Education for Lay Ministry
in Uniting Church (NSW Synod)

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5th October 2006

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Contents

Executive summary In 2006, a study of the needs of lay ministry workers was undertaken at the request of the NSW Synod with the aim of discovering the needs of lay ministry workers and how they might be better supported. Along with gaining an understanding of needs of lay ministry workers, an understanding of hindrances and challenges they face is undertaken and forms the basis of suggested strategies. The study involved

41 in-depth telephone interviews with lay ministers throughout New South Wales along with two focus groups.

It was evident that lay ministers are involved in a wide spectrum of church ministry and are integral to the on-going functioning of the Church. The needs of lay ministers is as broad as their ministry experience, with some relating to the church as a whole and others being more specific and local. A general issue was the recognition within the structures and culture of the Church by church members and attenders, clergy, Presbyteries and the Synod. While the situation has been clarified with the introduction of the ministry of pastor at the 11th Assembly, the pragmatic expectations are not always evident, and the culture within the church adjusts to these changes only slowly.

Most lay ministers experience a sense of call that leads them to take up the ministry role. Most find great fulfilment in their ministry, particularly as they feel they contribute to lives of others and see them develop in spiritual ways.

Among the challenges for lay ministers are negotiating the theology of the UCA in relation to their congregations, giving leadership and developing vision. Motivation to mission and ministry was often cited as a challenge, as was effective engagement with the community. At the same time, they often feel the lack of workers and leaders, and struggle especially to engage effectively with young people. Often maintaining other jobs means that the lay ministers find challenges in the business of life and competing demands from family and work, requiring skills of time management and setting boundaries.

Lay ministers spoke of the challenges of developing skills in pastoral visitation, chairing church meetings and managing people within the church, particularly in times of conflict. Challenges of administration, care of buildings and finance were mentioned.

In responding to the challenge of preaching, many lay ministers use the internet and commentaries. However, others have not adjusted to new technologies. While many find the internet useful, in many specialised areas of ministry, lay ministers find the resources sparse and not always helpful.

In pastoral care, many lay ministers turn to other ministers for support. They often refer people when there are specialist needs but are not always aware of what professional services are available. A State-wide resource list is needed.

Many lay minsiters have undertaken a great range of educational courses and used a variety of educational resources. Among these, the supportive role of the ELM centre was often mentioned positively. However, in general, the range of appropriate courses and access to them was thought to be insufficient and it was often considered difficult to know what would be worth the investment of time and money. Equal numbers wanted accreditation and did not think accreditation was necessary. Support for older people returning to study late in life needed special attention.

In developing strategies for training for lay leaders, the basis must be recognition and appreciation for the lay ministry that is being conducted and the sense that there is a mutuality of ministry of

both clergy and lay. Reflective learning models will help ensure that the training is clearly related to their situations. Providing accessible training using a variety of learning methods and covering the variety of practical needs of lay ministers are key. This will involve flexible options and recognition of prior learning and current competencies. Some financial assistance for the training of lay ministers could ease the burden of them significantly. Providing information that allows them to work out easily what is particularly appropriate for their situation is crucial.

Introduction

This research project has been undertaken by the Christian Research Association on behalf of the NSW Synod of the Uniting Church in conjunction with the ELM Centre as a response to the Synod recommendation 211/05S (c) & (d) which states:

"undertake research to identify specific needs of lay people in relation to accessing theological, leadership and discipleship education including:

1. What hindrances they face in accessing education,
2. What the Synod could do to reduce the impact of these hindrances and to offer practical assistance;
3. Develop a set of strategies to address the needs identified in the research."

Through two focus groups and 41 individual telephone interviews the views needs and experiences of lay ministers were heard. Common themes have been identified and presented as the findings of the study. Further discussion has been made of the issues identified with attention being given to possible strategies to be adopted in addressing the issues.

Aims:

This study aimed to identify the needs of lay people, and specifically lay leaders in the Uniting Church, in relation to accessing theological, leadership and discipleship education.

The research was designed to assist the Synod in the development of a set of strategies to address the needs identified in the research and to connect with lay leaders in the Uniting Church in such a way that would be supportive and would contribute to the spiritual formation of those leaders.

Method:

Two means of contacting lay ministers to discern their needs were used: telephone interviews and focus groups.

A schedule for the telephone interviews and focus group discussions were developed by the CRA in conjunction with the ELM Centre. The interviews and focus group discussions were conducted by Christian Research Association staff members.

Focus groups were planned to engage groups of people and allow them to stimulate each other in their thinking, cover the content of lay education that would be helpful in their settings and explore the best means of delivery of lay education and the best forms in which education might be presented. However, it was recognised that many people would not be able to attend a focus group and that there could also be aspects of needs and concerns that people would prefer to share in a one-to-one interview rather than in the setting of a focus group.

Moreover, it proved difficult to find suitable times and places to organise focus groups so that a range of people could attend. In several places, initial arrangements were made with Presbyteries but did not proceed because of changes to Presbytery business or because insufficient people were available for the focus group. Two focus groups facilitated. One in the Riverina comprising most of the Presbytery Education Committee and the second in the Parramatta Presbytery.

Prospective interviewees were identified by the ELM Centre and prior to this list being passed on to the CRA, the ELM Centre wrote to all potential participants and inform them about the project and that a telephone interview would be conducted with them. Participants were invited to inform the ELM Centre if they did not wish to participate in the study. One person responded that they did not wish to participate in the research.

Prior to the actual interview taking place, a telephone call was made to again inform of the research project and ask if the person still wanted to participate. All individuals contacted expressed a willingness to take part.

Contact with interviewees was attempted in the first place where phone numbers were provided by telephone. Where repeated attempts at contact by telephone had been made and where email addresses were supplied individuals were contacted via email, where no email address was available and repeated telephone contact had failed, initial contact was by surface post and then by telephone. Every person on the list who could be contacted was interviewed. We believe that there were no systematic biases in the sample. Most of those who were not interviewed were people who were away at the time of the study or had moved away from the address provided.

A total of 41 interviews were conducted by telephone. Interviewees were from a range of roles including local church and parish activities, Presbytery involvement, chaplaincy at schools and nursing homes. Full-time and part-time, paid and voluntary.

In examining of the interviews conducted the findings fall into two main spheres: Those things that relate to more systemic issues and those related to individuals.

The individual interviews and focus group discussions followed the common themes of:
- The situation of the lay leaders and specific needs
- The issues that lay leaders are confronting
- The ways in which lay leaders are seeking for and finding support
- The most appropriate content for lay education
- The most appropriate delivery forms for lay education, including distance options, mentoring, occasional seminars, etc.
- The importance of accreditation

Copies of the Interview Schedule and Focus Group Discussion Guide are attached.

We believe that the sample was sufficiently comprehensive to provide a good overview of the needs of people in lay ministry positions of leadership throughout the churches of New South Wales Uniting Church. Nevertheless, with a small number such as this, it is not possible to make statistically accurate conclusions about the extent of the particular findings. The qualitative form of the research focussed more on achieving an understanding of the dynamics of the situation.

2. Findings

Findings of the present study fall into two arenas. Those that have to do with the Church as a whole and those that are more individual in nature and relate more specifically to particular individuals and situations. While there are only several issues that relate to the Church as a whole that were identified, there were many issues of a more individual nature that were of a common experience to a number of individuals interviewed.

Issues that are more related to the church as a whole include: the place of lay ministry within the UCA with reference to their acceptance and placement by the Church, their relationship to clergy, and what is expected of lay ministers by the Church and it's members.

