

Title: Future Directions for Diaconal Ministry
Origin: The Working Group on Diaconal Ministry

That the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services recommend to the Executive of the General Council that:

- a) the findings from this report be referred to the Joint Ministry Working Group for information;
- b) the following guidelines for “The Guidelines for Presbytery-Recognized Ministries” be implemented:
 - i. enable candidates to be commissioned to a Presbytery-Recognized Ministry, whether or not the agency has a covenanted relationship with a Presbytery;
 - ii. ensure that Diaconal Ministers receive oversight and support from Presbytery when working with agencies outside of the United Church of Canada and;
 - iii. make changes to reflect requirements associated with Provisional Calls;
- c) statistical data related to the initial ministry positions of Diaconal Ministers be collected and reviewed on a three-year cycle;
- d) the Program Coordinator, Ministry Recruitment has a thorough understanding of Diaconal Ministry, and the educational requirements and available programs of preparation for Diaconal Ministry;
- e) resources for Discernment (including resources for both individuals and committees) include descriptions of the categories of ministry with sufficient detail for all the options available to those exploring a call to ministry;
- f) Pastoral Relations handbooks (for Joint Needs Assessment Committees and Joint Search Committees or equivalent) be reviewed with attention to the level of description for each category of ministry;
- g) educational resources for Presbytery representatives (for Joint Needs Assessment Committees and Joint Search Committees or equivalent) be developed to deepen their understanding of the categories of ministry and;
- h) A review be undertaken to determine whether the lack of a stipend or salary during field placements is an impediment for individuals entering Diaconal Ministry.

Report

The Working Group on Diaconal Ministry is mandated by the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services to:

- consult with Diaconal Ministers and the Diakonia of the United Church of Canada (DUCC) to determine the most appropriate mechanism to specifically support and encourage diaconal ministry within the life and work of the church;
- report on the historic and current practice of diaconal ministry in the United Church;
- make recommendations related to the future directions for diaconal ministry within the United Church.

Three members of Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services (PC-MEPS) were nominated: Tracy Fairfield (diaconal), Harry Brown (lay), and Lynda Gow (diaconal) and resourced by Joe Ramsay and Angie Musonza. The initial meeting was in June 2011 by conference call. This group also met nine times between June 2011 and GC41. The mandate of the Working Group was extended to June 2013. As of GC41 two of the members of the Working Group had completed their terms and two new members were nominated: Debra

Kigar (diaconal), Lorna King (DLM). The current group is Lynda Gow, Debra Kigar and Lorna King, resourced by Joe Ramsay and Angie Musonza. This group has had six meetings between Fall 2012 and Spring 2013.

The process which the working group used included:

- Sharing of member's own insights,
- Developing a survey shared with the church,
- A series of consultations
- Analysing results and consolidation into a report.

The following report is organized in three parts that reflect the mandate of the Working Group:

- A) Report on Historic and Current Practice and Current of Diaconal Ministry
- B) Consultation with Diaconal Ministers and Diakonia of the United Church of Canada (DUCC)
- C) Recommendations for Future Directions

A) Report on Historic and Current Practice and Current of Diaconal Ministry

Review of historical documents

A primary document considered by the working group was the Statement of Vision, which was adopted by DUCC at its April 2009 gathering. The significance of this document in defining the role and identity of Diaconal Ministers warrants its inclusion in full:

God calls us to diaconal ministry.
The gospel of Jesus invites all to this ministry:
to offer compassion and accompaniment,
to work for liberation and justice,
to act as advocates of creative transformation.

Diaconal ministry, as a recognized order, is rooted
within our faith tradition and history,
and it is continued and embodied,
in an ecumenical, world-wide community.

This vocation is a journey,
involving Spirit-filled enrichment and learning,
requiring humble offering of self,
demanding prayerful discernment and courageous risking,
exercising visionary and communal leadership,
promising joy and meaning,
and daring to imagine God's abundance,
in a world of love and respect.
Through education, service, social justice, and pastoral care,
diaconal ministry in The United Church of Canada,
encourages a growing faith,

speaks truth to power,
seeks mutual empowerment,
proclaims prophetic hope,
nurtures life-giving community,
fosters peaceful, right relationship,
within the church and the whole of creation,
wherever the Spirit may lead.

