forgiven, are nourished in the faith, share in the fellowship of God's people, cry out to God for themselves and others and are sent out in mission together with their minister of the Word. In preaching, sacraments and pastoral care God's reconciling work in Christ is declared and celebrated. In these powerful evangelising acts people are called to faith and sustained in it as they go out to share it and live it.

The minister of the Word shares in this rhythm of coming and going from the gathered congregation but beginning in the gathered congregation.

The ministry of the deacon is launched from the presence of God in the community among disadvantaged people. This ministry both challenges and empowers the church for service. In the community the deacon encounters not only the powerlessness and despair, the joy and resilience of the people, but the great loving and saving acts of God through the Holy Spirit, healing, restoring, renewing, giving hope and life.

The deacon recognises, names, embodies and mediates the reconciling and saving power of God. The deacon meets the people of God in their work and life in the everyday world as well as being in places and among people where the people of God rarely go. The deacon shares the rhythm of Christian life coming and going from the gathered congregation but beginning in the community.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to have the two ministries distinctly separated. They have different starting points, different responsibilities in the congregation and different emphases. However, their unity in diversity is a sign of the organic nature of the church, reflects the loving

relationship of the persons of the Trinity and is a sign of the one ministry of Christ to which all baptised people are called. Many ministers of the Word will find themselves in serving roles in the community. Many deacons will find themselves leading worship. Indeed each ministry would be incomplete without elements of the other, for both are part of the one ministry of Christ.

The presence of these two complementary, overlapping but distinguishable ministries, related but not in a hierarchy, will encourage all the people of God to recognise their own gifts in ministry, value, develop and use them, to the glory of God and in the service of God's mission in the world. They will be encouraged to recognise the gifts of others and work together in the interdependence implied in the organic images the Bible uses to speak about the church: 'body of Christ', 'olive tree', 'vine', 'God's building', and the unity implied in images like 'bride of Christ', 'holy nation'.

Conclusion

The Task Group has been convinced that flexible patterns are needed to revitalise the historic ministry of deacon. The church needs deacons who are called and gifted by Christ to embody what service means so that the distinctive gifts of this ministry are made clear. They witness to the presence of God in every part of life. They bear authentic witness to Christ the servant.

Diaconal ministry is affirmed in the *Basis of Union*; two Assemblies have voted in favour of renewing the diaconate. There is widespread ecumenical evidence for the renewal of the diaconate. The Uniting Church has a number of people experienced in diaconal ministry and is accepting candidates for education for this form of ministry. The mission context in Australia requires that the church offer leadership in service and justice.

Our proposals are not mandatory in the sense that they impose a new ministry on those who see no need for it. Rather the Task Group's proposals are permissive and liberating. They provide a framework for the development of ministries of service under the leading of the Holy Spirit. They affirm the call of deaconesses, build on their experience and vision, and give them possibilities for new kinds of partnership with other ministries.

We hope the church will permit this called group of men and women to exercise their ministry in a wider framework and contribute to the ecumenical renewal of the ministry of Christ.

3.6.3 *The ministry of the Word*

As the report indicates above, all ministry is rooted in the ministry of

"Jesus who announced the sovereign grace of God whereby the poor in spirit could receive the Father's love. He himself, in his life and death, made the

response of humility, obedience and trust which God had long sought in vain. In raising him to live and reign God confirmed and completed the witness which Jesus bore to him on earth, he re-asserted his claim over the whole of his creation, he pardoned sinners, and made in Jesus a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love. To God in Christ men are called to respond in faith. To this end God has sent forth his Spirit that men may trust him as their Father." (*Basis of Union* #3);

"The church derives its very existence and its calling to witness from Christ himself, who comes, addresses, and deals with men in and through the news of his completed work. Christ who is present when he is preached among men is the Word of God who acquits the guilty, who gives life to the dead and who brings into being what otherwise could not exist. Through human witness in word and action, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ reaches out to command men's attention and awaken their faith; he calls them into the fellowship of his sufferings, to be the disciples of a crucified Lord; in his own strange way he constitutes, rules and renews them as his church." (*Basis of Union* #5 N.B. With regard to gender specific language the Basis of Union reflects accepted usage at the time it was written.)

All members of the church are linked to Christ by faith, and through their baptism become part of the body of Christ. They are engaged to become Christ's servants and to confess their faith in Christ crucified. The Holy Spirit endows members of the church with a variety of gifts to equip them for service. All these ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ (see *Basis of Union* #5).