Issues that are more individual in nature yet indicate a common experience by others within lay ministry include: motivation and fulfilment for ministry
       challenges, including: leadership, relevance of ministry,personnel.
       skills needed for ministry
       resources needed for ministry
       education and support for ministry

Church wide issues

Within the current study, several issues were raised with respect to the clergy-laity relationship and roles within the NSW Synod that are systemic in nature. These issues include the acceptance of lay leaders and in particular:

- what the congregation expects

- what the Presbytery expects

Underlying these issues is the question:

> Given the emerging model of church within the NSW Synod where increasing reliance is made on lay leadership, is the distinction between the roles and authority of clergy and laity to be maintained?

It is felt that full comment on this question is outside the brief for this current research, however it must be noted that existing lay leaders are being pushed toward this ecclesiastical boundary continually. They are being called to make a response by way of word or deed and are therefore challenged by what they are authorised or not authorised to do.

Model of church leadership:

For some churches the move toward lay leadership has been deliberate, for others it has been born of necessity. For example, one church in the Riverina Presbytery with a lay ministry team now taking full responsibility for leadership determined to do so after finding themselves without a minister and then realising, after a year or so, that they enjoyed the lay ministry roles far more than the fund raising roles aimed at securing finance to be used to attract a new minister. The church determined to model itself on lay leadership, rather than spend further time in the search for a minister.

From individuals interviewed, some of the issues that congregations dealt with in determining their model of leadership (i.e. ordained clergy or lay ministers) include:

- The difficulty in finding people who are accredited to preach and take sacraments.

- Supply ministers having to move within a short period of time do not have much opportunity to connect with congregation, leaving the congregation with the sense that they are uncared for.
- Supply ministers being frustrated by the short-term relationships they develop with congregations and communities.
- The ability to afford an ordained minister and the viability of a part-time lay lay minister who is local and available.
- The understanding of the congregation as to the role and expectations of a minister. Some expectations of congregations of their lay minister extend beyond what the lay minister is authorised to undertake.
- Experiences of isolation by lay ministers who feel like they are the only one doing this type of work and are not understood by other members of the congregation.

Whatever the catalyst in bringing lay leadership to individual churches and Presbyterys, lay leaders are here, present and active. They are fulfilling roles in ministry and mission and express themselves as being used by God in this manner.

Acceptance of Lay Leaders

Lay leaders interviewed were asked what their respective roles were. Where possible, it has been attempted to maintain the use of the actual words used by the interviewee without distinction of the official title.

Leaders interviewed see themselves within the roles of:

Ordained:	**Lay Ministers:**	**Presbytery:**
Minister	Lay ministry worker	Resource Person
Minister of the word	Lay minister in charge	Member of Presbytery
	Lay worker	
Pastor (change with 11th Assembly)	Lay preacher	**Congregation specific:**
	Lay presider	Worship convenor
Youth:	Lay pastor assistant	Member of ministry team
Youth Worker	Lay ministry assistant	Mission worker and mission
Youth Pastor	Pastoral leader	leader
	Lay pastoral leader	
Family:		**Non-congregational setting:**
Family Worker		Chaplain – aged care centre
		Chaplain – school

What the congregations expect.

Strong within the people interviewed was the understanding that the pastoral role was one of prime importance for themselves and mostly what was expected of them by the congregation. This is consistent with National Church Life Survey findings where the roles of educator and pastor were most frequently identified as the major expectation of leaders within congregations (Kaldor, 1995).

Comments were made by interviewees along the lines that of some the congregants felt they had not received a true pastoral visit or fully received the sacrament unless it was carried out by an ordained clergy. The unique and special place given to ordained members of the church is such that within the inflexible application it sometimes receives others are denied the opportunity to fully participate in ministry.

What the Presbytery expects.

It was reported by one interviewee that he was restricted by the Presbytery in the number of times he was allowed to preach each month even though he was able to preach more frequently than the Presbytery would allow. The stated reason from Presbytery was '...what happens if the next part-time lay minister is only able to do part-time. The congregation may expect them to work full-time". While on the one hand this might seem a reasonable determinant for a part-time lay minister to be given time restrictions, with both time and willingness present, it seemed to this person an unnecessary restriction.

Other issues regarding expectations of the Presbytery on lay ministers relate more to the role of lay ministers in terms of authority to take part in specified church practices.

The UCA has as part of its Basis of Union the recognition and utilisation of lay persons within ministry, and this underpins the current research project.

"The Uniting Church acknowledges that Christ has commanded his Church to proclaim the gospel both in words and in the two visible acts of Baptism and the Lord's Supper" (basis of union, para. 6). It baptises those who confess the Christian faith and children presented for baptism. It takes responsibility for their instruction and nourishment in the faith. It ordains those it believes God has called to be ministers of the word and deacons. It commissions lay people it believes God has called to be elders, lay preachers, youth workers and community ministers. (http://www.uca.org.au/uca.htm, downloaded 14/9/06).

The Uniting Church in Australia through the 11th Assembly has recently established a Ministry of Pastor. This ministry will take in all those who currently would serve as lay pastors and community ministers and most youth workers. Pastors will be lay church workers with pastoral oversight of congregations or groups in the Uniting Church and may serve full-time or part-time. Pastors will be appointed by presbyteries, and will not be expected to have academic theological degrees but will undertake continuous education throughout their service. It is hoped that this new ministry will better enable the UCA to meet the needs of non-ordained ministry in the church in a simple and flexible way.

For some, the Ministry of Pastor is about "every ministry agent in the Uniting Church in Australia being in a specified relationship with the church" (*Assembly Word*, 5-11 July 2006, p. 3). However, without a corresponding change in what lay ministers (pastors) are authorised by the church to do, the frustrations identified within the present study will continue.

Given the understanding established above, participation in traditional roles reserved to ordained church members such as baptisms, funerals and weddings has been possible where exceptions were made by the Presbytery and Synod enabling lay ministers to conduct and or take part in these services. Several lay ministers commented that with Presbytery support they had been able to gain marriage celebrant status and conduct weddings as would an ordained minister. Others commented that under exceptional circumstances they had taken part in baptism services. While these restrictions are accepted and understood by most as the way things are, they become more challenging when ordained clergy are unavailable to carry out these functions. While exceptions can be made on the basis of expediency, the general desire by lay ministers is for a more inclusive ministry in terms of who can and cannot do things within church ministry.

What clergy expect.

While there were many references within the current study to the support, guidance and assistance given by clergy to lay leaders, there were also comments of a negative nature. It was stated that some clergy are less accepting of lay leadership. This lesser level of acceptance was seen in a number of ways from low level hostility to more passive forms. In one church where the move was

being made from a full-time minister to lay leadership, a retired minister withdrew from the congregation and attended worship elsewhere.

Other comments relate to the opportunities some clergy extend to lay ministers to take part in worship times where clearly involvement was sought by some clergy and withheld by others. One person interviewed suggested that much of the Presbytery was biased toward the clergy, where many of the committees carry greater membership from clergy compared to lay persons.

What seems to be happening here is the interface of two systems. In one roles are prescribed and reserved. In the other, other, sometimes through necessity, a more pragmatic approach is less defined and much more flexible.

What led them to take up the ministry role

When asked what lead them to take up the role in ministry interviewees responded most frequently by talking about an experience of being called. For many, it was just that, a call by God to be involved in ministry. Some understood this calling as the "inner voice" speaking guidance to them. Others saw this calling having taken place over a longer period of time, 17 years for one person, whereas for others, it was a much shorter period. A number of people expressed the calling as part of a journey or pilgrimage and God as leading and guiding them. For one person a period of discernment was significant in helping them decide to take a ministry role.

Others interviewed pointed to their experience within the Church as being instrumental in bringing them to their current involvement. This dynamic was so for those of a church background where family members had been involved in Church activities over a long period of time and where this involvement led to leadership and ministry opportunities. One person became involved in their ministry as part of a placement for the course they were doing, and was then invited to stay on as part of the ministry team.

Several of those interviewed spoke of other persons being instrumental and influential in their steps toward ministry. These included ministers, friends and other members of the ministry team.