Information was collected on diaconal ministry from various denominations in the United States and Canada. This research assisted with identifying differences and similarities among the various denominations.

The working group also reviewed the historical timeline for diaconal ministry within the United Church. The following is an abbreviated summary of this history which may or may not express the many struggles and challenges experienced through the years:

- Diaconal ministry has its roots within Christian scriptures; Stephen and six others were appointed to ensure that the widows were treated equally within the early Jesus community.
- The word *diakonia* means service. Acts of service to which all were called to strengthen the early community included teaching, baptism preparation, visiting the poor, sick, and imprisoned and preaching.
- The diaconate came to an end by the 600's and it was not till the 1800's that it was revived again in Europe.
- Deaconesses first arrived in Canada with the Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregational churches in the late 1800's.
- At Church Union in 1925, deaconesses and women workers were sent to mission fields within Canada, overseas through the Women's Missionary Society, and others worked in congregations. Deaconesses responded to the needs of the church and the world.
- By the 1960s, laymen wishing to serve the church in positions similar to deaconesses were named certified churchmen.
- During the "boom" years of our church in the 1950-60's, deaconesses were in great demand among congregations interested in Christian Education, and deaconesses became ex-officio members of presbytery in 1964.
- In the early 1970's, the church merged the Deaconess Order and Certified Churchmen to establish the order of Commissioned Ministers.
- In 1980, Commissioned Ministers became part of a single Order of Ministry along with Ordained Ministers.
- The early 1980's was a time of forming diaconal identity. Deep concern was expressed at losing the roots of diakonia with the word commissioning; this resulted in a renaming. Commissioned Ministers chose the name Diaconal Minister and decided not to seek ordination.
- At the same time, in response to changing times in both church and society, Commissioned Ministers were renamed Diaconal Ministers.
- In the early 1980s, the General Council created a Committee on Diaconal Ministry (CDM) and an association of Diaconal Ministers was formed by the diaconal constituency (DUCC).
- For the past 30 years, upon being commissioned to diaconal ministry, Diaconal Ministers were subject to the process of Transfer and Settlement. In response to the needs of the church, many Diaconal Ministers were settled into positions normally held by Ordained Ministers.

- As of 2012 General Council records indicate that there are 280 Diaconal Ministers, and of those 127 are working in the church, about 80% of Diaconal Ministers serve in congregations, and 10% in community ministries. Those in congregations are responsible for worship, education and pastoral care with approximately 43% being the only paid accountable minister in the pastoral charge.

Historical practices – Identity

Diaconal Ministers identify with a perspective of ministry more fully expressed within the Diaconal Ministry Vision Statement found in an earlier part of this report. Diaconal Ministry is more than function; it is more than what diaconal ministers do.

This is an issue because the function of many Diaconal Ministers is very similar to Ordained Ministers and Designated Lay Ministers. Many people may wonder why there is not a harmonization of the streams of ministry. Talking about identity and perspective of ministry by Diaconal Ministers is one way that difference is expressed.

Words used from both the survey and our consultations with DUCC to express a diaconal perspective of ministry are:

- a commitment to justice – an involvement with activities of justice and love in the church setting, in the immediate community and in the wider world; to accompany those and learn with those who are on the fringes;
- valuing diversity;
- being rooted in community and developing community;
- a strong commitment to teaming and mutuality which includes a non-hierarchical style of ministry;
- responding to the needs of the church through the years;
- being pioneers and on the forefront of change, being on ‘the creative edge’;
- being rooted in the innovative and daring work of deaconesses of the past;
- being connected by a vision of Jesus’ ministry of compassion and justice and care;
- being inclusive.

While these characteristics are not exclusive to diaconal ministry, they are characteristics explicitly associated with a diaconal identity and approach to the practice of ministry.