From among these members the church believes God calls out some men and women "to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, and to exercise pastoral care so that all members of the church may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in his church." These members who are called ministers of the Word are set apart by ordination (*Basis of Union* #14a).

The ministry of the Word like the ministry of all members of the church finds its source and model in the ministry of Christ. It seeks to point people to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and to remind all baptised people of their calling to bear witness to Christ.

Ministers of the Word are bearers of the tradition which derives from Christ and the apostles. As such they are required to commit themselves to study the scriptures so as to be able to bear faithful witness to Christ who sustains and nourishes the Christian community through the preaching of the Word and the celebration of the sacraments. This ministry of preaching, leading in worship and pastoral care

is essential for the building up of the whole Body of Christ so that they may exercise their varied ministries in the world.

However, being sent in the tradition of the apostles also means being endowed by the Spirit and sent to bear witness to Christ among those who have not yet apprehended the grace of God in Jesus Christ. The Task Group draws the attention of the church to the missionary situation in which the church in Australia now lives (see Chapter 2 above). Most people in Australia have not heard the good news of the graciousness and justice of God in Christ.

The Task Group believes more ministers of the Word must be set free in more flexible structures to pioneer new forms of ministry and congregational life. The vast majority of all ministerial settlements at present are in parishes. The church must find new kinds of settlements in which more ministers are set free, (and yet held accountable by the church), to minister more explicitly outside our present Uniting Church institutions, thus making plain the apostolic and missional implications of their calling.

This kind of flexibility was already envisaged in the *Basis of Union* (#14, last paragraph):

"The Uniting Church recognises that the type and duration of ministries to which men and women are called vary from time to time and place to place, and that in particular she comes into being in a period of re-consideration of traditional forms of ministry."

The Task Group hopes the church will push to the limits the permission it already has through the constitution, regulations and synod by-laws to develop new forms and types of ministry including new kinds of mission settlements for ministers of the Word.

Such work beyond the parish church is not an extra, but an indispensable part of partnership with Uniting Church members in their secular vocations. Councils of the church will need to collaborate in order to find the financial resources to support those ministers whom the Spirit calls to these frontier ministries. Some of these new settlements will require appropriate further education for ministers.

The Task Group recognises that there is a variety of theologies of ministry in the Uniting Church, and affirms that variety. At the same time the Task Group believes that the traditional roles of the minister of the Word (*Regulations* 2.3.10) need to be supplemented by encouraging more ministers to focus ministry in the following areas, so as to bring out the missionary nature of their call.

3.6.3(a) Minister of the Word as evangelist

God addresses people through Jesus Christ, the Word, set forth in the preaching of the gospel and celebration of sacraments. We are called and re-called

to faith and obedience by these strong evangelising acts. In pastoral care this ministry puts people in touch with Jesus Christ as their source of life, calling them to repentance, faith and service.

This continues the apostolic witness to Christ, inspiring the whole church for mission and evangelism in both its local context and in the whole creation.

The Task Group believes that the church must equip, encourage and resource some ministers to model for the church new and creative ways of evangelism among those who do not believe.

3.6.3(b) Minister of the Word as equipper

When the relation of church and creation is rightly understood, ministry is directed both to building up the people of God as a sign of the Kingdom's presence and also to transforming the creation through their daily life.

Ministers of the Word bear witness to this and model ways in which this is carried out, because of their interaction with members of their parish/congregation and community. They set forth the true identity of the church as a community of grace called and sent in mission by God. All baptised disciples share Christ's high priestly ministry. They seek to grow into their call to be a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2: 9).

Ministers of the Word help all members in the task of equipping people for the varieties of this service, and reminding them of the divine resources the Spirit gives to complete such tasks.

3.6.3(c) Minister of the Word as pioneer

As pioneers, ministers of the Word are called to penetrate to the heart of our catholic and apostolic heritage, and to the heart of God's world today as did the prophets of old.

They open the written Word so that its call to new beginnings is unmistakable. It becomes the living Word of Christ when it is translated and embodied in Australian society by pioneering ventures in mission, justice, liturgy, evangelism and service, which clothe the gospel with new forms.

Such initiatives may be within or beyond the life of congregations. Sometimes they will be ecumenical and community-based and not simply under Uniting Church control. Members of congregations too are engaged in pioneering ministries. The minister of the Word encourages, resources, enables the church as a whole in

pioneering as well as being themselves pioneers.