Interest and gifting in working with people was the catalyst for some taking up ministry roles. A number of those interviewed had experience as teachers, had retired and then moved into ministry. For one retired teacher, now in full-time lay ministry, lay preaching had been part of her life for 30 years. Others claimed a pre-existing interest in youth and youth needs, with confirmation coming during preparation courses of study in theology, youth and children.

Several mentioned that along with positive thoughts toward ministry and church involvement throughout their life time, the catalyst for their entry into lay ministry was when a minister left the church and a replacement was not made.

Preparation for ministry was identified by way of various courses and study programmes, life experience and church involvement as well as the individual understanding of the personal journey and spiritual pilgrimage.

Clearly for most people interviewed, their current place within ministry was seen as their response to God's call on their life. In this respect they join with their ordained brothers and sisters in caring for the overall functions of the Church. This is confirmed again through their responses to being asked what was most fulfilling within their present roles. Those interviewed overwhelmingly

responded with comments related to fulfilling mission.

Fulfilling aspects of ministry

Interviewees were asked what they found most fulfilling within their ministry role. Responses most frequently dealt with interpersonal relationships and the privilege of witnessing elements of life change within others and included:

- having contact with other people
- the opportunity to nurture others and be involved in one to one pastoral care
- belonging to and participating in community and family
- being with the aged
- being with people wherever they are at whether that is in a situation of drug and alcohol dependence, poverty or where there are mental health issues.
- seeing others "grow into Christ" or "come back to Christ"
- seeing young people grow and own their faith and learn how to begin dealing with life issues.
- being with other Christians
- doing things for others.
- seeing the relationships in a group of youth grow and develop.

Other responses dealt with some aspect of a wider mission view of the church and included:
- seeing the reputation of the church grow within the community
- seeing the church take on more of a mission focus and be outwardly oriented
- sharing the Bible
- ALPHA leadership
- leading worship
- preaching
- taking part in the sacraments
- leading a team

Challenges for lay ministry

The following are issues that are more in keeping with the individual nature of persons within lay ministry roles and which show some degree of common experience with other lay ministers. Individuals were asked what were the challenges they faces within their ministry context. Some issues were quite broad while others were specific to individual ministry situations.

Theology of the UCA

One broad based issue that arose in a number of interviews had to do with the aspects of working with people in relation to the theology, politics and policies of the UCA. In particular, the challenges of a theological nature were seen in the attempt to balance the conservative evangelical and more liberal theological views within the Church. Issues included sexuality and leadership in ministry and methods of response to the drug scene through provision of injecting rooms. The comment by one lay ministry worker was more pragmatic "There is a waste of resources to undertake the debate of these issues. Let's just get on with it (helping people)". For them there was scope within the UCA for all of these diverse theological views, and it was important not to lose sight of the purpose of the church, to serve the needs of humanity in what ever form they took.

Some lay ministry workers had the challenge of ministering within the context of congregations questioning whether to leave or remain within UCA. Issues related to theology, church structure

and homosexuality were evident. One lay minister described how the congregation he was ministering within had decided to withdraw from the UCA. He saw his role of facilitating this in a way that maintained the dignity of all involved including the congregation and the wider UCA and where grace would be evident.

Leadership and vision casting

Some of the challenges relate to the area of leading people. At least one interviewee indicated that the move from being a congregational member to being a lay leader within the congregation had brought with it a degree of isolation. The sense of the 'alone-ness' of a leader where they are both a leader and a member of the congregation often leaves individuals by themselves. It was noted that where there was a lay ministry team, the sense of being isolated and alone within the task was much reduced.

The challenge of gaining a vision for the ministry situation was prominent for a number of those interviewed. How to gain the vision, develop it for oneself and then share the vision with others and gain their commitment to the vision are a series of leadership skills that were yet to be developed by some of those interviewed.

Comments regarding these particular challenges of leadership and vision include:
"Helping people to keep on track"
"It is a challenge to move people forward. To help them to be more than pew sitters".
"Getting people to follow through on commitments and what they said they would do is a big challenge for me."
"We have a lot of transients with the (defence force base) close by. These people generally only have a short term view of mission and involvement."
"When people show their resistance to change, that is one of the hardest things..."
"The challenge I face is to help my congregation to become more mission focussed."

One lay ministry worker identified that he had a vision and communicated it to the congregation on a regular basis, but that the congregation was unable to move forward due to their fear of something new.
"I communicate my vision to everyone in the ministry team regularly, yet people are too scared to evaluate and to try new things."

Motivation of the congregation to mission and ministry was also seen as a challenge. This was articulated by one as helping the congregation to change their attitude from being pew sitters to becoming mission focused and to being actively involved in ministry. The desire for everyone to have a personal ministry was raised by a number of those interviewed. Still some saw that a more specific mission focus was needed. This was expressed as targeting specific age groups, the aged, youth or children. In association with the desire by lay ministers to see a more mission focussed congregation were the comments involving recognition of the smaller number of people involved in the congregation and the reduced pool of resources. This, for some, left them feeling like the ministry task was overwhelming and any amount of effort could not make an impact.

Engaging with the community was a challenge identified by many lay ministers interviewed. This was spoken of as connecting with the community, the church being seen as a credible group, the congregation being a force within the community. Engaging with the community was seen as something for the church as a whole as well as for individuals.

A number of those interviewed were also required to provide a level of strategic leadership. To

develop a vision that is appropriate to the present time and context, and to communicate the vision and gain support and commitment to the vision is a complex task. Some had been able to do this, or were part way along this path. Others when asked about aspects of church life they would like to see developed spoke of the desire for a strategic plan for their church.

In the words of those surveyed about the challenges they face:

- "Working out where the congregation should be heading. What to concentrate on."
- "We need to help the congregation to be more mission focussed."
- "Whatever we think of by way of mission and ministry, we have a lack of workers."
- "We are attempting to discover what it means to be the Emerging Church. Currently our experience within the broader UCA is that of being misunderstood. We are slowly and deliberately finding our way."
- "For our ministry, an alternative Church ministry, we need to become immersed within the culture to be accepted. This means we spend a lot of time building relationships."
- "We are challenged by the generation balance. It would be great to be connecting with all generations, however some generations are not represented within the congregation. We have more funerals than baptisms".
- "My greatest challenge is to know how to be relevant to today's society: how to connect with an un-churched generation."
- "Our congregation is mostly older folk. There are specific needs of the ageing that are a challenge for us, and none of us are getting any younger."

One lay ministry worker spoke of his vision and strategic plan, but felt the necessary resources were not available to see the plan into fruition.
    " I have a strategic plan,.... but not the resources to get it to happen.."

Relating to social needs and culture

Some of the challenges had to do with issues that were practical but which also related to a particular mindset and culture. For many this was to do with the culture of the congregational community. For others, social needs and culture related to the sector of society within which they were ministering. .

A challenge for several leaders was to help the congregation develop a culture of including others and helping new members and visitors develop a sense of belonging. This was especially important to them in their respective congregations as they frequently received people working in the area for a short period such as students or defence force personnel as members of their congregations. These people tended to only be part of the church for several years, and often maintained a transient attitude of never really belonging to the church community. For this congregation, it was especially challenging to help these short term congregational members to feel included. For other lay ministers having a welcoming congregation and place was important in helping people to find a 'safe place'.

Other ministry situations were involved with a specific cultural or social sector and included non traditional ministries and non-church or congregational ministries. Within these were ministries to:
- youth
- alternate life style ministries
- non-Anglo cultures
- aged and people with special needs.

For example, ministering to people with dementia and not getting much if any feedback from them requires a particular orientation and skill set as does ministering to youth.

One lay minister stated that the main challenge for him was to see more children and young people involved within the congregation. He and his congregation were encouraged recently when a 6 year old boy asked to be baptised. The boy, not a regular church attendee had made this request of his mother as a result of scripture classes at school. The mother agreed and arrangements were made for the boy to be baptised. So important was this event for the boy that he invited all his school friends to witness the occasion.

