

Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly

Guidelines for the Third Phase of Ministerial Education

Background

Following a comprehensive review of ministerial education within the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), the 8th UCA National Assembly held in 1997 introduced the Four Phases of Ministerial Education, with a view to encouraging the practice of lifelong learning on the part of all those engaged in specified ministry.

The Four Phases were the Period of Discernment, the Core Phase of theological education and ministry formation, the Ministry Intern Phase, and the ongoing period of ordained or commissioned ministry practice which includes a component of Continuing Education for Ministry (CEM).

Ten years later, the Ministerial Education Commission (MEC) undertook a review of the Ministry Intern Phase, which raised issues, in particular, about the timing of ordination, the effect of the Ministry Intern Phase on ecumenical relationships in ministry settings, and the demands of the study component.

The MEC subsequently brought recommendations to the 12th Assembly which resulted in a resolution to change to the timing of ordination, and to change the name of the Ministry Intern Phase to the Third Phase of Ministerial Education, which would be a three year period of mentoring and support (Assembly Minute 09.33: See Appendix I).

The Intent and Purpose of the Third Phase of Ministerial Education

The Third Phase of Ministerial Education is intended to be period of sustained and intentional mentoring and support for newly ordained ministers during the first three years of ministry practice. It is to be a period of increased partnership between the Presbytery, the placement context and the newly ordained minister to assist the minister to make a smooth transition from the Core Phase into active and responsible ministry and to develop lifelong habits of engagement in professional development activities such as professional supervision and continuing education.

It recognises the fact that newly ordained ministers face particular challenges in adjusting to their new roles, including transitioning from a primarily educational context to a primarily ministry setting and from being formed to seeking to participate in the formation of others in the ministry context, establishing a wide range of new relationships within their ministry placement and with

peer groups, managing time and the pressure of expectations, undertaking certain tasks for the first time, and finding an appropriate work-life balance.

In the early portion of this Third Phase the newly ordained minister should be freed of significant Presbytery and Synod responsibilities in order to give appropriate energy and space to these heightened transition expectations.

These Guidelines

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- offer assistance to the Church “to ensure that appropriate continuing education, supervision, collegiality and support arrangements are put in place for Ministers from the beginning of their first placement” (Assembly Minute 09.33: See Appendix I);
- seek to establish common practice across the Assembly in terms of an overall framework for the Third Phase of Ministerial Education, but expect that synods and presbyteries will develop particular practices appropriate to their own resources and to the needs of particular newly ordained ministers;
- need to be interpreted flexibly to take into account the diversity of geographical and ministry locations in which ministers serve; the challenges, in some cases, of distance; the availability and cost of professional supervision and continuing education opportunities; and the pressure of time placed on newly ordained ministers adjusting to their first placement.

Responsibility for oversight of the Third Phase of Ministerial Education

The Presbytery will have primary responsibility for oversight of the Third Phase of Ministerial Education for newly ordained ministers within its care, within the parameters of these Guidelines. Such responsibility may be resourced by the appropriate Synod educational agencies.

The Presbytery will exercise its responsibility in the following ways:

- providing pastoral care to the minister;
- assisting the minister to establish supportive collegial relationships within the Presbytery;
- encouraging the minister to participate in the life of the Presbytery at a level appropriate to a newly ordained minister;
- assisting the minister to find an appropriate professional supervisor and approving the appointment of the supervisor;
- assisting the minister to design a program of continuing education appropriate to the minister’s needs in the first placement, the location of the placement, and the availability of study opportunities; including ongoing training in the areas of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, Duty of Care, Mandatory Reporting, Sexual Misconduct Procedures and child safety practices.

- ensuring that the placement has a sound understanding of the nature and requirements of the Third Phase of Ministerial Education;
- establishing with the minister a process of regular and reasonably frequent reporting to the Presbytery concerning the practice of ministry and engagement in professional supervision and continuing education.
- assisting the minister with the costs of supervision and continuing education in accordance with the practices of the Synod and Presbytery.

The newly ordained minister will be accountable to the Presbytery for:

- the practice of ministry;
- engagement in professional supervision;
- engagement in continuing education;
- participation in the life of the Presbytery in accordance with the minister's ordination vows;
- regular reporting to the Presbytery as determined in consultation with the Presbytery.

