

Ministerial Education Commission

1. INTRODUCTION – MANDATE

The Assembly's responsibilities for ministerial education are exercised through the Ministerial Education Commission (MEC). The MEC meets annually, drawing together representatives from the UAICC and from each Synod's Ministerial Education Board (or equivalent) (MEB), the principals of the theological colleges recognised by the Assembly, and the convenors of the MEC's working groups. That meeting provides an essential forum in which possibilities and problems for the formation and education of those who offer themselves for the specified ministries of the Uniting Church are discussed, the Assembly's resolutions on ministerial education are implemented, and those involved in ministerial education on the Assembly's behalf are held accountable.

2. PRIMARY FOCUS – THE MINISTRY OF PASTOR

The Eleventh Assembly's resolution to establish the Ministry of Pastor among the specified ministries of the Uniting Church determined the primary focus for the work of the MEC over the last three years. That resolution requested that the MEC "facilitate the preparation of national schedules of competency, associated rules and guidelines for training, formation and continuing education for the specified ministry of Pastor" (06.17 d). Implicit in that resolution is the development of an entirely new way of discernment and formation for ministry requiring assessments to be undertaken by Presbyteries or other appointing bodies and based, not on satisfactory completion of a course of study within a program of formation, but on an evaluation of each applicant's prior learning and experience, their current competencies for the ministry context identified as suitable for a Pastor, and their future goals for formation and continuing education. The first Pastors of the Uniting Church have only recently been commissioned to this ministry, and Presbyteries are still discovering the new responsibilities and opportunities of their role, so this Assembly will be too early to evaluate the impact of their preparation and placement, but there is great potential for energy and grace to be released through this new opportunity for leadership and service, as well as a need for the Church to ensure that they are carefully selected, provided with effective oversight, and supported into ministry.

The MEC's role has been to prepare rules for the Ministry of Pastor, which were drafted by the MEC's Task Group on Lay Specified Ministries, received and endorsed by the full meeting of the MEC, and adopted by the Assembly Standing Committee in November 2008 (ASC 08.84). The rules identify the competencies (knowledge, skills and other attributes) Pastors will need to exercise their ministry. "Core Competencies" are those required at (or very soon after) the time of appointment. They include an understanding of the Basis of Union and the ethos of the Uniting Church, and an understanding of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for people engaged in professional ministry and the Sexual Misconduct Regulations of the Uniting Church. The "General Competencies" are those associated with the specific ministry context where the Pastor will be serving. On appointment each Pastor's current competencies will be assessed and a learning agreement will be developed to enhance and strengthen the Pastor's spiritual, relational and intellectual resources and disciplines for ministry. The appointing bodies will then provide oversight and encouragement for each Pastor as they grow into their ministry.

The MEC will have a continuing responsibility for the development of the rules for the Ministry of Pastor, including the preparation and amendment of the schedules of core and general competencies. This responsibility, however, exposes an inadequacy in the MEC's constitution. The MEC receives regular feedback on the impact of its work from theological colleges and Synod MEBs, and representatives from those agencies are actively involved in the preparation of rules, guidelines and supportive documents by the MEC. Formation and education for the Ministry of Pastor, however, will most often be given oversight by Presbyteries and provided through agencies not represented at the MEC's meetings. To maintain the relevance of the Assembly's oversight, the MEC will need to provide for participation from those informed and engaged in education for Pastors. A proposal will be brought to the 12th Assembly in support of such change.

Beyond the MEC's mandate, but vital to the MEC's work, will also be the development of insights and understanding on the theological and ecclesiological foundations and implications for the Ministry of Pastor. As the practicalities of establishment give way to experience and deeper reflection, the Uniting Church will need to examine and articulate the impact of this new specification in ministry on relationships with other churches and on the relationship between the ministry of

Pastor and the ordained specified ministries of Deacon and of the Word. The MEC encourages the Assembly to consider how best to facilitate that examination and discussion.

3. REVIEW OF THE “4 PHASES OF MINISTERIAL EDUCATION”

Over the last triennium the MEC also undertook a comprehensive review of each of the 4 phases of ministerial education, requesting feedback from each Synod and theological college on issues and concerns relating to each phase, and seeking suggestions for enhancement.

3.1 Phase 1: A Period of Discernment

The MEC's report to the 11th (2006) Assembly forecast changes to the Period of Discernment that would strengthen its intention as an opportunity for any member of the Church to reflect on and discern God's call to service and leadership. The MEC's guidelines for the Period of Discernment were subsequently rewritten and were adopted by the Assembly Standing Committee in November 2008 (ASC 08.69).

