



Uniting Church in Australia
Presbytery of Western Australia

Lay Preachers Handbook

A guide for those wanting to explore
their future ministry



Approved by the Candidates
for Ministries Committee
Presbytery of WA

What is a Lay Preacher?

A Lay Preacher is one of the four specified ministries of the Uniting Church. The others are

- Minister of the Word
- Deacon
- Pastor

According to the Uniting Church:

“The ministry of Lay Preacher is one in which lay persons may participate in the proclamation of the gospel and in witness to Christian faith and experience, and for which they have received gifts and are called by the Holy Spirit.”

How do you become a Lay Preacher?

This guide is offered for the information of anyone seeking advice about becoming a Lay Preacher in the Presbytery of WA. We hope that it will also be helpful to Ministers and Church Councils, as they deal with applications for candidature of Lay Preachers.

Uniting Church Regulations concerning the selection, training and recognition of Lay Preachers are to be found in *Regulations 2.3.4, 2.4.4 and 2.4.7.*

Discerning God’s Call

The first step in becoming a Lay Preacher is to discern that God is calling you to a ministry of proclaiming the gospel and leading God’s people in worship. There are many ways you can discern this call.

- Through your own prayer and devotional life, you may have heard God calling you to preach the gospel.
- God’s call to preach may have come to you through participation in worship, as you listen to the words of Scripture or songs.
- You may have been asked to lead some services of worship and from this experience, you have discerned gifts and a calling to this ministry.
- You may have undertaken some studies in Scripture and Theology and now feel that you have a calling to share what you have learnt through preaching.
- Others may have discerned a call and gifts for preaching in you and have encouraged you to become a Lay Preacher.
- You may have taken part in a Period of Discernment and through this process discovered a calling to become a Lay Preacher
- Others may have different experiences, but all will share a desire to proclaim the gospel of God’s grace in Jesus Christ.

Testing your Call

When you have discerned that God may be calling you to the ministry of Lay Preacher, you need to test out this calling for talking to others. Discernment of call is always done jointly by the individual in consultation with leaders in the church.

Your first step is to talk to an ordained Minister, either the Minister of your congregation, or if your congregation does not have a Minister, talk to another Minister who knows you well. Tell

them about your sense of call and find out if they affirm both your calling and your gifts for this ministry.

Secondly, talk to your Church Council to ensure your calling is affirmed by leaders in the church. The Church Council will meet with you to hear the story of your faith journey, and to test your sense of call: you need to be able to tell of the conviction of God's call to preach and lead worship. The Church Council will also assess whether you have the suitable character, personality and spiritual maturity to fulfil this ministry.

Applying to become a candidate for the ministry of Lay Preacher

To apply to become a Lay Preacher, you must

- Have been a confirmed member of the Uniting Church for at least 12 months.
- Have a current Working With Children Check and National Police Clearance.
- Have your application for this ministry affirmed by your Church Council.

You must apply to the Presbytery (through the Candidates for Ministries Committee) to be accepted as a candidate for the Ministry of Lay Preacher. The Application Form is attached to this Handbook.

Please note that there are sections on this Application Form which must be filled in by your Minister and your Church Council. Please note that the Church Council must record the voting for and against your application.

You may also seek up to two references from church members who can affirm your sense of calling and suitability for this ministry.

Once the Application Form has been completed by all parties, it is to be sent to the Chair of the Candidates for Ministries Committee, at candidates.ministry@wa.uca.org.au together with copies of your Working with Children Check and your National Police Clearance.

The Candidates for Ministries Committee (CMC) on behalf of the Presbytery will consider the application, guided by all available reports and recommendations. You will be informed of the decision of the Candidates for Ministries Committee within 7 days of the decision being made. If the application has been rejected, CMC will give you reasons for this and also offer advice on any future action.

If the application is accepted, you will be referred to the Uniting Centre for Education and Formation (UCEF) for education and formation. CMC will also appoint a Mentor who will assist you in your formation for this ministry and a Contact Person who will maintain contact with you on behalf of CMC during your period of education and formation.

Preparing for the ministry of Lay Preacher

National Standards

The National Assembly of the UCA establishes the Standards for the Education and Formation of Lay Preachers. To read these standards go to the Assembly website here -

<https://ucaassembly.recollect.net.au/nodes/view/464>

Required Courses

In the Presbytery of WA, you must complete the following Lay Preacher training program.

Core study areas include:

- Introduction to the Old Testament
- Introduction to the New Testament
- Introduction to Theology (the study of God and faith)
- Introduction to Worship Leading and Preaching

Other required courses are:

- Introduction to the Basis of Union (the main faith document of the UCA)
- How the Uniting Church Works – its structure and ethos
- Behaving Responsibly as a Lay Preacher – Code of Ethics and professional boundaries
- Safe Church training

If you can provide evidence that you have already successfully completed courses in these areas, then you may apply for an exemption.

Mentorship

As well as undertaking the above courses, you will also meet regularly with a Mentor, appointed by CMC. The Mentor will be an experienced preacher who will guide you in your formation for this ministry. Formation will include

- a. regular participation in the worship of a congregation or faith community
- b. supervision in the preparation and leading of worship and feedback from your Mentor
- c. participation in the spiritual disciplines of prayer and study of the Scriptures
- d. reflection on the Basis of Union and ethos of the Uniting Church
- e. reflection on the UCA Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Lay Preachers

You are encouraged to meet regularly with your Mentor to talk about your progress and any challenges. Your Mentor will help you grow in confidence and skills.