Ministers of the Word must have qualities of discernment, wisdom and humility if they are to model Christ's presence without using their authority from God in an authoritarian and self-centred way. In such a spirit, they ensure that the gifts of the baptised are respected, affirmed and developed through appropriate forms of service, both within the church as institution and in the wider community as a sign for the whole creation.

Such leadership in no way diminishes the responsibilities of every member to embody Christ's pattern of leadership through service. The Uniting Church is committed to remaining open to recognise new forms of this leadership and to order them appropriately in the Spirit.

All are needed for the fullness of Christ's ministry to be visible in the various parts of the Uniting Church. They must be both distinctive and complementary if Christ is to have proper place in our common life and mission.

3.6.4 Community ministers

The Task Group considers that there are three groups of people whom the Uniting Church should enable to exercise ministries in limited settlements.

First, there are ordained ministers of the Word or deaconesses who are not in settlement, and who are employed locally. They could be made eligible for limited settlement in local parishes. This could be achieved with little change to current regulations and synod by-laws.

We recommend that such changes be made. In addition we wish to remind parishes and presbyteries that the Assembly regulations are less restrictive than some assume and full use of the regulations should be made in order to do what they already permit.

Second, there may be people who have undertaken theological study equivalent to that undertaken by candidates for an ordained ministry. Where such study has been undertaken successfully, and where the person has a sense of call which has been tested and confirmed by the church, such persons could be ordained into limited ministries.

We recommend that this possibility be implemented.

However, there is a third possibility which the Task Group wishes to promote. Experience in many other churches (see *Non-stipendiary ministries: Third report*, prepared by Rev Dr John Brown for the Assembly Standing Committee, 1988 and distributed for discussion in the church) has underlined the value of publicly recognising the gifts for leadership that are already present in local congregations.

We consider it to be desirable that such gifts be developed by educating such leaders for further responsibility in a ministry that is recognised by and accountable to the presbytery and leads towards ordination.

People who may come into this category are, for example, retirees who are supported by superannuation or pension, people with independent means, people who are able to exercise a profession or run a business on a part-time basis, or a person whose spouse is able to support him/her.

This is a very valuable provision for isolated situations remembering that people may be isolated not only by geography but by language, ethnicity and culture. However, the ministry we propose calling Community ministry is not just an expedient to provide isolated or hard-to-settle congregations with a ministry of Word, sacraments, pastoral care and service. It is not just for congregations unable to finance a fully stipended ministry. It is a recognition of the experience of missionary churches in many places that indigenous leadership is a vital part of the growth towards being able to communicate effectively within a local context.

Our investigations in the Task Group reminded us how varied Australia is and how much we need the insight of those with deep roots in their local community, particularly in the various minority cultures and ethnic communities, if we are to embody the gospel effectively and in an understandable way. There are Uniting Church members who have obvious gifts for a ministry which offers both leadership and equipping of the local community through preaching and pastoral care. While experiencing a call to ministry, these people have not felt called to ministry of Word or deacon on a full-time basis.

However, they may feel called and be willing to offer a 'tent-making' (Acts 18: 3, 1 Corinthians 9: 11 - 15) ministry, continuing to support themselves while offering a part-time ministry of a particular kind in their local community.

The criteria for selecting candidates for this ministry shall include:

- a sense of call to this ministry;
- maturity in and understanding of the Christian faith;
- membership of the Uniting Church;
- experience and acceptance in leadership of the Uniting Church;
- respect in the general community;
- ability to teach and communicate;
- exemplary character;
- given to hospitality;
- acceptance of this person's ministry by the local congregation;
- understanding and acceptance of the ethos and polity of the Uniting Church;
- openness to new ideas;

- ability to lead in mission and service in the community;
- ability to undertake the required course of study.

We recognise that there is a risk attached to this proposal. It might lead to insularity or to an incapacity for the word of challenge and judgment to be issued because of the social bonds existing within that community. It is also possible that, without adequate oversight from the presbytery, persons favoured by only sections of the community might be allowed to exercise a ministry with the potential for division.

Not every parish will be deemed by the presbytery to be suitable for the settlement of a community minister for any of a wide variety of reasons. The presbytery will need to exercise gifts of discernment with care. Nevertheless, we feel that the advantages of the proposal outweigh the risks.