3.2 Phase 2: The Core Phase

The Core Phase refers to the intensive period of formation for each of the specified ministries during which the essential elements of ministry are explored and integrated. In the case of ordained ministry the core phase is that undertaken through a theological college. It is defined in rules that each theological college must adhere to when providing courses of study for candidates for ordination – rules that reflect the Assembly's resolutions in this area and that are used by the MEC's visitation teams to assess standards for ministerial education in each of the colleges recognised by the Assembly.

Over the last three years the MEC's Working Groups on Ministry of Deacon and Ministry of the Word have worked together to revise and consolidate the rules for Ministers of the Word and Deacons. Those rules were submitted to the Assembly Standing Committee and adopted in November 2008 (ASC 08.83).

3.3 Phase 3: Ministry Intern Phase

In 2007 the MEC devoted attention to the experience of candidates, Presbyteries, theological colleges and other groups involved in the implementation of the Ministry Intern Phase. The discussion gave rise another proposal that will be submitted by the MEC to the 12th Assembly. Some aspects of the Ministry Intern Phase have been very positively received, in particular the intentional and structured program of reflection and support provided to

candidates moving into their first placement, and the participation of Presbyteries in that program. Critical concerns related to the deferral of ordination to the completion of the Intern Phase, and the associated perception that ordination was seen as an award for satisfactory completion of transition into a placement. That perception was not considered consistent with the Uniting Church's understanding of ordination. Interns reported widespread confusion in congregations, in ecumenical relationships, and among themselves, when they were authorised to exercise every aspect of ministry – in most cases also celebrating the sacraments – but were not ordained. The MEC's proposal seeks to retain and strengthen the positive aspects of the transition program, while also recognising that celebrating ordination at the conclusion of the core phase, at the point where congregations and candidates can most helpfully receive the confident blessing of the wider church, is most appropriate.

3.4 Phase 4: Continuing Education

The MEC's Working Group on Continuing Education is consolidating as a cross-Synod network of people actively involved in encouraging and supporting the development of continuing education programs. The MEC's review of continuing education recognised that effective continuing education is crucial to sustainable mission and ministry, but that ministers often struggle to define a coherent program and to fulfil the expectations of the Church. The MEC has asked its Working Group to gather information from Presbyteries on current practice across the Church, and to review the Assembly guidelines on continuing education (“Seeking a Heart of Wisdom”). In an associated area, this Working Group has also been asked to undertake a review of the guidelines for supervision contained in the Assembly's primary resource on supervision - “Pastoral Supervision: Introducing a process of reflection on ministry experience.”

4. WORKING GROUPS

The MEC now maintains 4 working groups:

- Ministry of Deacon Working Group – based in Victoria;
- Ministry of the Word Working Group – also based in Victoria;
- Lay Specified Ministries Working Group – based in South Australia, and
- Continuing Education Working Group – co-ordinated from NSW, but with members drawn from a number of Synods.

The 11th Assembly's decision to close applications to the specified ministries of Youth Worker, Lay Pastor and Community

Minister, and to establish the ministry of Pastor, resulted in changes to the MEC's working groups. Oversight of education and formation for Pastors and Lay Preachers is now provided through the Lay Specified Ministries Working Group – which has been very busy. In addition to drafting the rules and guidelines required by the MEC, they have also been engaged in the development of resources that will be used by Presbyteries to assess the competencies of applicants for the ministry of Pastor.

The Assembly's resolution (06.17 g) also provided for a process of transition to one of the ordained ministries for those who had been recognised as accredited Youth Workers, Lay Pastors and Community Ministers. The MEC was asked to assist with the preparation of guidelines provided to the transition panels appointed by each Synod.

The MEC has also asked Synod MEBs and theological colleges to ensure that the programs, resources and skills developed for the formation and education of Youth Workers continue to be maintained and developed, and that providers of education for lay and ordained ministry in the Church seek ways to encourage and equip those involved in ministry with young people.

5. EXECUTIVE

The Executive of the MEC has been based in NSW for the last 6 years, but will be convened in the Queensland Synod after this Assembly. The Executive provides continuity for the work of the MEC between its annual meetings, support to the Working Groups, and a point of reference for questions and concerns related to ministerial education from the wider Church. The Chair and Secretary of the MEC are appointed by the Assembly and are ex-officio members of the Executive (Regulation 2.2.15 (a)). Other members of the MEC resident within the Synod's bounds are also members of the Executive, and the Executive co-opts additional members to maintain its work. The Assembly provides a budget that funds the annual meeting of the MEC, allows for projects including regular consultations with theological colleges, and for the part-time employment of an Administrative Assistant.

6. ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

6.1 Visitation of Colleges

As noted above, the MEC's responsibilities include regular consultations with the staff of theological colleges, conducted through visits intended both to evaluate each college's adherence to the Assembly's standards for theological education, and to share insights and experience between

Synods. The MEC received reports from visitations to Trinity Theological College in 2006, to Perth Theological Hall in 2007, and to Nungalinga College in 2008. A visit to Parkin-Wesley College is planned for 2009.

