

OCTOBER 1980 UCC Observer

One order of ministry but debate continues

The United Church has made some decisions about what ministry is and who does it, but the Church is far from finished with the debate.

General Council agreed that there is one order of ministry and it includes both ordained and commissioned. Some are ordained to the ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral care; others are commissioned to the diaconal ministry of education, service and pastoral care.

(And people earlier commissioned as missionaries who had the education qualifications as deaconesses will now be offered inclusion in commissioned ranks.)

But at the same time as it made those decisions about the commissioned ministry, General Council was also dealing with Project:Ministry which had a different approach. The "essential thrust" of the Project:Ministry report was approved for the future. That means an emphasis on a ministry of Christ into which the

whole people of God are called. But within that ministry, some are called specifically to look after the central acts of proclamation and celebration of the word. Those people would have special training and be set apart and ordained. Other people might be called, set apart and commissioned to assignments of teaching, service and oversight.

In other words, although the report tried to avoid strong divisions, there would still be ordained, commissioned and lay people. Reaction to the report's attempt to stop using lay-clergy language was rather negative and no resolutions were passed that would do away with those familiar designations.

Jean Hamilton of Maritime Conference spoke for many when she told commissioners: "I'm not only comfortable with lay-clergy language, I rejoice in it. Many of us are enjoying our lay ministry. I don't want to be defined in terms of

what I'm not (a non-ordained person)."

While some main thrusts of the report were approved, some concerns were noted by the sessional committee that spent 13 hours trying to put together a list of recommendations. Some people are confused by being told the order of ministry refers to the whole people of God while various functions are still separate. Some commissioners feel left "in ambiguous, secondary" position.

As the sessional committee noted: "As a Church we are still on our journey toward a more complete understanding of ministry."

However, the Council did agree to the following:

□ Instead of inducting ordained people and installing lay people, the Church should use a single "covenanting ceremony" for entry into these special new relationships.

□ Normally, every ordained or commissioned minister must have a covenant arrangement with presbytery and a local congregation. If the minister declines, he or she must request presbytery to either lodge his or her name with a local congregation and hold the ordination or commissioning in "suspension of function" or remove the name from the order of ministry roll of the United Church and place it on the discontinued service roll.

□ While the Project:Ministry report recommended that commissioned, lay or other supply who were in a pastoral assignment should have the "right" to administer the sacraments, the Council changed that to "possibility" of administering them. An amendment to change it back to a "right" for commissioned supply ministers lost on a close vote. "If we pass this there will be no distinction between ordained and commissioned," the Rev. Glenn Ashford of Bay of Quinte said.

□ However, Council agreed that lay or commissioned chairpersons of presbytery, presidents of Conference or moderators should be able to preside at the Lord's Supper.

□ At the same time, small groups within congregations should be discouraged from celebrating communion without proper authorization or as part of the whole community.

None of these decisions will be put into practice immediately. A small implementation and monitoring group is to be set up "to guide the Church in following through its decisions about ministry". That representative group will probably be ready by the end of the year. It is supposed to consider the process not just in terms of ministry on its own but "in context of appropriate mission strategy".



The sessional committee which dealt with the Project: Ministry report presents its recommendations to Council, above. From left, Ralph Webber, David Lochhead, Anne Squires, and Bob MacLean, who was Project: Ministry staff person. Many rose to debate the recommendations, put together after 13 hours of committee sessions. Among them, Rod Booth, right, who admits to feeling tired of the subject after almost 20 years, on the two previous groups studying the question of ministry in the United Church.

