



Uniting Church in Australia  
SYNOD OF VICTORIA AND TASMANIA

Report of the Board of the  
Centre for Theology and Ministry

Review of  
Education for Ministry  
November 2010

The following is primarily the report of the Review on Education for Ministry presented to the CTM Board at its August Meeting. The CTM Board has adopted the report and has determined a breadth of resolutions based upon recommendations from the Review Team.



Centre for **Theology & Ministry**

## SETTING THE SCENE

The Centre for Theology and Ministry has particular responsibility in the life of the Synod of Victoria-Tasmania to resource the education for ministry of the whole people of God; and participate in the formation of those who seek to serve in specified lay and ordained ministries.

During the past years the style and form of education for ministry has remained relatively stable in its content, style and approach. While there have been significant changes in the theological education as determined by the Ministerial Education Commission (specifically the introduction of the four phases of ministry education) the content and rhythm of the core phase located at the Theological College has been less responsive to the radical shift that has been experienced in congregations and in the community; for example, the increase in multi-cultural diversity within the UCA and the Australian society; the expansion of opportunities to exercise ministry in non-congregational placements; the increase in lay leadership of congregations; and the inability of many rural congregations to afford full-time ministry. Discussion and debate regarding the impact of this current reality and the place of the ordained ministry in these changing times has, and continues to be, the subject of many papers, reviews and raised voices.

The Centre for Theology and Ministry through its Board established a review to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of its current practices to equip individuals for specified UCA ministries (lay and ordained) in this changing context.

The Review Team sought to develop concrete and practical recommendations in the light of their reflection on the theological and contextual issues

that are relevant to education for ministry today. That is, given the changing context of ministry how must the processes of education for ministry be renewed?

Thus, this report does not reiterate the debate or the perspectives that abound, nor engage at length the theological arguments and discussion around the forms of church and society. Rather, the review sought to take as given that education for ministry needs to equip individuals for a changing world and church, making the assumption that cultural change is constant and thus those exercising ministry must be equipped to be reflective practitioners able to respond theologically and in whatever context they find themselves. This suggests that the key framework for forming people for ministry is one which enables individuals to read their context in the light of their theological understanding and so be competent in drawing from their knowledge, experience and skills the necessary and appropriate response.

The short time frame for this review was deliberate in that there are already a number of wise and experienced people within the CTM and beyond who understand the current challenges and the changes that will help the CTM to address them. Therefore the Review Team conducted a series of consultations and interviews with key bodies and with a reference group who met twice to test the perspective of the Review Team's work.

The Board received the Review Team's report in August and finalized its response in October. What follows is the body of the report to the Board and the decisions that the Board has taken in response to the recommendations arising from the review.

setting the scene

# GUIDING PRINCIPLE

## Personal Formation for Ministry in a Multi-cultural Church

Personal formation for ministry in a multi-cultural church is the guiding principle that has shaped the deliberations of the Review Team. As noted earlier, there is a clear sense that the context for ministerial formation has undergone rapid and far-reaching change. In particular, we observe that those who are called into the various recognized ministries of leadership within the Uniting Church, both lay and ordained, enter formation from diverse backgrounds, we present diverse formational, educational and personal needs and will be called to exercise ministry in a diverse and ever changing context.

The outcomes of the review are offered in the belief that patterns and pathways of formation for ministry should give focused attention to the particular needs and requirements of each person. In emphasizing the need for personal formation, we are not suggesting that formation ignore the needs of the church, or the particular roles and responsibilities that constitute the church's ministries. We believe that people are best formed for ministry in the church when their personal skills, background, circumstances, prior learning and experience are taken into account in the development of the formation process.

In particular we affirm that in a context of church and society which is increasingly multi-cultural, with a diversity of ethnic identities, cultures, languages and worldviews, it is necessary for all who are formed for ministry to be exposed to and equipped for ministry in a multi-cultural setting.

In any program of formation for ministry there is a danger that formation becomes driven by or perceived as a matter of completing a set of requirements or of attracting a greater number of candidates. We prefer to consider how formation answers the question: "what is the particular formation program (content and process) which will best serve this person as they are being formed for the particular ministry to which they are being called by God?"

'Personal formation for ministry in a multi-cultural church' thus functions as the guiding principle which informs a range of aspects and priorities in this review of education for ministry. The terms used in the guiding principle are deliberate.