Continuing Education for Ministry (CEM)

The UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice recognises, in Paragraph 3.4(a), that “Ministers have a responsibility to maintain high standards of knowledge and skills in all areas of ministry relevant to their placement. This responsibility requires that Ministers undertake continuing education appropriate to this ministry”. In the supportive context of the Third Phase of Ministerial Education, the minister has the opportunity to develop sound habits of engagement in professional development activities, including continuing education.

Considerations to be taken into account by the Presbytery and the minister when planning a continuing education program for the Third Phase of Ministerial Education include:

- **Collegial relationships.** It will be important to encourage the newly ordained minister to develop collegial relationships within and beyond the Presbytery, to enable informal networking, sharing of ideas and reflection on ministry practice.
- **Geographical location of the placement.** The Presbytery and the minister will need to take into account the opportunities and limitations created by the geographical location of the placement. Ministers in larger towns and cities will have more opportunities for face-to-face learning through lecture courses and seminars; while ministers in rural and remote locations will need to consider online and correspondence options through distance education, and may need to be resourced for the cost of travel to larger centres for conferences and intensives.
- **Continuing education agreement.** The Presbytery and the Minister together should develop a three-year plan for continuing education during the Third Phase of Ministerial Education,

with a clear sense of direction and goals. The plan should be more detailed for the first year, less so for the third year; details for the second and third year will be worked out as the time draws nearer. As the minister moves into the second and third year, the minister should be giving some attention to educational goals beyond the Third Phase.

- **Time commitment.** *It will be important to ensure that the requirements of continuing education in the Third Phase do not overwhelm the newly ordained minister, who may be taking more time to complete ministry tasks than more experienced ministers would.* The Assembly document *Seeking a Heart of Wisdom* allows ministers in Phase Four 14 days of continuing education leave per year, but then indicates that this should be the “minimum time” allocated to continuing education, with time spent on leave supplemented by “planned reading programmes and other enrichment like spiritual disciplines ... integrated into a minister’s regular duties”. Continuing education programs for ministers in the Third Phase should be designed so that this level of commitment is maintained when the minister moves from Phase Three to Phase Four.
- **Options for continuing education.** Continuing education in the Third Phase should take into account the principles of adult learning and of variety, flexibility and relevance to the needs of the minister and the placement. Considerations include:
 - **Areas of study.** *Seeking a Heart of Wisdom* describes core areas of study which are foundational for most ministries: spiritual growth, Biblical studies, understanding and appreciation of theology and church history, skills for the practice of ministry, and reflection on society and culture. The minister in the Third Phase should seek to provide a balance of these in the continuing education agreement.
 - **Types of courses and modes of delivery.** The minister should be open to the possibilities of a variety of types of courses and modes of delivery; eg, postgraduate and undergraduate courses, courses with weekly lectures, intensives or online delivery, in-service options organised by the Synod or Presbytery, conferences, seminars, workshops, retreats, and reading programs. Courses may be accessed through universities, lay education centres, theological colleges, and programs hosted by synods and presbyteries. Creative options which combine study with ministry practice could be explored; eg, theological reflection based on ministry practice combined with a reading program, preparation of teaching programs to use in the placement.
 - **Cross-presbytery opportunities.** Specifically designed cross-presbytery opportunities such as peer reflection groups and in-service retreats sponsored by the appropriate Synod education provider could be an invaluable way of supporting the newly ordained minister, helping to build collegial relationships, and assisting the

- minister to reflect on ministry practice and develop an increasingly clear sense of ministerial identity.
- **Areas of ethical training.** Ongoing training in the areas of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice, Duty of Care, Mandatory Reporting, Sexual Misconduct Procedures and child safety practices should be built into the continuing education program.
 - **Payment for Continuing Education program.** Funding for continuing education during the Third Phase should be in accordance with the practices of the minister's Synod and Presbytery.

Professional Supervision

The UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice indicates, in Paragraph 3.8, that ministers “have a responsibility to ensure that they receive regular professional supervision. Such supervision is intended to assist Ministers to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of ministry” and is a matter of both self-care and professionalism in the exercise of ministry. The supportive context of the Third Phase of Ministerial Education provides the opportunity for the minister to develop sound habits of engagement in professional supervision. The Assembly document *Pastoral Supervision: Introducing a process of reflection on ministry experience* provides the basis for the practice of supervision in the UCA and should be consulted.

