

**Title: TICIF3 – Regional Team Models**

**Originating Body:** The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee

**Financial Implications if known:**

**Staffing Implications if known:**

**Source of Funding if known:**

**The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee proposes that:**

**The 41st General Council 2012 direct the Executive of General Council to encourage the emergence of regional team models of congregational ministries by:**

- 1. gathering and sharing the experience of regional team models across the church;**
- 2. calling on Presbyteries to encourage and facilitate the development of regional team models within their bounds;**
- 3. identifying and addressing structural issues that would facilitate the emergence of regional team models; and**
- 4. examining the implications of and mitigating the negative effects of the growing number of part time ministries in the church.**

Please find the background information in the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee Regional Team Models Report [below].

**TICIF Regional Team Models Report**

**Origin: The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee**

**Background**

It is clear that the church is changing and the challenge is not how to resist the changes, but to be faithful in the midst of them. It is important that the church maintain a strong sense of what its purpose is; to be about God's mission in the world; to nurture and support effective ministry that empowers a willingness to risk for God's mission; to reach out in new forms of ministry; and to be truly incarnational of God's presence in the world. In the midst of these challenges, it is important that models of ministry emphasize the widest use of ministry gifts, and that communities of faith value relationships that strengthen and support each other.

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that no one model of ministry will serve the future of the church. There will continue to be congregations that function with full time ministry personnel. Some congregations, relating to their particular geographic contexts, will likely need to be served by alternative forms of ministry including ecumenical shared ministries. Increasingly, some congregations will need to function without ministry personnel at all, as faith communities making use of lay leaders and sacrament elders. New forms of ministry will also emerge, likely with distinctive forms of leadership.

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that regional team models will provide an important option for congregational ministry in the future of The United Church of Canada. They offer the potential to use effectively the varied gifts of ministry personnel; they link congregations together in stronger networks of relationship; they provide a means for

smaller congregations to continue ministry; and they nurture and value lay leadership in the life of the church.

### **The Meaning of Ministry Task Group**

The Meaning of Ministry Task Group (2006-2009) was composed of members of the Permanent Committees, Programs for Mission and Ministry, Ministry Employment Policies and Services, the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee and the Executive of General Council. It proposed the “Statement on Paid Accountable Ministry (2009)” to the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council (2009) and as part of its report, made several recommendations to the Executive of General Council. Among its recommendations to the GCE it offered the following:

As the church explores and prepares itself for the emergence of new expressions of ministry, the Task Group is drawn to the importance of using the gifts of ordered and designated ministries in relation to each other. The Task Group affirms the suggestions received in the discernment responses and elsewhere that lift up the possibility of models of congregational structures that involve one Ordered Ministry personnel, or a team of Ordered Ministry personnel working in partnership with Designated Lay Ministers in serving a cluster of congregations. The Task Group believes that this model effectively brings together the specific and appropriate roles and gifts of ordered and designated ministries. The Task Group also believes that the increasing pattern of congregational use of part-time ordered ministry personnel is the major impediment to the exploration of these models, and a significant injustice to ministry personnel. The accompanying proposal requests that further exploration be undertaken on the model and on the implications of restricting the use of part-time ordered ministers in all but exceptional circumstances (where the ministry personnel themselves seek such a position for personal reasons.)

*The (Meaning of Ministry Task Group) ... proposes that the Executive of General Council request that the Permanent Committee, Ministry and Employment Policies and Services and the Permanent Committee, Programs for Mission and Ministry explore options that limit the number of part-time ordained and commissioned ministries in such a way as to encourage the emergence of new models of congregational clusters, including the option of ordered ministry personnel working collaboratively with designated lay ministers in support of a cluster of congregations.*

This proposal was not acted on.

Following the direction of the 40<sup>th</sup> General Council (2009), The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee (TICIF) undertook further work on the Statement on Ministry and invited responses from across the church to a revised version of the statement. It also invited participation in a Symposium on The Future of Ministry in The United Church of Canada co-sponsored with the 2011 Annual Theology Conference of Queen’s School of Religion. These consultations confirmed the direction of the Meaning of Ministry Task Group and offered further evidence to the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee in support of regional team models.

### **The Valuing of Gifts**

Like the Meaning of Ministry Task Group, the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that the ongoing challenges in the church over “streams of ministry” has at its roots, a failure to honor the distinctive gifts of each part of the body.

For example, diaconal ministers are trained to work in teams. Diaconal Ministers indicate from their understanding of history that they were required to serve in solo ministry positions by decisions relating to settlement. This was further accentuated by financial challenges which limited the capacity of congregations to support multiple ministry positions. The end result is that most diaconal ministers serve now in solo pastoral ministry positions. The intention of diaconal ministry however, has always been to function in specialized ministries of education, community ministry and pastoral care, collaboratively with ministers of word and sacrament. While the distinctive training and vision of diaconal ministry is still relevant in solo ministry positions and should not be diminished, the vision of diaconal ministry in collaborative relationship to the ministry of word and sacrament is largely lost.

A similar point could be made about designated lay ministry. There are ongoing challenges to the church's understanding of designated lay ministry that are more fully explained in an accompanying proposal<sup>1</sup>. One emphasis, however, of lay ministry has been the wider engagement of the varied gifts of people with a depth of life experience and alternative education paths. The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that lay ministries within the church are meant to function in relationship to ordered ministries, not in a subordinate way, but in a manner that values different gifts and training.