- 'Personal' recognizes the importance of the individual's context, background and learning, and the need for formation to focus the personhood of this individual. It assumes too that this forming of personhood is not individual in the sense of isolation but belongs and takes place in the context of community - the community of learning

and the community of the church. Thus the word 'personal' is used rather than the word 'individual'.

- 'Formation' recognizes that the whole person is being formed, shaped, equipped. This term is used in preference to the less adequate expressions, 'training' or 'education'. It is assumed here that areas of knowledge, learning of skills and aspects of individual development, are all part of 'personal formation'. Crucially, we affirm that formation is the work of the triune God for which we can make room and to which we can contribute but over which we have no final control. In this sense the term 'spiritual formation' as 'formation in and by the Spirit', can be appropriately used.
- 'Ministry' establishes the purpose of the person's formation and recognizes that the person is responding to a call from God, discerned by the church, to give leadership in the service of the Gospel, and to equip others in the ministry of Jesus Christ. This report has as its focus formation for recognized ordained and lay ministries within the UCA.
- 'Multi-cultural' recognizes that the context for ministry is diverse in its cultural character and that all ministry takes place both within a specific cultural context and within a broader multi-cultural context. It is misleading to suggest that only those congregations with non-western membership are multi-cultural. At the same time, there is growing diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds within the Australian church and the Australian society.

The following commentary and decisions are an attempt to work out the implications of this guiding principle in relation to the following key issues: the need for flexibility, greater levels of integration, responding to the multi-cultural context, matters relating to curriculum and pedagogy and processes for discernment and selection.

These key issues are served by several supportive elements - technology, funding, partnerships and promotion. It is acknowledged that the implementation strategy is crucial if the changes suggested are to be effective and to take shape in the next few years.

Implementation will be guided by identifying possible changes at three levels: a) those that can be effected immediately with significant impact; b) changes that will require negotiation with partners and authorizing bodies, and c) changes that will evolve and emerge over time as the earlier changes gain traction. (See overview framework back cover).

guiding principle

# KEY ISSUE

## FLEXIBILITY

A number of factors require more flexible patterns and pathways for those who seek formation for ministry.

Background: those who are being called enter formation with diverse background contexts:

- ethnic and cultural identity and practice
- age
- prior learning (in theology or other disciplines)
- prior experience (in aspects of ministry or other relevant areas of life)
- theological / church tradition and culture

Formation Needs: those who seek formation for ministry therefore have different needs and possible constraints:

- family circumstances and dependents
- geographical location
- responsibilities in communities (where lay leadership is ongoing during formation)
- language abilities
- educational abilities
- a relative weight of learning and experience in some areas with a consequent lack of learning and experience in others.

Future Ministry: those who will serve the church in their ministry will face a diverse and changing context:

- a variety of potential ministry contexts
- the need to respond to changes in society
- a multi-cultural and multi-faith context

The flexibility needed in formation for ministry therefore relates to:

- the length of the formation program
- the pace at which the program is done (part-time options)
- the content of the formation program
- the relative weight in the program given to different components (e.g. academic study and field placement)
- the location of the formation program
- the style and methods of formation

The flexibility we seek is intended not to diminish quality and standards of formation in any of its aspects but rather to enhance them by relating them more closely to the personal circumstances of each candidate.

We note that in recent years the staff of the CTM has introduced several new developments which contribute towards this vision of personal formation. In particular we note:

- the development of a policy on part-time formation for Ministry of Word and Ministry of Deacon;
- the creation of 'Formation Panels' as a means for discerning and monitoring appropriate formation requirements for each candidate for Ministry of Word and Ministry of Deacon;
- the increase and spread of lay ministry intensives, including regional sessions taught with local leaders.

Flexibility

### Decisions

1. **The CTM provide a formation community for ministry and discipleship for independent students studying at the UFT, and those engaged in lay intensives and/or events/workshops sponsored by the CTM**
2. **The Faculty Formation Committee at the CTM:**
  - a) **revises the policy on part-time formation with a view to broadening its scope**
  - b) **continues to monitor and, where possible, develop the work of Formation Panels in relation to the vision of personal formation.**
  - c) **establishes a clear process whereby the insights that emerge from the Period of Discernment and Selection processes feed into decisions about appropriate formation requirements for each candidate for specified lay or ordained ministries.**
3. **The CTM trial an online learning and regional formation community in one region in partnership with a sponsoring presbytery, supported by the trial appointment of a regional tutor.**

# KEY ISSUE

## INTEGRATION

Formation for ministry takes seriously the whole person and the whole of life. It will seek to challenge unhelpful separations between theory and practice, academic study and practical experience, theological knowledge and spiritual formation, classroom and church, being and doing, word and deed. We note that unhelpful separations are sometimes structurally assumed in the different disciplines of learning (theology, biblical studies, church history, pastoral theology, missiology, worship). We also identified a need for integration between formation for lay and ordained ministries so as to increase the richness of formation for all participants.

