

Title: United Church recognition of diaconal ministry

Originating Body: Conference Ministry, Personnel and Education Committee on behalf of the Coordinating Committee of Diakonia of The United Church of Canada (currently based in Maritime Conference)

Maritime Conference Action: Transmit with concurrence

Financial Implications: N/A

Staffing Implications: N/A

Proposal:

The Maritime Conference proposes that the 40th General Council:

1. The United Church of Canada establish a mechanism by which diaconal ministry is specifically supported and encouraged within the life and work of the church.
2. The United Church of Canada consult with diaconal ministers and Diakonia of The United Church of Canada to determine the most appropriate mechanism to specifically support and encourage diaconal ministry within the life and work of the church. Possible mechanisms may include:
 - a. creation of a standing committee of General Council on diaconal ministry
 - b. granting status to Diakonia of The United Church of Canada (DUCC) to access General Council structures directly
 - c. amending the mandate of Ministry and Employment Policies and Services Unit (MEPS) to specifically address issues related to diaconal ministry and appoint a diaconal representative to the MEPS Permanent Committee
 - d. creation of a specific staff position for diaconal ministry.

Background:

The Basis of Union Article XVII, *Of the Ministry*, declares “We believe that Jesus Christ, as the Supreme Head of the Church, has appointed therein ... a diaconal ministry of Education, Service and Pastoral Care...”; and

Diaconal ministry was established by the early church, (i.e. Phoebe, Romans 16:1 and Stephen, Acts 6:5) and has been expressed in various ways since that time to the formation of The United Church of Canada. Even so, at present diaconal ministers make up less than 10% of serving order of Ministry Personnel; and

the minority status of diaconal ministry presents circumstances of isolation, misunderstanding, confusion with other forms of ministry and fear of marginalization for many diaconal ministers; and

at one time the United Church of Canada supported diaconal ministry through a designated staff person along with a standing committee, the most recent version of which was called Committee on Diaconal Ministry within the former Division of Ministry Personnel and Education; and

following the disbanding of the General Council Committee on Diaconal Ministry there appears to be no General Council committee, working unit or staff position with a specific responsibility to support Diaconal Ministry; and

a number of significant issues related to Diaconal Ministry remain of concern, such as but not limited to:

- the characterization of diaconal ministry within General Council documents
- recruitment for diaconal ministry
- support for those called to diaconal ministry in the Candidacy process
- orientation of individuals and committees (Education and Students and Conference Interview Board) within the Candidacy process
- support for institutions of preparation for diaconal ministry
- developing awareness of the gifts of diaconal ministry expressed within the life and work of the church
- isolation of individual diaconal ministers
- development of ministry positions for diaconal ministers
- orientation of individuals and committees within Pastoral Relations processes

General Council has recognized the association, Diakonia of The United Church of Canada (DUCC), celebrating its 25th year in 2009.