Some of these advantages are:

- first, the kinds of opportunities that good quality local leadership can give to a congregation are seen by us to warrant some risk;
- second, it is our confidence that with adequate oversight by the local presbytery the risk can be minimised;
- third, we do not believe that in the experience of the Uniting Church, these risks have been eliminated in traditional forms of ordained ministry. There the added risk of little knowledge or understanding of the ethos of that local community exists.

After appropriate and careful selection procedures involving parish, presbytery and synod within guidelines laid down by the Assembly, such people will be appointed to minister in their local community for six months on a probationary basis. After this probation presbytery will determine whether they are to be commissioned as a candidate for the ministry of community minister. As with traditional forms of ordained ministry the precise nature and terms of each ministry will be determined by consultation and may vary from place to place.

Nevertheless, the emphasis of the ministry will be to point the local congregation and community to the living Christ through a leadership that will normally include preaching and pastoral care.

The commissioned candidate for the ministry of community minister will continue a process of distance education (see Chapter 4) until they have reached the standard of preparation laid down by the Ministerial Education Commission for community ministers. They will then be ordained to ministry in Christ's church and accredited as minister of the Word or deacon, depending on the nature of the minister's call and training and the nature of the settlement.

While the depth and extensiveness of this preparation for ordination should be appropriate to the accreditation being sought, it should also be appropriate to the particular and localised nature of that ministry and take account of the gifts, graces, and experience of the candidate. During the period of preparation, the community minister would be under the pastoral care of the presbytery and supervised by a minister of the Word or deacon appointed by the presbytery.

As an ordained person the community minister would administer the sacraments to the congregation(s) with whom he/she is related in this settlement. Before ordination, it is anticipated that the presbytery will give the candidate authority to preside at the sacraments with the people with whom he/she is in ministry, as soon as he/she has completed the appropriate course of study laid down by the synod.

After ordination the community minister would be required to undertake continuing education in the same way as other ordained people.

While community ministry is designed as a part-time, unstipended ministry, it is expected that questions of allowances for travel, other expenses, and perhaps part-stipend will be part of the negotiation of the terms of settlement.

It is possible that a community minister who has been ordained into a settlement in a particular locality may be eligible to exercise a similar community ministry in another location if they are requested to work elsewhere by presbytery or synod. However, given the criteria for selection as a candidate for this ministry, such an occurrence would be rare.

Should a person who has been ordained as a community minister wish to enter the traditional ministry of Word or deacon, further education and formation would be required, their nature to be determined by the Ministerial Education Commission.

Please note: the Task Group is

- NOT recommending the ordination of people who have had no theological education or formation;
- NOT recommending that people without appropriate theological preparation and formation should be allowed to preside at the sacraments;
- NOT designing a back-door, easy way for people to enter traditional ordained ministry;
- NOT recommending that someone attempt to take up full-time settlement in a busy parish, work for a living, do full-time study and be responsible for a family;
- NOT providing a way for parishes to put pressure on ministers to accept a reduced stipend and conditions.

Chapter Four

Theological education by extension... (Distance education)

Rather, what we have tried to do, building on the experience of other churches, is to design a form of ministry that is flexible, adaptable and able to provide care for people in isolated communities using the resources of local leadership.

In a society comprised of sub-groups, the fostering of indigenous leadership from within these sub-groups must be a central priority for the church. We need to equip and encourage leadership from within different ethnic communities, socio-economic sub-groups, occupational categories and generations.

Such a missional priority demands diversity and flexibility in educational and formation processes. Ministry formation while a person is engaged in ministry "on the ground" has much to commend it. We wish to encourage those engaged in the development of theological education by extension. Many in our churches are excited by these proposals. The responses to "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*" made that clear.

The Ministerial Education Commission has agreed in principle to the establishment of a program of theological education by extension. The Task Group is convinced this proposal will meet with warm acceptance by many members of the Uniting Church. It is the opinion of this Task Group that development of an effective program of distance education is essential for the implementation of the recommendations of this report.

When students attend educational institutions, the relationships and experiences built up over a number of years can be a rich source of identity and personal growth into Christ. It will be essential for careful attention to be given to overcoming the isolation of the proposed distance education, by structuring into the courses significant face-to-face experiences of formal and informal learning shared with teachers and other students so that appropriate formation can occur.

The Task Group is particularly concerned that such a program offer a diversity of courses at a number of levels with a variety of educational styles, so that formation for lay as well as ordained ministries may occur through the program.

Chapter Five

Some creative approaches to ministry...

