



Worksheet 5: Ordination

Many people are unclear about what ordination means. While all are called to discipleship, some are called to ordained leadership in the church. It is important to appreciate what ordination is about.

A *Brief Statement on Ordination* (2008) provides a helpful explanation. The excerpts below provide an overview of the *Statement*.

Baptism: the foundation of all Christian ministry

All Christians participate in the ministry of Christ by virtue of their baptism. *The Basis of Union* says some members are recognised “through the guidance of the Holy Spirit” by the Church as “women and men called of God to preach the Gospel, to lead the people in worship, to care for the flock, to share in government and to serve those in need in the world” (para. 14). This process of discernment and setting apart is concerned with the ordering of the Church’s life “in response to God’s call to enter more fully into mission” (para. 13).

Ordination

Ordination is the “setting apart” of baptised women and men, called by God as discerned by the Church, to serve as Deacons and Ministers of the Word (*Basis of Union*, para. 14(a)). Commissioning is distinct from ordination. It involves recognising individuals for particular tasks and roles, for a specific time and place.

The importance of ordination for the Uniting Church can be seen in the special care with which the *Basis of Union* addresses the liturgical requirements for ordination:

“The Presbytery will ordain by prayer and the laying on of hands in the presence of a worshipping congregation. In this act of ordination the Church praises the ascended Christ for conferring gifts upon men and women. It recognises Christ’s call of the individual to be his minister; it prays for the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to equip the minister for that service” (para.14(a)).

Ordained ministers exercise their ministry as part of the ministry of the whole people of God. They have a particular relationship to other parts of the body of Christ.

“Ordination places the minister in a new relation to others in the community, as a designated leader who is authorised to be such. The person is given a new status in the community, not in terms of hierarchical advantage, but in its proper sense of a new ‘standing place’, in the same way in which marriage places two people into a new relationship with each other which will never be the same again” (*Ordination and Ministry in The Uniting Church in Australia*, 1994, Part 3, para. 6).

The question is often raised whether ordination is about function or a change of the person in themselves. It is a matter of a new relationship in the body of Christ. This new relationship recognised and established by ordination is normally for life, and the Uniting Church maintains that it is with the whole Church catholic [universal], not just within the Uniting Church. With this new relationship come particular responsibilities. “These will preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and exercise pastoral care so that all may be equipped for their particular ministries, thus maintaining the apostolic witness to Christ in the Church” (*Basis of Union*, para.14(a)). Ordained ministers have a particular role in the formation of individual Christians and for the body of Christ as a whole. God gifts ordained leaders to the church.

Ordained ministry is a representative ministry. It is ministry exercised “personally on behalf of the Church” (*Basis of Union*, para. 16). Ministers exercise their responsibility to Christ and the Church by representing Christ to the people and the people to Christ. This representative ministry involves focusing, modelling, supervising, shepherding, enabling and empowering the general ministry of the Church.

Each of the ordained ministries has a different emphasis. Ministers of the Word have a particular responsibility for safeguarding the unity of the body of Christ; and Deacons, for the church’s service in and for the world. Neither of these particular responsibilities excludes the other.

Formation

Ordination in the Uniting Church places people into a new relationship of general responsibility within the church.

The Christian Church has always tested and prepared ministerial candidates and evaluated them for character and spiritual maturity. In the Uniting Church, the process of becoming ordained is a time both of the Church’s testing of a person’s calling and gifts, and of the person testing if God is calling her/him to the ministry of Deacon or to Minister of the Word. This process is often referred to as the formation of ministers. It is a partnership between the candidate for ministry and the Church, which seeks to enable the candidate to find her or his place in the ministry of the Church.

“ORDINATION IS THE ‘SETTING APART’ OF BAPTISED WOMEN AND MEN, CALLED BY GOD AS DISCERNED BY THE CHURCH, TO SERVE AS DEACONS AND MINISTERS OF THE WORD.”



Statements by the Assembly

Below is a list of statements made by the Uniting Church in Australia National Assembly concerning ordination.

- » *A Brief Statement on Ordination* - full text (2008)
- » *The Church and its Ministry* (2004)*
- » *Sacramental Protocols* (1997)*
- » *Affirmations on Ordination* (1997)*
- » *Ordination and Ministry* (1994)*
- » *Report on Ministry* (1991)*
- » *Statement on Ordination* (1988)

(* These statements can be found in Bos, R. & Thompson, G., *Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia*)

Discussion questions

- » What is the relationship between the call to discipleship and ordination?
- » In what ways might ordained ministry be more than task oriented?
- » What then do you see are the particular responsibilities for ordained ministers?
- » Does the context influence how ordained ministry is best conducted and, if so, how?
- » How might you and your congregation assist the minister to be faithful to their calling?

Further reading

- » *A Service of Ordination of a Minister of the Word with Induction* (sections: the Presentation of the Ordinand, the Charge, the Questions, and the Ordination)
- » Gordon Dicker, *Faith with Understanding* (ch.12 section on Ministry)
- » Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding* (ch.11 section on The Meaning of an Ordained Ministry)
- » *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry WCC: Faith and Order Paper no.111* (section on Ministry)



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Note

This sheet is part of a series on theology in the 21st century. It is prepared for the National Assembly by the Working Group on Doctrine as a discussion starter for small groups, in congregations, faith communities or other settings. It may also be used for personal reflection. Low resolution copies of this sheet can be downloaded free of charge from the Doctrine website: www.assembly.uca.org.au/doctrine.