Considerations to be taken into account by the Presbytery and the minister when setting up professional supervision arrangements include:

- **The nature of professional supervision.** In setting up a professional supervision arrangement for a minister in the Third Phase, the Presbytery and the minister need to be clear what professional supervision is and what it is not. The nature of the supervision envisaged by the Code of Ethics is primarily “intended to assist Ministers to maintain the boundaries of the pastoral relationship and the quality of ministry”, but is at the same time an aspect of self-care, since competence in ministry generally leads to an improved sense of confidence and wellbeing. Professional supervision is not spiritual direction, mentoring, coaching, counselling or therapy, though the Presbytery and the minister may feel that it would be advantageous to engage in one or more of these activities as well as in professional supervision. Collegial relationships within the Presbytery also enable sharing and contribute to enhanced ministry practice.
- **Geographical location of the placement.** The Presbytery and the minister will need to take into account the opportunities and limitations created by the geographical location of the placement. Ministers in larger towns and cities will have more opportunities for face-to-face supervision, where ministers in rural and remote locations may need to access supervision

through email, telephone, Skype or VOIP options. Distant presbyteries may find it helpful to link into the supervision programs of more densely-populated presbyteries to access a broader range of supervisors.

- **Professional Supervision covenants.** When setting up a supervision arrangement, it is important to establish a covenant between the minister and the supervisor which spells out clearly what each expects of the other in terms of frequency and length of sessions, content of the session, preparation for the session, and limits to confidentiality (eg, danger of self harm, illegal activity etc). The supervisor may assist the minister in planning a CEM program.
- **Time commitment.** The Assembly document *Pastoral Supervision* does not stipulate any particular frequency or time commitment for supervision, and different presbyteries will require different levels of commitment from their ministers. Ministers in the Third Phase should be provided with more than the average amount of supervision, taking into account, however, that supervision is intended to be helpful and supportive but not a burden in terms of time. The amount of time spent in supervision should be scaled down over the three years of the Third Phase so that the minister transitioning into Phase Four is engaged in the same amount of supervision as other ministers in Phase Four.
- **Options for professional supervision.** Options for professional supervision include:
 - face-to-face, email, Skype or VOIP sessions;
 - one-on-one arrangements or peer supervision groups;
 - supervision from professionals in the field, ministers in placement and retired ministers who have had supervisory training, and peer groups facilitated by a supervisor.
- **Payment for Professional Supervision.** Funding for professional supervision during the Third Phase should be in accordance with the practices of the minister's Synod and Presbytery.

Conclusion of the Third Phase.

Towards the end of the third year of the Third Phase, there should be an intentional conversation between the Presbytery, the minister and the placement concerning the minister's learnings during the Third Phase, growth and development in ministerial identity and practice, the role of the placement in shaping and forming the minister, the importance of maintaining the good habits established in CEM and supervision, and, if necessary, strategies for further work in areas of ongoing challenge.

List of Resources

Bos, Rev Dr Robert, *Offering our Best to God and the Church: Continuing Education for Ministry*. Presented to the UCA Queensland Synod in Session, May 2010.

Pastoral Supervision: Introducing a process of reflection on ministry experience
(<http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/MEC/mecpastoralsupervision.pdf>)

Seeking a Heart of Wisdom
(<http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/MEC/mecheartwisdom.pdf>)

Appendix I Assembly Resolution 09.33

The Assembly resolved:

09.33 REGULATIONS RE MINISTRY INTERN PHASE

- a) to authorise the Standing Committee, on the advice of the Assembly Legal Reference Committee, to amend the relevant Regulations (including 2.1.1, 2.2.18 (c), 2.2.24(g), 2.2.25(d) and 2.2.28) so that with regard to the Third Phase of Ministerial Education (Ministry Intern Phase)
 - ordination take place at the end of the Core Phase and upon approval of a call;
 - the Third Phase of Ministerial Education be no longer known as the Ministry Intern Phase; and
 - the Third Phase of Ministerial Education be a period of mentoring and support for newly ordained ministers during the first three years of their ministry; and
- b) to request the Ministerial Education Commission to develop Guidelines to ensure that appropriate continuing education, supervision, collegiality and support arrangements are put in place for Ministers from the beginning of their first placement.

Approved Assembly Standing Committee 17 July 2010.