5.1 Ministry in congregations with fewer traditional resources

It is clear from consultations held by the Task Group in each synod and some presbyteries and from responses to the discussion document "*A Vision for Ministry in Australia*" that ministry in communities with few traditional resources is an important issue. This is true whether the apparent scarcity of

resources arises from geographic location, cultural difference, language, poverty, limited education, social dislocation, etc. In some of these communities the hidden diversity of ministry resources may need to be recognised so that the distinctive nature of their mission can be taken up.

There are a number of suggestions and recommendations in this report which, when taken together with Assembly regulations and synod by-laws, can help parishes and presbyteries make flexible responses to the circumstances of ministry in their congregations. What follows is a summary only. The items are not listed in any order of preference.

5.1.1 A community minister may provide a part-time ministry in a small congregation.

5.1.2 A lay pastor as described in this report may provide a short-term ministry.

5.1.3 The elder or elders may provide pastoral care while lay preachers conduct worship from time to time.

5.1.4 A minister of the Word or deacon may be funded by a synod, presbytery or another parish for a limited period to help some members of a congregation develop the gifts and skills necessary for the mission and ministry of that congregation.

5.1.5 A partner in mission may become part of the congregation.

5.1.6 A "patrol" ministry may be instituted in which a minister of the Word or deacon resources scattered congregations supporting the ministries of the people - elders, lay preachers, partners in mission. The 'patrol' area may be a number of suburbs, an area of rural Australia, a number of communities where people from the same language or cultural group live.

5.1.7 An ecumenical ministry may be appropriate, making use of one of the forms of agreement now available for regularising such arrangements.

5.1.8 A number of congregations made up of people from different language and cultural groups may form one parish where one or more ministers of the Word or deacon work with elders, lay preachers, lay pastors or community ministers from all the constituent groups.

5.1.9 The gifts of the people of the congregation may be recognised and released using resources from lay education institutions, particularly theological education by extension.

5.1.10 A congregation where a number of people work in the same occupational field may focus ministry on issues of common concern.

5.1.11 An ordained person may provide a limited ministry.

5.2 Proposals which introduce some flexibility into stipendiary issues

5.2.1 The Regulations of the Uniting Church are less restrictive than some believe. Presbyteries should take the opportunities for flexibility that the *Regulations* already offer, e.g. 2.4.7c (limited exercise of functions of ordained ministry); 2.5.1g (minister in association); 2.5.2 (limited settlement).

5.2.2 The by-laws of some synods already make provision for part-time settlements for lay pastors in certain circumstances. Some allow for the appointment of a local person as a lay pastor. Other synods may choose to take up these suggestions.

5.2.3 The three community ministry proposals make possible ordained ministry of a non- or part-stipended kind.

5.3 Presiding at the sacraments

In *Regulations* 3.4.4(1) it charges the presbytery with the responsibility of making "provision for persons other than ministers of the Word to preside at the sacraments where, in the opinion of the Presbytery, circumstances so require".

A number of people who are not ordained exercise ministries in which an argument can be made for giving them permission to preside at the sacraments with the people with whom they are in ministry.

Lay hospital chaplains, for example, are often deeply involved with patients, family and the staff. It may be appropriate to celebrate the sacrament of the Lord's Supper together. It is not appropriate to bring in a stranger to preside when the pastoral relationship has already been established at a deep level. While individual lay chaplains can already be given permission by the presbytery to preside at the sacraments, an argument can be made for permission to be part of the accreditation for that ministry.

It may be appropriate for lay chaplains in schools and tertiary institutions to celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion with students and staff with whom they are in ministry, when an ordained person would enter the group as a stranger.

Other examples could be cited. We suggest the Commission on Doctrine be asked to investigate the matter and prepare a statement for presentation to the Assembly Standing Committee.

Conclusion...

The task given to the Task Group on the Ministry of the Church was to study, consult, and investigate patterns of ministry in Australia and overseas and envision elements in the emerging shape of ministry in the next ten years.

We have been encouraged in this task by the interest and enthusiasm of large numbers of people in the church, especially at the grass roots, and by the many evidences of the energy of the Holy Spirit at work in congregations large and small as they witness to the saving love of God in Jesus in the places where they live and work.

This report proposes a range of light, flexible structures which offer congregations and individuals a variety of ways of participating in God's mission. In this environment the church's ministry can respond to the diversity of Australian society in ways that are creative and faithful to the gospel.