For individuals working with youth or aged and even people with dementia, resources and networks seemed to be available. However, for the non-traditional and alternate ministries this sense of resourcing and networking was not as developed and was replaced more with a sense of the ministry being in a pioneer area. Their need was for a bigger network to support and encourage alternative forms of community ministry.

Personnel challenges

Also expressed as challenges were a number of issues related to resources around personnel including:
- lack of workers
- lack of leaders.
- equipping young people for mission and the competition from other interests for youth.
- business of life and demands on families for time restricting their involvement.

Some of the lay ministry workers interviewed were able to speak more fully of their personnel needs and some even of the strategies of developing new leaders. For example, one person expressed it as needing to "equip ourselves to keep young ones involved... the young ones left the church about three years ago and we need to develop a new group of children and youth workers..".

The spiritual life, growth and development of the congregation were identified within the interviews as both challenges and desired goals for minitry by lay ministers interviewed. Lay ministers recognised and spoke of the need for developing the faith of the congregation, of deepening their spirituality. Methods of encouraging this growth typically included regular preaching and teaching, more small groups and Bible studies.

The aspect of spiritual formation within the congregations was raised within a number of interviews and in a number of ways. While access to a wide range of small group discussion material was acknowledged, lay ministers spoke of the need for Bible studies that were relevant and engaged the congregation and were able to put forward the theological understanding of the UCA in a non-technical manner. Several of the lay ministers made the connection between the need for "good" formation of congregations and the challenge of identity. That is, "what does it mean to be a member of the UCA?". Their belief was that congregations were not being adequately instructed in the doctrines, beliefs and practices of the UCA. Another lay ministry worker indicated they thought that studies and discussion group material that revisited the Basis of Union would be helpful.

Skills for ministry

One sector of ministry challenges listed had to do with specific skills related to the ministry including a range of pastoral and people management skills. Skills mentioned included:

- skills involved in pastoral visitation
- chairing congregational meetings
- dealing with conflict within the church, particularly when conflict gets personal and families are drawn into it.
- managing disgruntled people who are staying or leaving the congregation because of change
- managing people with strong personalities
- managing change.

Time management

Challenges relating to dealing with the quantity and complexity of tasks were identified by a number of those interviewed. They spoke of the demands of ministry where the sheer variety and volume of demands competed for their time and resources. Being able to manage these demands and prioritise them were skills identified as in need of development by some.

For others, the demands around time management had to do with being engaged as a part-time ministry worker yet having full-time expectations and work load placed on them. Balancing the demands of part-time ministry was particularly important for a number of lay ministers who also maintained employment or were involved in farming. For some, time management issues were related to the demands of working with more than one congregation. A number of lay ministry workers described the situation of multiple congregations with multiple boards, committees and councils demanding large amounts of time commitment. A number of people in these situations described how they had been able to simplify the situation either by empowering the group to carry out their work without their immediate presence or to reduce the number of committees and boards, often by combining those common to more than one congregation.

Boundaries

Although lay ministers and many involved only as part-time workers, the demands and dynamics of ministry are such that the dynamics of full-time professional clergy ministry also apply in some measure to the part-time lay counter parts. This is seen in the context of the findings above related to time management. In a related way, boundaries for roles and expectations, the task and work of ministry, needed to be specified and maintained for all ministry workers. Given the challenges identified by some lay ministry workers, the maintenance of balance within ministry was a major issue, with burn-out a consequence if not addressed.

Administrative challenges

Administrative challenges while noted by a number of lay ministry workers were not given the same degree of importance or impact as other challenges. Administrative challenges included aspects of finance and property management.

For one lay ministry workers their property challenge was related to the size of present facilities where activities and number of people involved were such that the present facilities were too small. Another lay minister was challenged by the much needed repairs to their church property and the seeming inability to get someone from Presbytery to come and inspect what was needed and enable repairs to take place.

Finance

Issues of finance were more common challenges experienced by a number of congregations. Generally these involved scenarios where there were less people attending and as a consequence, less money received into the church. In rural areas, poor years for farming has had an impact on church finances.

The consequence of reduced finance for many church congregations was to not have a full-time minister or to not have a minister at all and to move to a lay ministry model.

Many congregations were involved in fund raising activities including thrift shops, garage sales and market stalls. One person interviewed made the suggestion of selling the church property and investing the capital and using the income generated to fund a minister.

Leading worship and preaching

For another group of interviewees, the challenges relating to leading worship and preaching were of importance. These included issues encountered in the experience of moving from traditional to more contemporary styles of worship. Other interviewees expressed this as the challenge of maintaining worship that was suitable for an older more traditional congregation and at the same time attempting to grow new more contemporary congregation. There were those who were challenged by having to organise or facilitate worship experiences.

Comments from those interviewed indicated that resources to help them in preparing for preaching would include seed ideas and also tools to handle issues with clear theological insights presented non academically.

Specific comments and challenges included:
- loss of the pianist when no other music accompaniment is available
- finding and arranging for people who were available for preaching and presiding over the sacraments
- finding willing participants and getting congregations to take part in and take responsibility for worship
- preaching and having something new and distinctive to say each week
- maintaining a preaching plan for the whole year
- to look at new ways of doing church and worship that involved all generations

One person interviewed expressed the desire to see the use of technology develop within their congregation. He saw this as preparing for the future so that the ability to use technology could be available worship in preparation for the day when no pianist or organist is available.

Help and resources for preaching

Interviewees were asked "when you preach, where mostly do you find materials to help you? What do you find most stimulating as your prepare your sermons and services? What resources do you find helpful?"

Not all of the lay ministers interviewed took part in preaching. Responses regarding the sources of help in sermon preparation were quite varied. The most frequent sources of help were the individual's own library, personal devotions and theological reflection. The internet is used by many, but not by all, with some using it a lot and others occasionally. Media Com resources were

also used frequently.

Resources identified

About half of those interviewed had used internet and commentaries. About a quarter were using the lectionary and or lectionary resources. Generally people were using more than one resource. That is, they might use the internet plus commentaries plus lectionary or Media Com materials.

- Words for Worship
- Media com (20)
- Own library, concordances, commentaries, study Bible (20). Books from Christian bookshops.
- see others do things and copy
- Worship committee
- lectionary (11)
- Internet (20)
- Reading (4)
- Illustrations from every day
- Personal life experience.
- Personal reflection: "take a text and let it speak to me".

- Prepared materials (purchased resources). Seasons of the Spirit, Pastor's Annual, Words for Worship
- Follow a theme or book
- Lay preachers course (3)
- UCA web site
- UTC library
- Own resource file of articles and subjects
- other people who provide articles and resources.
- Current study program (lay preachers course, B.Theol. M.Theol).

* Frequency of resource used among interviewees in ().

Helpful processes:

A number of processes were identified that helped individuals with their preparation for preaching and worship services.

Some liked to see and hear others involved in worship and preaching and reflect on it and develop their own sermon and worship experience. For these folk, visiting other churches and watching video and DVD recordings provided a useful resource.

Other preachers had developed their own reading to include current issues, theology and ways of illustrating their chosen topic.

Personal reflection and daily devotion was strongly identified with by a number of those interviewed as the source of their inspiration for preaching, daily living and ministry. One lay minister described how he liked to find the text early on in the week, to read it over a number of times and then reflect on it. It was generally later in week that he committed his thoughts to paper.