Networking

An association for Diaconal Ministers was formed in 1983 with permission from the General Council office: *Diakonia of the United Church of Canada* (DUCC). Most Diaconal Ministers belong to DUCC, which meets on a bi-yearly basis for education and networking. A strong communication network bonds this group together. It relies on committed volunteer leadership – diaconal ministers who are already working in full-time ministry. There are yearly membership fees. Through this association the United Church diaconal community links with the worldwide organizations of Diaconal Ministers and deaconesses. The General Council Office pays the membership fees in these organizations. A newsletter – *Diaconal News* – is produced by DUCC

and is distributed to all Diaconal Ministers with the assistance and support of the General Council Office.

Very recently a staff person, Sharilynn Upsdell (diaconal), has been employed part time by DUCC to provide contact and informational liaison between the DUCC Coordinating Group and MEPS; monitor General Council Executive minutes; to inform DUCC of actions regarding diaconal ministry; to maintain a list of Diaconal Ministers serving on General Council committees.

Advocacy for diaconal ministry

Presently advocacy is carried out in the same way that it is for all ministry personnel and other employees of our church. Historically there were committees for distinctive ministry groups, including Committees on Diaconal Ministry, Designated Lay Ministry and Women in Ministry within the former Ministry and Personnel Division. In 2003 these committees were concluded with the establishment of the Permanent Committee on Ministry and Employment Policies and Services. Policies and issues pertaining to Diaconal Ministry are the work of the PCMEPS. Two Diaconal Ministers are currently serving as members of this permanent committee. In the current triennium, there are 35 Diaconal Ministers serving on various committees and task groups of the General Council.

B) Consultation with Diaconal Ministers and Diakonia of the United Church of Canada (DUCC)

Two consultations with members of DUCC (Diakonia United Church of Canada) Coordinating Cluster (Executive) included:

- Linda Ervin (Red Deer, AB)
- Roland Legge (Cochrane, Ontario)
- Ann Naylor (Winnipeg)
- Christine Dudley (Kimberly, BC) – not part of the Coordinating Cluster

The initial meeting focused on naming the skills and gifts that Diaconal Ministers offer the church:

- social engagement/ service/ social analysis;
- global network;
- personal growth/awareness/partnership ;
- calling out the gifts of others;
- empowerment/ group process/ consensus;
- collegial support/ intentional integration;
- a feminist/ liberationist voice.

When asked how diaconal ministry might be supported and encouraged within the United Church and key challenges that need to be addressed, the DUCC Executive responded:

- more awareness is needed about diaconal ministry by Conference Personnel Ministers, presbytery leaders and others in key leadership positions in the United Church of Canada. More up-to-date resources are required on diaconal ministry. (e.g. a 1 - 800 number)
- a stronger link is needed with the Centre for Christian Studies, the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre and church structures.
- there is a perception at times that diaconal ministry is a special interest group and also an easy

way into ministry.

- the exclusion of Diaconal Ministers from some ecumenical chaplaincies – for example only Ordained Ministers are eligible to be considered by the Canadian Military and Correctional Services Canada.
- more recognition of non-congregational and non-church ministries is needed - recognizing non-church ministries and including ministries where ministers are self-employed or work for profit-making companies, an awareness of the unique nature of diaconal ministry in areas of facilitating the ministry of the whole people.
- ensure that the policy for Diaconal Ministers to receive License to Administer the Sacraments be made consistent throughout the church.

Later a second consultation enabled some members of DUCC to respond to the first full draft of the report by the DM working group. Surprise was expressed that ‘service’ was not listed as one of the top skills and gifts by Diaconal Ministers in the survey. A further comment related to the historical time line of Diaconal Ministers in the United Church which did not seem to reflect the struggle that diaconal ministry has experienced within the church throughout the years. As well the use of the term ‘style vs. function’ was seen to be a less helpful phrase to use in talking about their leadership. Rather ‘perspective’ was seen as a better term to describe the characteristic that distinguishes Diaconal Ministry from other types of ministry leadership. These comments were implemented in the final draft of this report.

Survey

A survey was developed by the working group and sent to those within the Order of Ministry, Designated Lay Ministers and lay members inviting response on their experience of Diaconal Ministry within the United Church. The survey was sent via direct email, subscription to the Church Leadership Network, and displayed on the DUCC Facebook page.