### **Valuing the Church's Ministry Leadership and Ecclesiology**

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that the church's future depends on effective and faithful leadership. Congregations need passionate and committed leadership from trained ministry personnel, capable of helping the church respond faithfully to the current context. While the church has always valued an educated clergy, there is no more important time, the committee believes, to value the importance of theological training for ministry leadership. As the Christian memory of church members disappears, and new members come into the church with a very limited understanding of the core of Christian teaching, the role of "resident theologians" becomes increasingly important. Congregations also need access to many other gifts of leadership, the Committee believes, functioning in relationship and collaboration with each other. The present reality is very different. Instead what is evident in the church is an increasing number of part-time ministries in isolated congregations each seeking to employ or call a solo ministry personnel.

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that the increasing number of part-time ministries presents significant challenges to the church. It concurs with the Meaning of Ministry Task Group that part-time ministries present a significant injustice to Ministry Personnel. It is the understanding of the Committee that this is also the assessment of the Permanent Committee, Ministry and Employment Policies and Services Committee. The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee's area of concern however is primarily with the theological and ecclesiological implications of this trend.

The Committee believes that the trend towards part-time ministries is a sign of existing and growing congregational isolation. Individual congregations, as they face financial challenges to maintaining full-time ministry, move into part-time ministry as the preferred direction. With financial pressures growing across the church it seems likely that an increasing number of

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<sup>1</sup> See the proposal from the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee for a study process on "local ordination."

ministries will be part time, leaving ministry personnel who require full time employment to bring (cobble) together a variety of positions. The assumption behind this, the Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes, is that congregations are independent entities without a commitment to a larger identity in relation to neighbouring United Churches. The Methodist understanding of “connexion” is lost as is the importance of Presbytery. The Committee believes that the United Church’s theological understanding has always balanced congregational identity with that of the Presbytery. No congregation exists in isolation.

The assumption that the default option to financial challenges is part-time ministry undermines an understanding of the interrelationship of congregations within the Presbytery, and it also further limits the capacity of Ministry Personnel to fulfill their oversight and mission roles in the larger church. More concrete research would be necessary to confirm what appears true to the Committee, that part time ministries restrict the capacity of ministry personnel to give adequate time to both support the mission and ministry of the larger church and to fulfill the governance roles that ministry personnel are required to fulfill within United Church polity. The Committee believes that this will potentially have serious implications for the ecclesial identity of The United Church of Canada.

### **An Alternative Model of Ministry**

The Committee believes that regional teams need to be facilitated as one model of ministry for the future of the church. This concept, which is also called the larger parish model, is widely in use in the British Methodist Church. Similarly, such models are in use in New Zealand, Australia and elsewhere around the world.

It is also being experimented with in a number of Presbyteries throughout the country. In simplified terms it involves a team of ministry personnel serving a larger number of congregations or faith communities. In this team there would be a variety of skills and gifts. The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that an academically trained ordered minister should be in every team. This fulfills an expectation that a “resident theologian” should be present and available to every congregation of the church and reflects the desire that is widely held across the church valuing the role of a theologically educated clergy. It might become the expectation that such teams also include a diaconally trained minister representing again the valuing of different gifts in ministry and the focus on faith development and training of lay leaders. The team might function with lay ministry personnel, youth ministers or parish nurses, each bringing their own particular gifts.

A critical component of this larger parish model is that every congregation would also be served by lay worship leaders (including licensed lay worship leaders) and sacrament elders. The model is therefore focused on the support and nurture of lay leadership rather than based on spreading the work of ministry personnel across increasing numbers of congregations. In this model, ministry personnel would not preach at all the points on a Sunday. Rather the distinctive gifts of the ministry team would enable the work of all leaders in the larger parish, allowing different forms of worship to emerge.

The regional model would also provide possibilities for leadership teams to engage actively in new and different forms of ministry and mission. New initiatives that create faith activities or

communities, which are not necessarily structured according to a congregational model, could be pursued by a team. As more creative missional endeavours are sought for the future, this might give the necessary space and flexibility.

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that such a model would provide an alternative to the increasingly common occurrence of congregations choosing to close when they can no longer call a paid accountable minister. The Committee notes examples where some congregations are searching for 6-10 hour per week positions. Instead the encouragement would be for such congregations to maintain a community of faith in their present location through the gifts of lay leadership in worship and ministry and supported through connection to a larger parish.

The Committee believes that for the effective functioning of regional team models, supervision and coordination will play a major role. However, it need not be assumed that a supervising role would automatically be filled by an ordered minister. It might be the case that a Designated Lay Minister in the team would carry a much longer history and proven record of effective supervision of a team. In other words, the role of supervision and coordination would be seen from the perspective of the best use of the gifts of the team.

The Committee notes the importance to the church of retired ministers who continue to offer their gifts in ministry, many in part-time positions. It is vitally important that the gifts of retired ministers be honored and used well by the church. Regional team models provide an opportunity to make exceptional use of such ministries. They can provide an opportunity for retired ministry personnel to be mentors in a team relationship to those just entering ministry. They can provide support to lay ministers who need the additional skills and training that retired ministers can often provide. They can function with much greater flexibility in length and focus of service, knowing that they are part of a larger team that will offer stability and continued presence to the community.

The Committee believes that employing regional team models is vitally necessary for the future of the church. However the most significant block to its emergence is the choice of congregations to seek part time ministry leadership and the willingness of Presbyteries to approve these decisions. The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee believes that Presbyteries already have sufficient authority to limit the number of part-time ministries and to encourage the development of larger parish models. The Committee also believes that sharing the learnings of experiments with larger parish models can inform Presbyteries and invite them to better use their authority and responsibility for mission and ministry.

There are a number of structural issues that need to be addressed for regional team models to be more widely of use in the church. Among these is the capacity of Presbyteries to be the employer of regional teams, if this is the model of employment that is chosen.

The Theology and Inter-Church Inter-Faith Committee recommends therefore that the Executive of General Council take action to ensure that Presbyteries have the legal capacities required to support the development of regional team models.