Resources for stimulating ideas for preaching and worship:

- Personal / daily devotion
- Other sermons / worship
- Life experience
- personal journals
- intercessors who pray for me and give feedback
- use others ideas for reflection and build

- on them.
- Reflect on every day life events.
- Leading worship is stimulating
- look for a germ of an idea and nurture it to grow and develop.
- Movies provide a stimulus and illustration

Internet used for a range of purposes:

The internet was a popular tool and used for either accessing information or for developing ideas with friends through chat-rooms and email. More specifically, the internet was identified as useful in the following ways:

– access sermons in text or audio
– gather worship ideas
– commentaries and reference books
– songs

– prayers
– Email network with peers and friends to discuss and develop ideas

While many web sites were identified, record was made of only a few. Some web sites cited by those interviewed included:

- www.sermons for kids
- www.preachers help
- UCA web site
- Iona community site
- www.textweek.com

Resources used in ministry

During the interviews, lay ministry workers were asked where they turned to for help when they encountered a difficult pastoral situation.

Most frequently lay ministers found support and guidance in fellow members of the ministry team, mentors, supervisors, church elders and church council members. A large number also found help and support from a minister, other professionals, and friends. Other people involved in ministry, as members of the ministers fraternal, staff at a Presbytery or Synod level or one of the training providers (e.g. ELM Centre) also provided support on a less frequent basis.

Several mentioned that their first line of support in times of difficult pastoral situations was to spend time with God. One person responded "I don't cope well and usually call the minister from the neighbouring town."

A large number of interviewees indicated that they would make a referral to an appropriate professional as the situation determined, including issues dealing with mental health, conflict, relationships and family crisis. Lay ministers said they would also make referrals to the police, Life line, Legal Aid and a range of other service providers.

There was a common need for a Resource List that gave State wide contacts. Many of the lay ministers were aware of the need to find professional services and to make a referral , but were unable to determine how to go about contacting the appropriate service or sometimes what services were available within their region.

Education support for ministry

When asked where they found educational support for their ministry, lay ministers indicated a range of tertiary level universities and colleges, Vocational Education and Training providers, in-house UCA seminars and training and seminars form other churches, para-church organisations and other community bodies.

Educational resources from Coolamon,Wesley colleges , UTC, Synod Youth department and most frequently the ELM Centre were utilised from within the UCA. Educational resources utilised from outside the UCA include:

- Willow Creek
- Sydney Board of Mission College
- Hillsong
- Tabor
- Charles Sturt University
- Vision College

- Joyce Meyer
- Wellspring
- Anglican Youthworks
- TAFE
- CPE
- Moore College

The ELM Centre was identified as providing:
- Lay ministers retreat / in-service
- Lay presiders course
- Lay leaders training
- Lay Preachers course
- Expos for worship and social justice.

Many of the people interviewed were most supportive of the role of the ELM Centre with comments that their educational activities were "very helpful" and "I have a good relationship with ELM". One person interviewed was emphatic saying the ELM centre was "very good. Their services and training are easy to use". Other comments regarding the provision of training by the ELM Centre indicated an overall positive appreciation of the range of courses, the level at which they were pitched and the staff involved and include: "helpful", "...thoroughly enjoyed it..".

The lay ministers in-service training / retreat tended to be most popular with high comments of praise. As one person put it "..the highlight of my year..."

One comment was received indicating that the ELM Centre needs to be more relevant in the range and level of training offered. However, this same person commented that the ELM Centre staff member was great and that their going out to churches and bringing training to congregations is fantastic. Their hope was that there would be more of this.

While one person stated that they would like more time for study with the ELM Centre, another indicated that the ELM Centre was not providing what 'I" need. Their expressed needs for education for ministry were quite specific and professionally based. Another person indicated that it would be helpful to have advertising material for courses and seminars which included details about those for whom the course was suitable.

Comments regarding travelling required for training were also made, with one person pointing out that it takes her 4 days to do a 2 day program in Sydney with a day travelling each way. Travel and distance issues along with regional training initiatives will be taken up at a later stage within this report.

Coolamon college was identified as providing training for lay preachers and lay presiders. The general sense was that the quality of training provided by Coolamon College was "good" while for some the training was "from a long time ago". E Many experienced great challenge when they returned to study after many years. One lay minister who had completed their course suggested that as the courses were conducted by distance education, the relationship with the supervisor was paramount and that regular follow-up should be made during the course and during the year or so

following completion.

Generally the range and access to courses was thought to be insufficient. Only about 25 per cent of those interviewed indicated that the courses and educational resources were adequate with good support, network, range of subjects and units that were practical and helpful. A number of those interviewed indicated they used UCA educational resources along with those of other institutions.

Adequacy of current education resources

By way of general comment on the adequacy of the current education resources within the NSW Synod the following issues were identified:

- timing and schedulingof courses
- distance education for some older individuals is most difficult without a coach or a tutor assisting.
- combinations of correspondence and quarterly seminars.
- some lay ministry workers are challenged by financial pressures when considering training and when they may be required to take time off work to attend study along with the cost of courses.
- Need to provide a greater range of

subjects and venues (ie city and regional)
- more face to face courses and seminars
- more correspondence courses
- more networks to be facilitated
- more follow up / support after the course
- more retreats
- an increased connection between the colleges and church [some happening]
- a course for writing liturgy
- so many things on offer that it is hard to choose / discern what is appropriate / helpful.

Accreditation of training and education

Accreditation of courses was thought to be necessary by a similar number as those who thought it was not necessary.

Those who thought courses and training needed to be accredited indicated that it really depended on what the training was. Some training courses they thought, were of such a nature that they required accreditation. Accreditation would bring a degree of recognition for some. For others accreditation meant that they could eventually earn a significant educational achievement (degree or diploma). For others, accreditation was mostly about accountability of what was being taught. This was most clearly seen in comments relating to the preaching and lay presiders courses.

While a good number thought accreditation was necessary, their comments were not in isolation from other associated issues to do with return to study for people who have been out of the education system for some time and the need for flexible assessment. Included with these comments were those suggesting recognition of prior learning and recognition of current competencies.

Comments from individuals who thought accreditation was not necessary focussed on a range of other issues including the need for the teacher or trainer to be a credible person. That is, their credibility needed to be more than paper credentials. The teacher or trainer needs to be authentic and have both knowledge and experience.

From comments received by lay ministers within New South Wales three aspects of educational support for ministry were identified as being paramount: regional access to training, flexible options for training and special assistance for people returning to study. These will be explored later in the report.

Presbytery support

When asked about support from the Presbytery, the overwhelming response was that Presbytery

was most supportive. As one person put it "synod and assembly together have been supportive and do a good job".

From comments received lay ministers tended to look to both the Presbytery and Synod for affirmation of them as lay ministers, what they were doing in ministry and who they are as individuals. Comments such as: "It is good when they listen to us and show that they are with us" are indicative of this. As alone-ness was a challenging factor for a number of lay ministers, the understanding by one person interviewed was reassuring because they "...have an advocate who knows the system". Still for others the sense of support was experienced by knowing others were praying for them.

Support was found in a number of ways:
- as a resource: Presbytery youth worker gives good connection
  Knowing they are there and you can call on them is helpful
  Presbytery pastor is always available
  Knowing people are praying for you

- personal qualities of individuals at Presbytery level: "...our Presbytery minister is lovely".

Some lay ministers did not have such a positive experience of Presbytery. One person indicated they had a very negative view of Presbytery and saw it as a "necessary evil".
Other comments include:
- "Communication is generally Ok, however there are lots of email and a lot are irrelevant"
- "Presbytery show interest but are not really supportive and overall not helpful. Generally I am disappointed."
- "...no confidence in Presbytery, however, contact with the youth worker is good."
- "The size and complexity of the presbytery makes it difficult to give adequate support. Most resources and energy are focussed on dealing with crisis, with little left over."

For some other lay leaders, it was their sense of not being appreciated by Presbytery that came through in the comments.
"Presbytery does not give lay ministers adequate pastoral care and support"

"The level of support is '50:50' Lay leaders are treated badly and not recognised for their theological training and experience, especially if this came from outside of the UCA."