Survey Participation

The total number of respondents who completed the survey was 655. The breakdown of respondents is as follows:

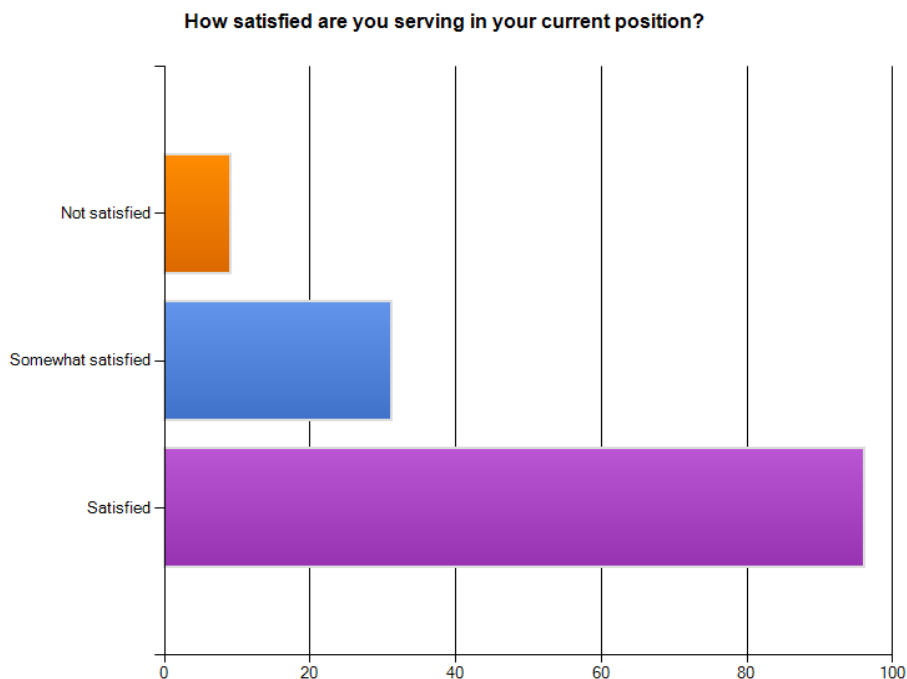
- ordained 358
- diaconal 136 – approximately 73 % working and 27 % retired or no longer employed in the church. (According to statistics from the General Council office of the 280 Diaconal Ministers, 127 are working in the church, 13 within community ministries, 111 retired or working outside the church, and 29 retained.)
- Designated Lay Ministers - 34
- Candidates for ministry - 40
- Lay church members – 87

Survey Questions

The objectives were to discover the kinds of work and variety of settings in which Diaconal Ministers are involved, how their ministry would be described, the level of vocational satisfaction, and any additional comments. The feedback received from the broader constituency provided a view of how diaconal ministry is perceived by church leaders who are not Diaconal Ministers.

Summary of Findings

Of the Diaconal Ministers who completed the survey 7.7% were not satisfied with their current position, 21.7% were somewhat satisfied and 70.6% were satisfied.



What are Diaconal Ministers doing?

- The top three answers to this question were equal in response (60%) stating that education, pastoral care, and worship were the primary responsibilities of Diaconal Ministers.
- Of the Diaconal Ministers who completed the survey
 - 83 % indicated that they are currently filling ministry positions suitable for a Diaconal Minister, and 93% indicated that they are satisfied with the position they currently fill
 - 35 % were the only paid staff on the ministry site, 12 % were part of multiple staff on the ministry site
 - 51 % were working full-time, 22 % were in part-time ministry
 - 71 % are in pastoral charges, 10 % are in community ministry, 19% answered n/a

When asked to name the most important contributions made by Diaconal Ministers:

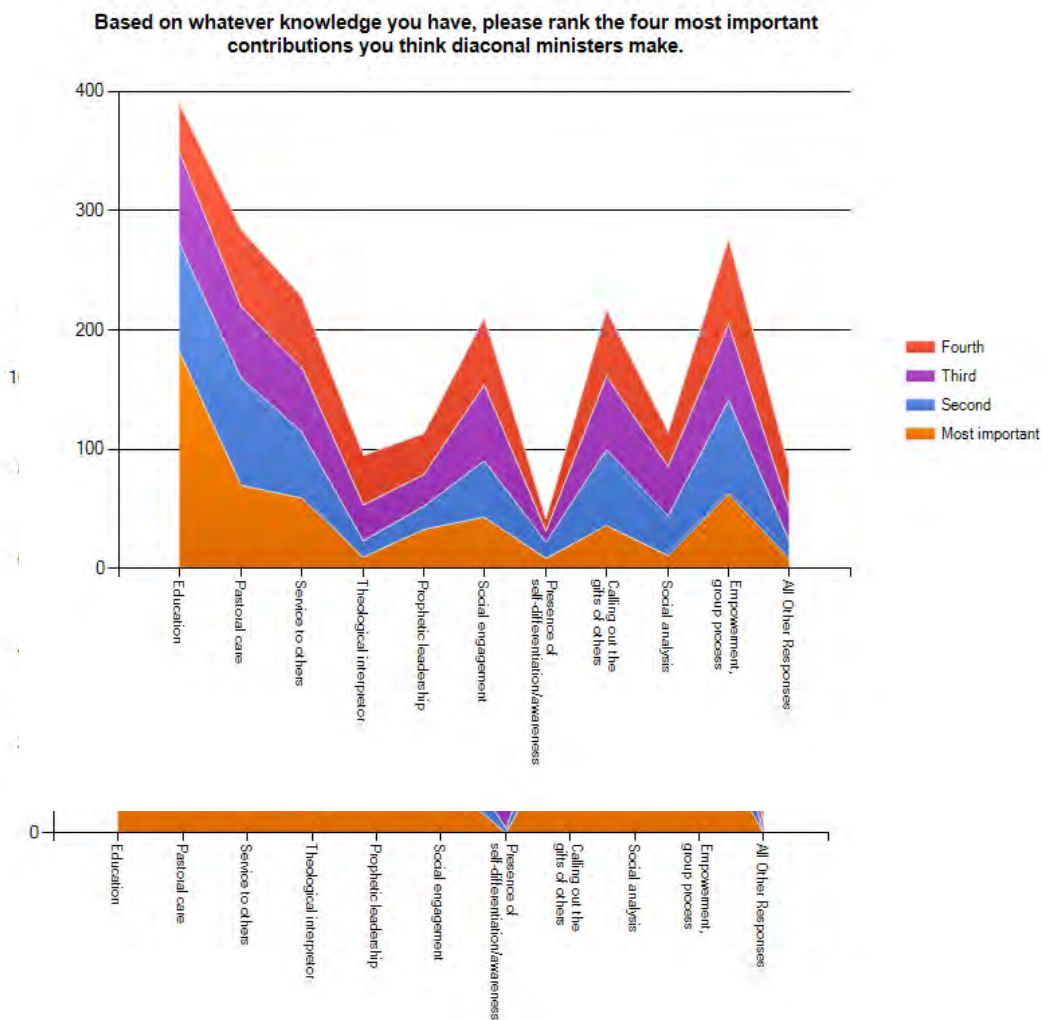
Diaconal Ministers named:

1. Empowerment/group process
2. Education
3. Calling out the gifts of others
4. Pastoral care

When asked to name the most important contributions made by Diaconal Ministers:

All other respondents (not Diaconal Ministers) named:

1. education
2. pastoral care
3. empowerment/group process
4. service to others



Community ministry opportunities

Of those who work in community ministry, when asked whether their organization would have an opening in the next five years for Diaconal Ministers, 58 % indicated “likely” or “somewhat likely”.

When asked what kinds of skills would be required in such positions, the top three skills named were: community development, social work, and theological foundation.

The following observations are based on the statistical results of the survey as well as the comprehensive comments offered by many respondents.