Then, it is our hope that the people of the Uniting Church will be better equipped to enter into Christ's life and mission in the world, united in one fellowship of love, service, suffering and joy in the power of the one Spirit.

Recommendations

The Assembly resolves:

1. that the report be received;

Moved
Seconded
2. that congregations be encouraged to develop, encourage and recognise new forms of ministry through which members can use their gifts in mission, recognising "that every member of the church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant" (*Basis of Union #13*);

Moved
Seconded
3. that all employing bodies within the Uniting Church be urged to recognise the important contribution employees make to the ministry and mission of the Uniting Church, and to provide appropriate pastoral care and opportunities for personal and professional development;

Moved
Seconded
4. that the criteria (i) - (xi) in section 3.5 (Specified ministries) of the report be the basis on which the Assembly shall designate a form of ministry as a specified ministry;

Moved
Seconded
5. (a) that the ministry of lay preacher be designated a specified ministry of the Uniting Church;
 (b) that councils of elders as well as those involved in youth ministry be encouraged to seek out people who have the gifts and graces necessary for the specified ministry of lay preacher, and to recommend them for training and accreditation as lay preachers;

Moved
Seconded
6. that the ministry of youth worker be designated a specified ministry of the Uniting Church;

Moved
Seconded
7. (a) that the value of the ministry given by lay pastors in the recent history of the church be recognised;
 (b) that the ministry of lay pastor be designated as a specified ministry of the Uniting Church;
 (c) that the responsibility for the recruitment, initial education, continuing education, formation and approval of lay pastors be vested in a synod body;
 (d) that the settlement of lay pastors shall be as determined by the synod (ref: *Regulations 2.7.21*);
 (e) that synods be recommended to pay the same stipend and allowances to lay pastors as to ordained persons;
 (f) that the role of lay pastor be recognised as essentially a short-term one and that a lay pastor should not

normally continue in this ministry beyond ten years, provided that this condition shall not apply retrospectively;

- (g) that the minimum term of a particular appointment will usually be three years with annual review thereafter;
- (h) that lay pastors are members of presbytery and under the pastoral care of presbytery;
- (i) that entrance qualifications for lay pastors be standardised by the Ministerial Education Commission in consultation with appropriate synod bodies, having due regard for personal qualities and Christian experience as well as academic attainment;
- (j) that theological education by extension (distance education) be recommended as one of the appropriate modes for the continuing education of lay pastors.

Moved

Seconded

- 8. (a) that the diaconate be renewed in the terms outlined in the report on the Ministry of the Church (section 3.6.2);
- (b) that selection procedures for applicants for the ministry of deacon follow those laid down in *Regulations* 2.2.1 - 2.2.15;
- (c) that the Ministerial Education Commission be requested to develop guidelines for an appropriate ordinand course for the ministry of deacon.

Moved

Seconded

- 9. (a) that one ordination to the ordained ministry in Christ's church be recognised, and that ministers so ordained be accredited to the ministry of deacon or ministry of the Word;
- (b) that the Commission on Liturgy be requested to prepare orders of service which implement these decisions.

Moved

Seconded

- 10. that the Commission on Doctrine be requested to investigate the issues raised by the proposal in section 5.3 of the report to allow some lay people to preside at the sacraments with the people with whom they are in ministry, and to present a report on these matters to the Assembly Standing Committee in 1992;

Moved

Seconded

- 11. (a) that the ministry of community minister, as outlined in the report on the Ministry of the Church (section

3.6.4), be established within the Uniting Church;

- (b) that candidates for community ministry after appropriate selection and training, be ordained to ministry in Christ's church, and community ministers so ordained be accredited to the ministry of deacon or the ministry of the Word;
- (c) that the Ministerial Education Commission be requested to develop guidelines for an appropriate ordinand course for candidates to community ministry, including significant elements of theological education by extension.

Moved

Seconded

12. that the Assembly Standing Committee be requested to establish a Committee on Ministries, accountable to the Assembly Standing Committee to:

- (i) oversee the development of the ministry of deacon;
- (ii) oversee the development of the ministry of youth worker;
- (iii) oversee the development of the ministry of community minister;
- (iv) consider the designation of other ministries as specified ministries and bring recommendations to the Standing Committee;
- (iv) consider whether such a Committee on Ministries should become a permanent part of the structure of the Uniting Church and bring a recommendation to the Seventh Assembly.

Moved

Seconded

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