Practical Assessment

You are also required to undertake practical assessment of your ability to lead worship and preach. You will need to:

Practice leading worship and preaching in your own or another congregation. Ask for support from your Mentor as you prepare to lead worship and get feedback from the congregation.

Your competency as a Lay Preacher will need to be assessed as satisfactory in at least 3 worship services, with at least one of these being in a congregation which is not your own. Your worship leadership and preaching will be observed and assessed by a person chosen by the Uniting Centre for Education and Formation.

You will be assessed on:

- The structure of your worship service, including your choice of music.
- Your preaching style and sermon structure, including its relevance to contemporary life.
- Your Biblical interpretation and your theological and pastoral depth.
- How well you connect with and involve the congregation
- Your use of creative and visual elements, technology and space.

Final steps to becoming a Lay Preacher

In order to successfully complete their education and formation, candidates for Lay Preacher are required to demonstrate competency in the following areas.

- a. preparing material for worship appropriate to local contexts
- b. facilitating shared planning of worship services
- c. setting up and utilising worship spaces
- d. speaking and leading in worship settings
- e. undertaking exegesis of biblical texts
- f. developing sermons appropriate to local contexts
- g. presenting sermons appropriate to local contexts
- h. ability to articulate a biblical and theological basis for Christian worship
- i. ability to explain the shape and elements of Christian worship
- j. ability to undertake evaluation and act on feedback
- k. ability to articulate the scope and implications of the “Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice for Lay Preachers

When you have successfully completed all the required education, formation and practical assessment, two short written reports, one from the UCEF Education & Resources Coordinator and the other from your Mentor will be sent to the Candidates for Ministries Committee. These reports will confirm that you are demonstrating the required competencies and are now ready for recognition as a Lay Preacher.

CMC considers the reports, and may interview you or seek additional reports, if considered necessary. If the Candidates for Ministries Commission endorses your recognition as a Lay Preacher, they will arrange for you to be presented to a Presbytery meeting with the recommendation that you be recognised as a Lay Preacher. The Presbytery makes the final decision on whether you are ready for recognition as a Lay Preacher.

You will need to attend the Presbytery meeting (a regional church council) and make a brief presentation on your faith journey, your calling to be a Lay Preacher and why you believe you are now ready for this ministry. The Presbytery members will then vote on whether you should be recognized as a Lay Preacher.

Service of Commissioning

Once the full presbytery meeting has made a decision to recognise you as a Lay Preacher, the Chairperson of Presbytery will arrange a service of worship at which you will be commissioned for this ministry, and shall issue a Certificate of Recognition as a Lay Preacher. This service is usually conducted in your own congregation.

Life after Commissioning

The Pastoral Relations Committee maintains a roll of Lay Preachers in the Presbytery which is made available to congregations seeking a Lay Preacher to lead worship. This roll is reviewed on an annual basis to determine whether Lay Preachers are still active or not.

Lay Preachers are eligible to be elected as members of Presbytery. If you wish to take up this option please inform the Secretary of Presbytery.

Lay Preachers are expected to engage in continuing education through regular participation in events organised by UCEF which help you enhance your Biblical, theological and practical skills. You are encouraged to take part in annual reviews to reflect on your ministry and identify areas for growth. You are also required to keep up to date with your Safe Church Training and Ethical Ministry workshops, as well as maintaining a Working with Children Check. You are also encouraged to continue to evaluate the services you lead and seek feedback from the congregations you serve.



Candidates for Ministries Committee Application for Acceptance as a Candidate for Lay Preacher

Declaration of Intent

I believe that God is calling me to a preaching ministry within the Uniting Church in Australia. In obedience to that Call, I present myself to the Church for acceptance as a candidate for the Ministry of Lay Preacher.

I understand that my Call to preach will be tested as my application is considered by the Councils of the Church.

Signature of applicant: _____ **Date:** __/__/__

Personal Details

Surname: _____ **Title (Ms etc):** _____

Given names: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____ **Postcode:** _____

Telephone: Daytime _____ Evening _____

Mobile _____

Email: _____

Date of birth: __/__/__

How long have you been a confirmed member of the Uniting Church? _____

Present Congregation _____

Period of Church Membership at present Congregation _____

Do you have a current Working with Children Check? (Please attach copy) Yes No

Do you have a current National Police Clearance? (Please attach copy) Yes No

Personal Statement

Please attach a short personal statement which outlines how you have discerned that God is calling you to become a Lay Preacher, and what gifts and experience you believe you have for this ministry.

Affirmation by others

1. Minister: Name (please PRINT): _____

I have known the applicant for _____ years.

I have met with the applicant and affirmed their gifts and calling to the ministry of Lay Preacher. (If they want, the Minister may provide further comments in a confidential report to CMC)

Signature: _____ **Date:** __/__/__

2. Church Council

We have met with the applicant and offer the following comments about their:

Faith Development

Gifts for this ministry

Calling for this ministry

Spiritual maturity

Character and personality

After meeting with the applicant, we affirm that they are a suitable person to be accepted as a candidate for the Ministry of Lay Preacher.

Voting: For Against Abstain

Signature (Secretary): _____ **Date:** __/__/__

3. Referees (Note: this section is optional)

Applicants have the opportunity to supply the names of up to TWO referees.

Written references attached? Yes No

Title and Name: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____ **Postcode:** _____

Phone: _____ **Mobile:** _____

Email: _____

Title and Name: _____

Address: _____

Suburb: _____ **Postcode:** _____

Phone: _____ **Mobile:** _____

Email: _____