"The distinction between Ministers of the Word and lay ministers sometimes creates barriers. Presbytery is weighted by number of Ministers of the Word and not always appreciative of lay ministers. Some churches do not get all correspondence from Presbytery because there is not a Minister of the Word."

"I feel like I am not on the radar as a lay minister because I am not paid. If I was paid, then the Presbytery would have had to approve my appointment and as a consequence, know I exist."

From these comments it is noted that there is a range in the support received from Presbyteries. It is thought that individual differences and differences within Presbyterys may account for the differences. From both the positive and negative comments the sense of needing to be appreciated and recognised for what they were involved in was most important. Where lay ministers felt left out or not acknowledged for their ministry by Presbytery, then there was more likely to be a negative

view of Presbytery.

Synod support

Responses to being asked about Synod support of their ministry were mostly positive. They saw Synod as being there to resource and help with the overall function of church. Links were strongest to Synod where there was a personal connection, either with a member of Synod or as through their own membership.

Overwhelming positive comments were received regarding contact with Synod staff members. Contact by lay ministers with Synod on this level was appreciated and accepted positively.

Of those who do not experience the same level of support from Synod, it was mostly in relation to the difficulty in making and maintaining contact with the Synod office. One interviewee had asked on a number of times over a two year period for a Synod representative to come for a site visit to deal with a property matter to no avail.

For the majority of those interviewed no regular contact was experienced with Synod.

3. Strategies:

What does the UCA require in a lay leader?

For some period of time, the UCA has been develop its models of church in relation to lay ministers alongside ordained clergy – to lead the church or work in a ministry role either full-time or part-time, paid or voluntary. The recent 11th. Assembly saw further endorsement of that with the establishment of the Ministry of Pastor.

Thus, the place of lay ministers within the UCA has changed. Lay ministers are an integral part of how church is done within the UCA. The ministry of lay persons gives evidence of a viable and, in some cases because of lack of resources, necessary alternative to ordained clergy. A number of churches within the NSW Synod have been operating for sometime under the ministry of lay persons to good effect.

There is evidence of the growing appreciation of lay ministry teams as model of church leadership. Lay ministers speak of finding support from other members of a team, of enjoying the sense of shared responsibility and joy and fulfilment of taking part in ministry.

The UCA, in numerous ways including the motivation for this present study, recognises the need and the appropriateness of lay ministry. What is being called for by lay ministers is acknowledgement for what they are doing. This is not just an expression of appreciation, but a sense that others are connecting with the scope and meaning of what they are involved in. From comments regarding the Presbytery and Synod, lay ministers are calling for relational and authentic leadership by Presbytery and Synod that conveys a sense of connection, appreciation and encouragement for lay ministry. What is in need of being addressed in this respect has its development from within the Presbytery and Synod offices.

Mutual Ministry

While the distinction between clergy and laity has been made throughout much of the history of the Church, Fenhagen (1977) draws particular attention to the shared aspect of ministry, arguing that it is a mutual ministry of individuals within the congregation, and also a mutual ministry of the congregation with God. "Ministry is a function exercised in response to the prompting of the Holy Spirit" (Fenhagen, 1977, p26). Others have identified that the ministry of the Church has always been the ministry of the *laos,* the people of the assembly (Vine, 1952*)* and a mutual ministry of clergy and laity.

What becomes clear when considering the involvement of both clergy and lay persons in ministry is that the requirements for involvement draw back to the same basis of faith, gifting and skill, irrespective of ordination or not. This suggests therefore that the development of lay ministers needs to carry with it the same sense of purpose as the development of clergy.

One useful framework for considering the development of church leaders has been developed by Australian, Ian Jagelman. The frame work put forward by Jagelman consisting of four quadrants:

The "L" factor: the ability to lead others is dependent on an individual having a developed belief system, the capacity for sound judgement and the capacity to handle complexity. With the increase of leadership responsibilities there is a corresponding increase in complexity.

Integrity of Heart. Integrity of heart recognises the need for a developed spirituality and personal godliness as an essential spiritual quality of a Christian leader.

Visioning Capacity. Visioning capacity involves ability to lead within the context of the present time and being able to recognise and respond to the signs of the times.

Skillful Hands. The skills for working with others, organisational ability, specific technical skill and knowledge. (Ian Jagelman, 2002)

When considering the development of lay ministers it is helpful to understand in which quadrant the development is taking place. This framework may be of particular help in considering aspects of recognition of prior learning or current competencies for people seeking endorsement as lay ministers or desire to be considered for ordination.

Clearly, some lay ministers see ordination as a goal and lay ministry contributing toward reaching the goal. However, several of the lay ministers interviewed felt that the pathway to ordination for them was unclear. One even thought the process was being frustrated on a personality basis. Within the current context of Australian society there is a requirement for transparency. Transparency is based within trust and applies equally to the Church as it does to wider society.

> It is increasingly important that churches develop systems of transparency and accountability and means of dealing impartially with complaints. Systems which monitor the service offered as well as the financial accounts are an important part of the process. So also are the systems of reporting. Development of professional codes of ethics play an important role. Such systems reassure the public that the churches and their organisations will be fair in their dealings with others. They will contribute to the perception that the churches truly exist for all people, not just for those who have powerful positions with them (Hughes, 2002, p.4).

Education and Training

Principles of adult learning

Hughes and Bentley (1991) identified a number of principles within adult education point toward elements of self direction, incorporation of personal experience, immediacy of application which comes from learning within the situation. When principles such as these are applied to lay ministry training they provide a useful framework for the development of training programs.

The current research project confirms that lay ministers are keen to maintain a high degree of self direction toward their education and training. They want to be able to decide what they will be involved within study. Frequently this is not in isolation and they may consult others, but the final decision will be theirs. Much of the requests for training arose out of the context in which the lay ministers were serving. This links directly to the desire for immediacy in application as it is determined from their current work environment and experience.

David Kolb has put forward a model that has been useful for many and identifies the components of reflective learning as: a concrete experience, observation and reflection, forming abstract concepts, testing in new situations. Examples of this learning style can be found within mentoring, supervision and peer support.
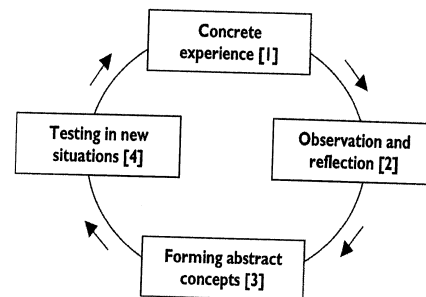
Any means that can be employed to enable these elements to be present and to better facilitate adult

learning are to be encouraged.

Accessibility

A key factor in training for lay ministers interviewed was accessibility. This was understood in terms of the delivery point or where the course was conducted, delivery method, range of courses offered, and the academic level.

Accessibility to education and training varied across the state. For those people within the greater Sydney area, or within a daily commute to a regional centre, access to training locations was not such an issue. For lay ministers in rural areas travel time was clearly an issue. A number of those suggested that most people do not mind travelling for up to an hour and a half to get to something, but "... it better be worth it". Clearly, quality and appropriateness of what was offered was also an issue.

Regional workshops received strong endorsement by lay ministers who said that there was greater opportunity to present training in a more targeted manner and at an appropriate level for participants. This suggests that, at times, lay ministers have participated in training that has not been suitable for them or did not meet their need. However, the main motivation for regional training was to reduce the burden of travel for participants. Generally positive comments were received in relation to where the ELM Centre have conducted regional courses and seminars.

A suggestion was made by one individual that it would be be helpful for the ELM Centre to write a course and then to train others to deliver the training. This would enable the development of expertise in course writing to take place to good effect along with multiplying the opportunities for the training to be delivered.