Any formation program needs to give serious attention to the integration across these categories so that the person being formed for ministry has an experience of integrated learning.

The need for integration applies equally to those who are being formed for ordained or lay ministries in the church. We acknowledge that the current structural framework that exists at the CTM does not always enable this integrative work. In particular we note that:

- responsibility for formation for lay and ordained ministries currently resides in distinct parts of the CTM;
- further consideration of the way that ministry experience can and should be integrated with academic learning is required for both lay and ordained ministries.

Successful integration will also require greater cooperation between the CTM and the presbyteries, with which lies primary responsibility for POD and Pastor.

### Decisions

4. The CTM explore the role, expansion and consequences of the membership of Faculty to include the responsibility for formation for specified lay ministries.
5. The Faculty of the CTM develops integrative strategies as a part of the UFT educational provision, including attention to curriculum, pedagogy, forms of assessment.
6. The Faculty of the CTM initiates a discussion with UFT colleagues whereby the assessment tasks for UFT units might be revised in order to stimulate greater levels of integrative reflection in the formation process.
7. The CTM:
  - a. integrate more effectively field education experience into formation programs
  - b. deepen the engagement of suitable field education supervisors
  - c. ensure appropriate supervisors are drawn from a range of cultural backgrounds and theological perspectives.
8. The CTM identify ways of integrating learning in the formation for specified lay ministries.
9. The CTM give attention to identifying the bridging courses or experiences necessary to enable effective articulation from lay leadership studies into degree level study.

integration

# KEY ISSUE

## THE MULTI-CULTURAL CONTEXT

In a context of a church and society which are increasingly multi-cultural with a diversity of ethnic identities, cultures, languages and worldviews, it is necessary for all who are formed for ministry to be exposed to and equipped for ministry in a multi-cultural setting. Increasingly in the Uniting Church, there is also a need to consider seriously the leadership needs of congregations where the membership is essentially African, Asian or Pacific, and the resourcing of these congregations in formation for ministry.

It is also the case that increasing numbers of people who come from 'non-western' cultural backgrounds are presenting for formation for ministry. This is sharpening our questions of appropriate processes of formation for people who are not well equipped to deal with the standards of academic learning which

have become the norm in formation for ministry, and for whom this is not the most appropriate approach to formation. There are particularly sharp issues for those for whom English is their second or even third language. For some people who do come from a western cultural background, the current norms may also be inappropriate for educational reasons. We note that in past eras of theological education there were provisions available for those who were not well able to complete degree studies.

We are aware that the current staff personnel at the CTM does not include anyone from a non-western cultural background, and that only limited attention is given to the specific formation needs of, and processes for, those candidates who come from non-western cultural backgrounds.

multi-cultural context

### Decisions

10. The Faculty and Formation Committee of the CTM and Formation Panels ensure that all candidates for ordained ministry undertake a field placement in a context whose majority culture is distinct from that of the candidate.
11. The Faculty of the CTM:
  - (a) initiate with their UFT colleagues the development of appropriate educational strategies for working with those from a non-western cultural background and that this include attention to issues of language, bibliographic resources, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment.
  - (b) as a part of this specific attention be given to the possibility of developing oral modes of assessment as a part of the UFT assessment framework.
12. The CTM appoint suitably qualified people from a non-western cultural background as members of staff, Faculty or as 'adjunct faculty' and that such people assist in the provision of formation of candidates for multi-cultural ministry whether lay or ordained.
13. The CTM ensure that the DML is equipped in resources for multi-cultural ministry (e.g. theology books in languages other than English; contributions in theology and biblical studies from the non-western world) and make applications for library grants to the MCD and other funding bodies make this possible.
14. The CTM establish a deliberative process which encourages appropriate individuals with CALD backgrounds to participate in the life of the community through
  - a. visiting lecturerships
  - b. adjunct faculty
  - c. honorary research fellowships
  - d. postgraduate research students.
15. The CTM increase the provision of lay ministry formation in a multi-cultural context by providing education in languages other than English.

