

A Response to *A Proposal for One Order of Ministry* from the Dialogue Between The United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada

Saskatoon • January 29, 2015

In 2012 the official dialogue between The United Church of Canada and the Anglican Church of Canada began focusing its work on “an examination of the doctrinal identities of the two churches and the implications of this for the lives of the churches, including understandings of sacraments and orders of ministry.”¹ This mandate has coincided with The United Church’s own internal discernment around the establishment of a single order of ministry known as the ordained ministry.

The members of the dialogue have followed with hopeful interest the evolution of *A Proposal for One Order of Ministry*, and discussed at length the draft of the document dated December 18, 2014. While recognizing that this is an internal conversation of The United Church of Canada, we are also conscious that our two churches are actively searching for new pathways toward a mutual recognition of our ministries, and this process offers a potential inroad in that direction. Therefore there is much in the aforementioned iteration of the proposal that the members of the dialogue find encouraging and wish to affirm.

We first of all acknowledge that the context from which the *One Order* proposal emerges is one shared by both of our churches, as well as others. Our denominations are struggling to provide adequately formed ministers of word, sacrament, pastoral care, and service at a time when a variety of models of training for ministry are necessary in order to meet changing mission needs.

It is encouraging to see a commitment to retain the language of ordination to describe the ministerial office being proposed. As the *One Order* document notes, a broad consensus has emerged about the nature of ministry in the wider church, thanks in part to ecumenical convergence texts like *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Therefore all efforts to understand ordered ministry within The United Church of Canada as part of the global Christian community, the one church of Christ, are to be encouraged. The use of such common language as “ordained ministry” helps open the way for broader discussions about ministry with other churches, including the Anglican Church of Canada. We are also heartened to see the traditionally close association the proposal envisions between the one order of ministry and the administration of sacraments.

There is much in The United Church’s proposed one order of ministry that Anglicans can recognize. Like Anglican priests these United Church ministers would be ordained, be accountable, administer sacraments, and also exercise a variety of ministries. A move in such a direction would not only advance our two

¹ Resolution A139-R2, 2010 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada.

churches' ongoing conversation about mutual recognition of ministry, it would also help normalize some of our existing relationships in contexts such as ecumenical shared ministries.

In bringing clarity to its own categories of ministry, The United Church of Canada will also be creating new possibilities for deepening conversations with ecumenical partners about the mutual recognition of ministries. We are also encouraged by the way in which this proposal would further help the church's ministers become nimble as they respond to the rapidly changing mission context in which they are called to serve.

When the Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada were negotiating a formal merger in the 1970s, it was for the sake of mission: "We desire that union should make possible more effective participation in God's mission both in Canada and throughout the world."² Though organic union is no longer our goal, we still strive for visible unity in common purpose, vision, and mission.

An eventual mutual recognition of ministry between our two churches will help reveal that unity of a church in and for the world. It is our view that *A Proposal for One Order of Ministry* represents a significant step along the way, and we would encourage The United Church of Canada to pursue this path.

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² Plan of Union, ¶ 8.