Delivery method

Learning styles vary with individuals with some preferring face to face, discussion or classroom learning while others prefer distance learning and the ability to progress at their own pace. An encompassing training program takes into account various learning styles and provides a range of delivery modes. The choice of what learning style and delivery mode is most suitable is quite individual. While face to face training helps develop networks, much valued by some, weekly attendance at classes eats into available time and is a frustration to others. It is thought that in considering the scope of delivery modes and learning styles, it would be helpful to take the following factors into account: face to face, distance, intensives, part-time, weekly, regional, accredited and non-accredited, skills based, theory based courses. Clearly, how to meet the diversity of desires is not an easy matter to resolve.

Range of training available

Access issues also related to what training was available in terms of the range of courses and seminars. A number of lay ministers indicated how they generally looked outside the UCA training providers for their training experiences on the basis of the available range of courses. For others, access was related more to knowing what was appropriate for them in their ministry situation. Many of these folk found it a challenge to work through the large amount of information that came their way and to identify which of the training experiences were suitable for them.

Some suggestions of topics of training required included:

multi media	help to train youth in leadership
youth spirituality	how to reach the marginalised.
elder – training.	leadership

pastoral care	generation migrants.
mental health (for chaplains and ministers)	how to access to media / film resources. Copyright.
cross cultural ministries: 1st and 2nd	financial planning and management for the parish

Flexibility

A number of challenges were identified by lay ministers interviewed. These related to a broad range of issues including access to training and education, recognition of prior education and current competencies and the clarity of the process leading to ordination.

Given the increasing median age of congregations it is not surprising that for some the challenge of study was returning to it after many years. One lay minister spoke how at 68 years of age she commenced the lay preachers course. Her experience was not a positive one where the supervision provided was not helpful. Her particular need was for a resource person to help her understand the questions.

Flexible options are needed to facilitate older persons undertaking study courses. These options need to preserve the purpose of the education process while not burdening the individual with an accumulation of additional and often un-needed disciplines. For instance if a study course requires assignment work and essays to prove the learning, the disciplines of technical writing styles and theological argument steeped in church history may also be present but not necessary to the core learnings of the course. Under a system of this style of learning and assessment individuals who have not participated in education for many decades will be at a distinct disadvantage. For many of them, it becomes too much and they give up. The goal is not to turn out any number of would be theologians, but to develop the necessary skills and knowledge for lay ministers to fulfil their calling within ministry.

Recognition of prior learning and current competencies.

For some lay ministers, the goal of being ordained was present. Some had been clergy within other denominations and were now fulfilling similar roles through their ministry within the UCA. Common to their experience was their feeling that the process toward ordination within the UCA was unclear and did not give due recognition to their current competencies and prior learning. One lay minister spoke how he felt that the process for him being ordained was being frustrated at present and that while ordination was being denied, he had conducted 14 weddings, 7 funerals, and provided pastoral care and chaplaincy in 5 fatality situations. Within the congregation, he has conducted the communion service each month, and even prior to the recent Assembly decision was known to everyone in the town as the Pastor.   Another person felt that movement toward ordination was being frustrated by individual personalities at Presbytery level.

Thus the process toward ordination is a challenge for these persons with prior ministry experience and who are fulfilling the role of an ordained clergy, and for whom the desire for ordination within the UCA is present.

Accreditation

Lay ministers were divided as to the need for accreditation. This was predominantly to do with what type and aspect of training was in mind when the questions were asked.

Accreditation of training within Australia can occur under the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) which provides the basis for Australia's nationally consistent, high quality vocational education and training system or the higher education system encompassing universities and colleges. Churches within Australia along with other organisations have maintained

accreditation within these frameworks. A third aspect of accreditation does not have to do with any government sponsored education framework at all. There are aspects of training and education offered to lay ministers and pastoral candidates that remain entirely within the determination of the church in terms of what is offered, how it is offered, how evidence of learning taking place is collected and reviewed. It is suggested therefore that the NSW Synod needs to be clear about what positions and functions to be carried out require accreditation and with what body.

For instance, the lay preachers training and lay presiders training may only require accreditation within the UCA. As such, the mode of delivery, the level at which teaching takes place and the learning outcomes do not have to conform to an external framework. With this understanding, training packages can be developed that will take into account individual needs including those of people returning to study after a long period of absence, distance, limited access to books and tutors and so forth.

It is also possible therefore that training for some lay ministers may be offered as both accredited and non-accredited depending on what the objective of the individual is in undertaking the training.

Financial help for lay ministers undertaking training
For a number of lay ministers a point of contention existed in relation to Ministers of the Word receiving financial support for education while lay ministers were required to fund the education and training by themselves. For some this required them to take time out of paid employment.

It must be noted that in some churches where funds were available, lay ministers received support for training. One church that was staffed by a lay ministry team was able to pay for the full cost of training for lay ministers because of the funds available through not having to pay for an ordained minister at the church.

However, what seems to be at contention here is that it is written into UCA policy that clergy receive financial support for training, whereas this is not yet the case for lay ministers. Given that lay ministers are undertaking in essence the same ministry as ordained clergy, it seems appropriate that consideration be given to developing a policy that provides for support of lay ministers in their training and development.

Advertising of training events.
A comment repeated a number of times through out the interviews was that there was an overwhelming amount of information about training coming through the church office from Presbytery and Synod making it difficult to know what to give your attention to and what would be of benefit to the immediate situation.

What is being asked for is for publicity regarding training and courses to include a recommendation as to its relevance and value and an indication as to who the training is aimed at. This is especially important for training being offered by non-UCA bodies, and some research may need to take place before details of the training are transmitted to the churches.

Caring for lay ministers.
One of the clear expectations of lay ministers is for relational and authentic leadership to be modelled by members of Presbytery and Synod. It is leadership of this nature that will encourage lay ministers in their task and foster a bond of common purpose. Leadership of this calibre will also go a long way to alleviating elements of isolation experienced by lone workers in churches working

often at a considerable physical distance from peers and colleagues.

Communication

Communication of resources to lay ministers was identified as an issue. The understanding gained was that there were a lot of resources available. However some lay ministers were not confident that they were able to evaluate what was beneficial or appropriate. These ministers asked therefore for the further development of web based resources that could provide links to helpful sites.

It is noted that there are already many resources listed on the UCA New South Wales Board of Mission web site covering the large scope of ministry carried out within the Synod. Comments were received during the interviews regarding the helpfulness of this resource. However, a number of comments were received that indicated that the New South Wales Board of Mission web site was not delivering what they needed. Comments in this regard related to pages and information being out of date and not updated regularly, the site being hard to navigate and finding resources listed as if by accident. When the writer visited the web site difficulty in browsing the various pages was experienced with a number of pages not being accessible. The expectation of people using web based sites is that they are easily navigated with pages opening at the click of the mouse and, most importantly, that the information is current.

Additional web based information and links to resources were requested for:
- lectionary resources
- resources for worship including: prayers, songs and music music. "It would be good to have them prepared and ready to use".
- resource pages with links to other helpful sites.
- a resource list of people available for ministry listing their skills and contacts.

Finance.

When asked what additional resources the church could provide, additional finance was inevitably included by some. The requests and comments regarding finance came in a number of forms including the comment: "the church is wealthy, ... we have enough financial resource overall. We just need better systems of distribution and sharing of resources." Several comments were made regarding funding for additional ministry positions.

Forums

For a number of lay ministers the desire to belong to a group who share similar ministry experience and challenges was evident. Common among the comments was the sense of being able to access current ideas and trends, and to share ideas where they could receive review by others engaged in similar ministry expressions as their own. Some lay ministers readily spoke of the benefit that these peer networks brought to them, providing support and guidance in difficult situations, sounding boards for ideas and access to an enlarged resource pool.