1. The survey data revealed that Diaconal Ministers understand their gifts of ministry differently than how others see them. This is also consistent with the perception by Diaconal Ministers about how they are perceived by others in the church. Diaconal Ministers report that their ministry is not well understood and there is a lack of awareness of the unique nature of diaconal ministry at many levels of church leadership. An example of this happens frequently when a Joint Needs Assessment clearly indicates a desire for a minister with diaconal skills but the vacancy calls for an ordained minister. Some confusion at the congregational level arises from differences in how Diaconal Ministers present themselves (i.e., to use or not use the title “Reverend”; the wearing or not wearing of stoles and variation in types of stoles).
2. It could be said that the three top responses by Diaconal Ministers reflect more a philosophy of leadership than function of ministry whereas the top three responses from others were more about function of ministry. This is consistent with an understanding that Diaconal Ministry is more about perspective – while Diaconal Ministers are defined by their commission to education, service and pastoral care, equally important, however, are the values, perspective, and approach they bring to ministry.
3. While the survey indicates a high level of job satisfaction by Diaconal Ministers comments in the survey and in consultations expressed concern about the way Diaconal Ministers are valued. The Isolation Study in 2005 indicated a similar pattern with all ministry personnel and classified the dissatisfaction as organizational alienation, perceived persecution and a lack of respect and recognition. At its most extreme, there is a perception by Ordained Ministers that Diaconal Ministers are a threat. There is also a concern that in difficult economic times Diaconal Ministers serving in team ministry are the first to be let go, or to have their positions reduced to part-time. In addition, Diaconal Ministers see the increased numbers of Designated Lay Ministers and congregational accountable ministries as a challenge for them in being able to find employment in positions that meets their training and skills.
4. Diaconal Ministers are trained for ministries of education, service and pastoral care. Their formation provides them with a perspective and approach to ministry that is especially suited for ministries of social justice, advocacy and community engagement. However, most Diaconal Ministers live-out their ministry serving a pastoral charge as the only paid minister. In other words, they undertake the same positions and tasks as Ordained Ministers. Most Diaconal Ministers report feeling that this is appropriate and that they are satisfied in their positions. Yet, while the emerging church is creating more opportunities for social justice, advocacy and community leadership, there are only a few Diaconal Ministers serving in these specialized ministries which could be suitable for their specialized training or perspective. For the working group, this observation raised questions about the United Church’s recognition that Diaconal Ministers are especially, although not uniquely, prepared to provide leadership to the emerging church.

5. An issue that arose from the survey and the interviews with some members of the DUCC coordinating cluster concerns the right to administer the sacraments. According to United Church polity, Diaconal Ministers are granted this right only upon request at the beginning of each new pastoral relationship. This policy is not handled uniformly in all Conferences (some Conferences automatically grant License to Administer the Sacraments at the time of Commissioning.) Because the majority of Diaconal Ministers are involved in congregational ministry, with many as the only paid accountable minister, many feel that Diaconal Ministers should be granted the right to conduct sacraments upon commissioning to diaconal ministry. A proposal from Alberta Northwest Conference directed this question to the 41st General Council 2012. Proposal ANW-1 was been referred to the Joint Ministry Working Group (Theology and InterChurch InterFaith and PC-MEPS) and insights from the Diaconal Ministry Working group are being shared with them.
6. For some, the perception is that education for Diaconal Ministry is the easy way to become a minister and that they are less educated than ordained ministers. Diaconal Ministers only have two places to receive their training – the Centre for Christian Studies (CCS) and the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre, while there are many more schools available for ordained ministers. However, CCS receives funding from the United Church which is on par with that received by other theological schools. There are both positive and negative consequences of the historically entwined relationship between the Centre for Christian Studies and Diaconal Ministry.
7. In the survey there were many comments regarding the need for Inquirers and Candidates to be strong self-advocates if they felt called to diaconal ministry. In Discernment Committees and Education and Students Committees there is commonly a lack of knowledge about Diaconal Ministry, which has required candidates/inquirers to educate committees themselves. And even when a committee was aware of Diaconal Ministry, naming a call to Diaconal Ministry was often discouraged by committee members who suggested that the only available calls, the only ministry opportunities were for Ordained Ministry. There are stories of Conference Interview Boards who found themselves interviewing Candidates with diaconal skills who had never been introduced to the possibility of Diaconal Ministry.

c) Recommendations for Future Direction

In addition to all that has been said in this report, there are some very recent proposals and actions at the GC level that will have consequences for all people in ministry (including Diaconal Ministers) in the upcoming years. Examples of this include the Program Coordinator, Ministry Recruitment; Local Ordination; Statement on Ministry.

