

Proposal: Administration of sacrament for retired Diaconal Ministers

Origin: Judy Zarubick

1. What is the issue? Why is it important?

Many diaconal ministers have years of experience administering the sacraments in their communities of faith and in other ministry positions. When Diaconal ministers retire, this licence is removed.

Currently, many communities of faith are seeking ministry personnel for pulpit supply with the hope that they might be able to conduct the sacraments as part of that supply opportunity. While many diaconal ministers would like to support these communities of faith by honouring their request to administer the sacraments, the current policy does not make this possible for all retired diaconal ministers in all regions.

In addition, there are many retired diaconal ministers who faithfully serve their Region by fulfilling the role of Pastoral Charge supervisors. One of the roles for Pastoral Charge supervisors can be to administer the sacraments to communities of faith over which they have supervisory responsibilities; communities of faith with whom they have established strong supportive relationships.

2. What is happening now?

Currently there is inconsistency between regions with some retired diaconal ministers continuing to be licensed while others are not. This inconsistency creates confusion for diaconal ministers as well as misunderstanding for communities of faith who rely upon ministry personnel to enhance the vitality of their communities through sharing the gifts of the sacraments. This confusion is particularly acute when a region appoints a Pastoral Charge Supervisor to support and meet the needs of a community of faith, only to discover that they must search for someone to administer the sacraments. This adds additional anxiety in an already stressful time in the life of a community of faith.

3. What is the recommendation?

This proposal asks that Regional Council provide license to retired Diaconal Ministers on request. The General Council could authorize an amendment to the current policy by removing the “or retired diaconal ministers” line from I.2.4.1(a):

I.2.4 Licences to Administer Sacraments

I.2.4.1 The regional council may grant a licence to administer the sacraments to

a) a designated lay minister, candidate serving under appointment, admission minister serving under appointment, diaconal supply, ordained supply, ~~or retired diaconal minister;~~

and adding to I.2.4.2:

I.2.4.2 Diaconal Ministers

The regional council must grant a diaconal minister a licence to administer the sacraments when the diaconal minister is serving in a call or appointment, or are employed in another ministry position **or when a retired diaconal minister makes a request for a license**. The licence will be for the duration of the call, appointment, or other ministry position.

4. Background information:

In 2018 GC 43 received the proposal “MNWO 03 Sacramental Licence For Retired Diaconal Ministers” addressing this same issue. The suggested way forward from the Facilitation Group included *direction to the General Secretary to conduct a comprehensive study on these issues (including all issues raised in proposals MNWO 01 and MNWO 02 on rural and small church ministry) and develop a strategy for meeting the ministry needs of all communities of faith, including access to the sacraments.* This work was then given to the Ministry Streams task group (appointed late 2019) to consider. The task group brought forward a number of recommendations to the 44th GC in 2022 related to small and rural churches. However, none of these recommendations were related to licensing retired diaconal ministers to administer sacraments for communities of faith who do not have their own ministry personnel. The “may” language in I.2.4.1(a) remains unchanged.

5. How does this proposal help us to live into our church’s commitments on equity?

Many communities of faith are without called or appointed ministry personnel. These communities of faith, especially those in isolated, rural and small communities, face an increased burden to make sure their worship services take place. They do not have regular access to the sacraments that nourish and strengthen them. Granting permission to administer the sacraments to retired diaconal ministers who make such a request indicates that our church supports these vulnerable communities of faith. It also addresses the discrimination against Diaconal Ministers who throughout their ministries have strengthened their communities of faith through sharing the sacraments – only to discover that they can no longer offer such support upon their retirement. This proposal supports Regions in their search for Pastoral Charge Supervisors who can provide the essentials of ministry to the communities of faith under their care without additional administrative action. This proposal would ensure that any retired diaconal minister who is willing to support communities of faith in this way, would be able to do so, simply by requesting the license from their Region. This proposal will also help to remove the regional inequities and inconsistencies in the practice of granting license to administer sacraments to retired diaconal ministers.

For the body transmitting this proposal to the General Council:

Please select the appropriate option and provide the key discussion points for items being forwarded to the General Council:

- Agree
- Disagree without forwarding to the General Council
- Disagree and forwarding to the General Council
- Take no action at this time

Comments _____

Who will present (by prerecorded video) this proposal on behalf of the transmitting body?

Email contact:

If you have questions regarding this proposal, please send them to: GC45@united-church.ca