6.2 National Theological Educators' Consultation

In 2003 the MEC was directed by the 10th Assembly to encourage national co-operation and discussion between the theological colleges of the Uniting Church, with a view to sharing resources and working together in the development of programs and initiatives in theological education. The consultations are planned every two years, and the MEC invites one of the colleges to host and plan each gathering. The most recent consultation took place in Victoria during July 2007, and the United Theological College in the NSW Synod will host the next in April 2009.

6.3 Deacon Pre-sessional

The MEC's Ministry of Deacon Working Group has assisted the planning of an in-service and training program for Deacons over many years. It has become a significant forum for Deacons as they reflect on and prepare for their ministry, and it consistently offers focussed, high-quality input from practitioners and leaders both within and beyond the Uniting Church. While not strictly the responsibility of the MEC, its working group provides a point of reference in the absence of a nationally constituted association, and the pre-sessional often exposes candidates for the ministry of Deacon to colleagues in ministry and opportunities for orientation and education that the small numbers in separate theological colleges cannot provide.

7. CONCLUSION

The MEC seeks to encourage and facilitate councils and agencies of the wider Church as they respond to the Assembly's oversight in ministerial education and implement the decisions of the Assembly. The goal of the MEC's work is to assist the Church in identifying, forming and encouraging leaders who are confident in their call and giftedness, aware of their tradition, and able to work warmly and sustainably in community.

Rev Chris Udy
Chairperson

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION COMMISSION MANDATE

Responsible to: The Assembly

Reporting arrangements: The Assembly and the Standing Committee

Mission statement: To fulfil the Assembly's responsibilities in ministerial education, as stated in Constitution clause 38(a) and Regulation 2.2.18.

Mandate: (Regulation 2.2.18)

- (a) to recommend to the Assembly the colleges to be recognised by the Church as approved centres for training for ministry;
- (b) to recommend to the Assembly the pre-requisites for admission to candidature and the standards of ministerial education to be required of a candidate to qualify for recognition as a Minister or Youth Worker, including the requirements for completion of the period of discernment;
- (c) to prescribe the areas of study and the minimum requirements within each area which shall comprise an acceptable course of study for the various ministries of the Church, including the requirements of the licensed year;
- (d) to receive annually for review from the faculty of each recognised theological college a report on ways in which the prescriptions specified under (c) are being met;
- (e) to maintain a roll of candidates;
- (f) to set standards for qualifying examinations where appropriate for applicants seeking acceptance as candidates for specified ministries and to arrange for the administration of such examinations;
- (g) to prescribe the conditions under which a candidate qualifies for ordination and/or recognition and to issue a certificate of satisfactory completion of studies in respect of each candidate on receipt of advice from the faculty concerned that all requirements of the course have been satisfactorily met;
- (h) to encourage the several theological colleges to participate in ecumenical theological education so long as direct responsibility for each candidate is maintained and all regulations of the Commission adhered to;
- (i) to arrange regular consultations of staff of the several theological colleges as may be appropriate;
- (j) to recommend to the Assembly guidelines whereby Ministers and Youth Workers shall fulfil the requirement for three to five year continuing education agreements with their Presbytery or other appointing body;
- (k) to receive reports on ministerial education from the Synods and to report to the Assembly;
- (l) to do such other things as may be required of it by the Assembly.

General:

The responsibilities of every agency include:

- focusing the activities of the agency on the vision of the Assembly as a whole;
- advising the Assembly and/or the Standing Committee on policy matters within their area of responsibility;

- making policy decisions where the Assembly or the Standing Committee has delegated authority for certain policy areas, either through the agency mandate or by resolution;
- participating in cross-agency projects and teams established from time to time by the Assembly or the Standing Committee.

Power to appoint:

- To establish working groups for special tasks related specifically to the mandate.
- To make recommendations to the Standing Committee to establish other working groups for special tasks related to but not part of the mandate.

Membership of the Commission (Regulation 2.2.15 and 2.2.16)

- (a) a chairperson and a secretary appointed by the Assembly;
- (b) the principal (or an alternate appointed by the principal) of each theological college recognised by the Assembly;
- (c) one person appointed by each Synod;
- (d) two persons appointed by the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress; and
- (e) the chairperson of each working group appointed by the Commission, provided that a working group may appoint another of its members active in the ministry concerned to serve as a member of the Commission in the place of the chairperson of the working group.

Note: An executive committee of the Commission shall be appointed and function in accordance with Regulation 2.2.17.

Approved by the Tenth Assembly, July 2003