License to Administer the Sacraments:

We see a general concern that policies and procedures relating to granting this license should be consistent and equitable across the church and with many believing that this license should be granted automatically at the time of commissioning. We recognize that the Joint Ministry Working Group (Theology and InterChurch InterFaith and PC-MEPS) is currently working with the proposal sent to General Council 41 regarding Diaconal Ministers receiving the License to Administer the Sacraments at the time when they are commissioned by a Conference. Whereas we are unable to make direct recommendations to this Working Group, insights on the

sacramental issue raised in this report are being shared with the Joint Ministry Working Group (by a member who serves with both of these groups).

Presbytery Recognized Ministries:

We recommend that Ministry and Employment Working Unit work with the Community in Ministry Working Unit to explore changing “The Guidelines for Presbytery-Recognized Ministries” in order that students graduating from the Centre for Christian Studies and the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre might be commissioned to a Presbytery-Recognized Ministry, whether or not the agency they will be working with is in a covenanted relationship with a Presbytery. Further, to explore “The Guidelines for Presbytery-Recognized Ministries” for Diaconal Ministers who later in their careers find themselves working with agencies outside the church. This could work to ensure that Diaconal Ministers will all continue to be under the oversight and support of a Presbytery and that we will be honouring the breadth of ministry which is being done outside of the church context. In addition that the Working Units make changes to “The Guidelines for Presbytery-Recognized Ministries” to reflect details associated with Provisional Calls.

Provisional Call:

As we considered the pattern of Diaconal Ministers serving in solo ministry in pastoral charges, we speculated about how much that has been influenced by the former requirement that all persons, before being commissioned, must be settled to a ministry position. With the opportunity for an individual to seek a provisional call prior to being commissioned, the Diaconal Working group wonders what impact this will have on the types of positions that Diaconal Ministers will seek out prior to their commissioning and whether this will have additional impact on the kinds of positions they will seek out later in their ministries. We recommend that PC-MEPS review the statistics of the initial ministry positions of Diaconal Ministers on a three year cycle in order to determine the impact of optional settlement or provisional call.

Program Coordinator, Ministry Recruitment:

We recommend that the Ministry and Employment Working Unit ensures that the newly hired Program Coordinator, Ministry Recruitment is well-grounded in an understanding of Diaconal Ministry and of the preparation for Diaconal Ministry through the Centre for Christian Studies and the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre.

Resources:

That PC-MEPS undertake an intentional review of resources for Discernment (resources both for the individual and for Discernment Committees) to ensure that the descriptions of the categories of ministry contain enough detail to give appropriate options for those exploring a call to ministry, including the opportunity for Candidates to initiate discussions with agencies in order to develop Presbytery-Recognized Ministries.

AND

That PC-MEPS undertake an intentional review of resources for Pastoral Relations (handbooks for Joint Needs Assessment Committees and Joint Search Committees or their equivalent) to ensure that descriptions of the categories of ministry (Ordained, Diaconal, Designated Lay

Minister) include enough information so that pastoral charges and ministries will be able to choose which categories of ministers to invite to apply.

AND

That PC-MEPS develop educational resources for Presbytery representatives (to Joint Needs Assessment Committees and Joint Search Committees or their equivalents) which will deepen their understanding of the categories of ministry (Ordained, Diaconal, Designated Lay Minister).

Field Placement Stipends:

Whereas candidates for ordained ministry and designated lay ministers in training receive a stipend or wages during their preparation, we recommend that PC-MEPS determine whether the lack of stipend or wage during field placements is a block to individuals entering Diaconal Ministry. If it does appear that this is a block to individuals from entering Diaconal Ministry, that PC-MEPS explore the possibility of implementing some such program.