

RULES FOR MINISTERS OF THE WORD AND DEACONS

Uniting Church in Australia

MINISTERIAL EDUCATION COMMISSION RULES

Programme of Education & Formation for the Ministry of the Word and the Ministry of Deacon

Preamble

'The Uniting Church affirms that every member of the Church is engaged to confess the faith of Christ crucified and to be his faithful servant. It acknowledges with thanksgiving that the one Spirit has endowed the members of Christ's Church with a diversity of gifts, and that there is no gift without its corresponding service: all ministries have a part in the ministry of Christ.' (Basis of Union Para 13).

For the sake of fidelity to the church's apostolic beginnings and continuing its apostolic mission, the Uniting Church orders its life and ministry through a twofold ordained ministry; The ministry of the Word and the ministry of Deacon. In addition, it has instituted the ministry of Pastor, comprising a variety of ministries for which people are not ordained, and has continued the ministry of Lay Preacher.

The Ministerial Education Commission has responsibility, on behalf of the Assembly, for the oversight of the education and formation of candidates for the ministry of the Word and the ministry of Deacon, including the determination and oversight of standards to be attained (Reg. 2.2.18).

Programmes of education and formation shall reflect the commitment of the Uniting Church to work and witness within the fullness of the Catholic faith in loyalty to its Reformed and Evangelical traditions, in accordance with the *Basis of Union*.

Programmes of education and formation for the ministry of the Word and the ministry of Deacon shall be fourfold:

- 1.1 Phase 1 – Period of Discernment (Reg. 2.2.1 a)
- 1.2 Phase 2 – Core Phase
- 1.3 Phase 3 – Ministry Intern Phase
- 1.4 Phase 4 – Continuing Education

This document sets out the rules for the core phase of the programmes of education and formation for candidates for the ministry of the Word and the ministry of Deacon. The theological colleges recognized by the Assembly's Ministerial Education Commission (MEC) must adhere to these rules, varying them only with the explicit approval of the MEC. At the same time, the colleges have considerable freedom within these rules to determine the shape and content of the units of study that comprise the courses in the core phase.

Rules for the Core Phase

1. The Core Phase of education and formation for ministry comprises general and cultural studies, theological studies, supervised field education and ministerial formation. Subject to Rule 7 below, it shall be structured and taught so that these elements are integrated. The duration of the Core Phase will normally be three years full time or the equivalent.
2. The Faculty to which candidates are referred shall, consistent with these rules, determine the appropriate programme for each candidate's Core Phase. At the completion of the Core Phase, the Faculty shall advise the MEC that all requirements of the course have been satisfactorily met. (*Regulation 2.2.18 (g)*).
3. Wherever these rules specify what is 'normally' required, the Faculty may determine appropriate equivalent requirements for particular candidates, taking into account their circumstances and experience. Departures from the normal pattern should be exceptional.
4. Consistent with the *Basis of Union*, Faculties are required to equip candidates for the ecumenical context of ministry.

General and cultural studies

5. The aims of general and cultural studies are to develop candidates' critical thinking, to better equip them for theological study through exposure to disciplines other than theology and to enrich their appreciation of the world in which the gospel is to be proclaimed.
6. General and cultural studies may be undertaken either prior to or concurrently with theological studies.

Theological studies

7. Theological studies shall normally be undertaken at one of the Uniting Church's recognised Theological Colleges. Credit for units undertaken at other institutions shall be granted only when the Faculty regards such units as being of a satisfactory standard and theologically acceptable within the Uniting Church.
8. Within the Core Phase, candidates shall normally complete three years' full time or equivalent of theological studies at degree level and must be offered the opportunity to undertake such study as part of an accredited programme.
9. Faculties and MEBs should, where possible, provide the opportunity for graduate and postgraduate theological study to suitable candidates. Such study may be undertaken within the Core Phase where appropriate.
10. In order to successfully complete the Core Phase, a candidate must show knowledge and understanding in at least the following areas, normally by completing relevant units of study:
 - a. Systematic theology, including christology, trinitarian theology and ecclesiology;
 - b. Biblical studies, including Old and New Testament theology;
 - c. Church history, including patristic and Reformation theology;
 - d. Missiology, liturgical theology, pastoral studies and theological ethics.

An appropriate programme of theological study will be broader than this minimal list, but will include all these elements.

Supervised field education

11. Supervised Field Education shall be provided to develop skills in the practice of ministry and theological reflection and, under the oversight of accredited supervisors, to help candidates integrate the various elements of their formation for ministry.

12. Supervised Field Education placements shall take into account candidates' particular needs and capacities, relevant previous experience and their particular prospective ministry (ministry of the Word or ministry of Deacon).

Ministerial formation

13. The Faculty shall provide for its candidates an integrated formation programme to assist in the development of spiritual maturity, ministerial identity, theological understanding and the skills and capacities needed for their ministry.
14. The integrated formation programme shall take into account the different focuses of the ministries of the Word and of Deacon.
15. In order to successfully complete the Core Phase, candidates must show evidence of ability to embody the gospel through the following skills and capacities:
 - a. proclaiming the gospel;
 - b. leading worship;
 - c. pastoral care;
 - d. teaching the faith;
 - e. leadership in the mission of the church.

Candidates must further

- f. demonstrate an understanding of the history, polity, procedures and *Basis of Union* of the Uniting Church;
- g. satisfy the Faculty that their spiritual maturity and ministerial identity are sufficiently developed to begin their first placement.

Approved by the Assembly Standing Committee, November 2008