Yet other lay ministers did not have this experience although they desired it. Assistance by way of facilitating forums and networks of lay ministers may need to be given with the understanding that some networks will be Presbytery based whereas others will be State based or even broader depending on their context. Forums and peer network groups sponsored in this way would be centred on specific ministry context and concern, and provide the means of support needed for lay ministry.

Some specific areas of ministry identified within the study where people were needing additional support include working with aging congregations, working in rural ministry, and working with

alternative congregations. It has been noted previously in this report that while the NSW Board of Mission web site provides some resources and links for these ministry areas, many people found these inadequate.

Of concern for a number of lay ministers are the implications of an ageing congregation. They were able to identify some of their concerns including:
- the effect of a retiring congregation with members wanting to do less, along with declining congregation membership.
- some roles requiring people over 60 years of age to undertake additional study. Some people had not been in the education system for 45 or more years. These individuals were often not confident in writing, lacking in study technique and not practiced in forming and articulating arguments as required for many current study courses.
- use of technology. While some retired persons had learned to use computers and the internet along with other forms of technology, there was a large number who had not made this adaptation. The use of the internet for communication and accessing resources is increasing. These individuals and congregations are at a disadvantage with out these skill sets being present.
- The use of multi-media and data projectors is common place in some congregations, and something to be avoided in others. For ageing congregations the skills to use this technology is not present.
- Shrinking population in some rural areas is often due to younger members of the community moving to regional centres and capital cities for employment. Depleting rural congregations happens in this same manner with the remnant within congregations ageing.

Forums for the exploration of rural ministry will be appreciated by lay ministers and clergy alike and form the basis of ongoing development of these ministries.

Forums and network groups for ministry to youth and to alternate congregations exist at some level. Yet from within the comments gained within the study, some people are unable to access these. Sponsorship of forums for these ministry areas will extend what is already in place and bring further benefit to those involved.

4. Conclusions:

From listening to the voices and hearts of lay people involved in ministry it is obvious that they together represent whole scope of ministry undertaken by the Church. For many entering into ministry late in life it represents a new career and for many in this situation, a new lease on life. From the start of most interviews the sense of purpose was evident. These people were not just filling in time or playing church, but were intently and intentionally engaged in ministry.

For the lay minister a lot depends on their individual resourcefulness and maturity of of life and faith. The more resourceful are able to sort it out the challenges and issues and deal with them accordingly. There are those however who maybe less resourceful, but are none the less intent on fulfilling God's call on their life through lay ministry. For these people, the challenge for the wider church is how to support and resource them.

There was a true sense of the wonder of God as experiences were related telling of the hesitation at first in entering into what was perceived to be an important and vital task, a task that was traditionally reserved for the clergy, the perceived elite. Yet time and again, as these faithful individuals entered into ministry, they gained confidence and with confidence a growing enjoyment of discovery of fulfilling ministry. As one person commented with true fascination at the work of God within them "I never thought I would...". Their comment is significant for it claims the sense of so many lay ministers, given a chance at ministry, they have found fulfilment.

Lay ministers represented in this report are valuable members of a thriving church coming to grips with what is called for within this particular age. They deserve to be acknowledged, affirmed and supported in their respective ministries.

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Individual Interviews for the ELM Centre

Introduction
Hello, I'm [name of researcher] from the Christian Research Association. I am ringing on behalf of the Uniting Church ELM Centre in Sydney. I believe you have received a letter from them saying that we would ring. Are you happy to talk to us sometime how the wider church can best support you and your church? Would there be a convenient time to talk to you? .....

Actual Occasion
Hello, I'm [name of researcher] from the Christian Research Association. I am ringing on behalf of the Uniting Church ELM Centre in Sydney. Is this a convenient time to talk?

1. Can you begin by telling me a little about where you live? How large is the town / centre?

2. How close are you to a large regional centre? Do you go there often?

3. What about the church?
Do you meet weekly?
How many people attend each week?
Apart from worship what other activities do you have?

4. What is your role and responsibility in the church? What led to you taking up this role? What aspects of your past have prepared you for it?

5. Do you have other people who share in the responsibility of leadership? How many? What do they do?

6. What do you find most fulfilling about your role in the church?

7. What are some of the challenges? (Encourage interviews to be specific – more than just 'survival' or 'lack of money'.)

8. How do you cope with the challenges?

9. When you preach, where mostly do you find materials to help you? What do you find most stimulating as your prepare your sermons and services? What resources do you find helpful?

10. What do you turn to when there is a difficult pastoral situation?

11. Where do you find most support for your ministry? Are there particular educational resources you have found helpful? Have you done any courses at other places such as Coolamon College? (Other places which may be mentioned include Wesley Institute, Moore and Morling Colleges.)

12. How adequate is that support?

13. Would it be helpful to have other forms of support? In what ways might that be provided?

14. Does Presbytery offer any support or do you find Presbytery a burden?

15. Do you have much contact with the Synod offices? Have there been any other ways in which you have found the Synod to be supportive?

16. Coming back to your local church, are there other aspects of the church life that you would like to see developed? What are the hindrances to such developments?

17. Are there other things you would like to do yourself in the church?

18. Are there any ways in which additional resources, additional materials, mentoring or training might be of assistance in your situation?

19. How might such assistance or training be provided?

     Is it easy for you to go to things in the nearest regional centre?

     What about attending things in Sydney?

20. Is it important to you that courses are accredited in some way?

21. How easy do you find it using materials on the Internet?

- Have you attended any of the activities organised by the ELM Centre? How have you found them? (Highlights, frustrations.) Would you find similar activities helpful again?

(Programs run by the ELM Centre include:
     Lay preachers' school
     Lay ministry in-service
     Expos in worship, lay leadership and social justice.
Other resources on which interviewers can check on usage:
     Board of Education Resources website
     Elders and Leaders materials.
     'Must have Experience' – Lenten Studies Series.)

23. Are there any other ways you feel that the wider church can assist you and your church?

Focus Group Schedule
for Research on the Needs of Lay Leaders in the Uniting Church, NSW

1. Could we begin by each of you introducing yourselves and telling me where you come from.

2. Tell me about your churches. Just three things about your church from each of you ... and your personal responsibilities in your church.

3. What aspects of your involvement in the church do you find most fulfilling?

4. What are the major challenges? (Pursue these at some length. Encourage people to move beyond basic generalised challenges such as 'survival' and 'lack of money'. Ask for the range, and then ask them to prioritise these.)

5. How do you cope with these challenges? What forms of support do you have? How effective is that support?

      5a. More specifically – how do you prepare for sermons and services?

      5b. How do you cope with difficult pastoral situations?

6. How do you find the support of Presbytery and the State Synod offices in meeting these challenges? Do you receive any mentoring, educational or other forms of support from them or from other sources? Have you done any Coolamon College courses? How did you find them? What about courses from other places, or from other denominations?

7. Are there aspects of your local churches that you would like to see develop? What are the hindrances to that?

8. What about yourself? Are there any things you would like to be doing in the church, but for one reason or another have not been able to?

9. What resources, materials, and training might be of assistance? What would be the best ways of providing these?
      (Regional centres, Sydney, by extension. What forms they would take – short courses, day lectures, seminars or workshops? What would be the content? Who would you like to see providing these? How important is it that you know the provider? How helpful are materials on the Internet?)

10. Would there be any value in group activities in your local area? (Eg. Reading group, task groups, discussion groups.) What form might these take? What might groups work on?

11. Have you attended any of the activities organised by the ELM Centre? How have you found them? (Highlights, frustrations.) Would you find similar activities helpful again?

(Programs run by the ELM Centre include:
      Lay preachers' school
      Lay ministry in-service
      Expos in worship, lay leadership and social justice.

Other resources on which interviewers can check on usage:
      Board of Education Resources website
      Elders and Leaders materials.
      'Must have Experience' – Lenten Studies Series.)

12. How do you feel about what the ELM Centre is doing?

13. Are there any other ways you feel that the wider church can assist you and your church?