# KEY ISSUE

## CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY

There is the need to explore the curriculum needs of individuals from the perspective of academic outcomes sought, rather than one based on completing a curriculum of core studies. The notion of academic formation highlights the distinction. Without going all the way down the path of establishing academic competencies requirements there is value in acknowledging that the range of academic outcomes sought is influenced by the context and background of the individual. However, the deliberations on this matter are to keep in tension the desire to have a theologically competent leadership and ministry for the church.

Thus, we affirm that in any process of formation for ministry there will need to be a rigorous and thorough engagement in appropriate types and level of formal and informal education. For this learning to be genuinely formative attention must be given not only to the content of what is taught and learned but also to the method of teaching and learning employed. In recent years we have learned much about issues such as:

- Different learning styles and their implications for models and practices of teaching.
- Learner-centred approaches to teaching that take the learner's experience and knowledge seriously as a key aspect of the learning experience.
- The importance of skills in theological reflection on practice and context.
- The development of educational practices that better enable effective learning among adults.
- The need to focus on intended learning outcomes

We note that staff at the CTM is already committed in various ways to effective and creative teaching practices that enable genuine learning and formation. Creative forms of pedagogical practice already exist in the teaching of those being formed for lay and ordained ministries. However, there is still much that can be learned and further progress to be made.

### Decisions

16. The CTM develop an educational policy / values / framework which sets out the key commitments of all educational work provided by and on behalf of the CTM.
17. The CTM create staff development opportunities so that teaching and field staff can together explore pedagogy for effective formation for ministry, including the integration of class study with ministry practice, and the benefits gained from team teaching within the academic program of the CTM.
18. The Faculty of the CTM review the current curriculum,
  - (a) so as to participate fully in the MEC deliberations on 'academic formation for ministry' and, where necessary, seek to shape MEC policy in this area with special attention to:
    - (i) the notion of 'core curriculum' and its components
    - (ii) the 'minimum' level of academic achievement required of candidates for ordained ministries.
  - (b) working with colleagues in the United Faculty of Theology to revise the UFT 'curriculum' with the intention of shaping it such that it best serves the current needs for formation for Ministry of the Word and Ministry of Deacon.

curriculum and pedagogy

# KEY ISSUE

## DISCERNMENT AND SELECTION

The process of discernment of call and selection for a specified formation process for lay or ordained ministry is clearly of vital importance. The fact that much of the responsibility for discernment and selection lies with Presbyteries and at Synod level means that any decisions listed in this section will inevitably require the CTM to work in partnership with these bodies. We believe that attention should be given to the following issues:

- Whether the Period of Discernment process is understood and implemented within the Presbyteries in complementary ways.
- The nature of the selection process for lay specified ministries and the way in which these processes cohere with those for ordained ministries.
- Whether there are sufficiently effective and regular opportunities for members of the Uniting Church to discern opportunities and seek formation for church leadership and specified forms of ministry.
- Whether information and insights gathered during the PoD and Selection processes are strongly connected to the eventual formation process that is agreed upon for each person.

### Decisions

19. The CTM work with Presbyteries to reinvigorate the PoD process and the development of fresh strategies for encouraging a culture of discernment within UCA congregations. This would include as a matter of urgency the development of new material and resources for the PoD.
20. The CTM invite the Synod Selection Committee, and other relevant bodies, such as the synod Pastor committee, report on whether and how the selection of people for specified lay ministries can be brought into congruence with the selection of people for ordained ministries.
21. The CTM cooperate with Presbyteries to hold joint discernment days / retreats in which the formation opportunities offered by the CTM are an integral part of the information shared.

discernment and selection

# SUPPORTIVE ISSUES

Partnerships, technology, funding and promotion are identified as crucial aspects which need attention if the key decisions noted above are to be implemented.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

The work of the CTM is best done in collaboration with, and not separate from, the wider life of the church. In particular, Presbyteries play a key role in the discernment for ministry and in formation of leaders. In addition, the Commission for Mission exercises an educational function in the life of the church, as also do Presbytery Ministers: Mission and Education. It makes sense for the CTM to work with these bodies in a cooperative way in shaping and delivering formation for ministry. This wider voice of the church needs to be heard, and the CTM needs to have opportunity to connect with the educational role of the wider church.

There is further scope for involving resources from the wider church in the processes of formation for ministry. This will enrich the pool of resources for formation, reduce the pressure on existing CTM personnel, and give the wider church a sense of participation in the processes of formation for ministry.

There is a distinctive and important matter of partnership in formation for ministry between the CTM and the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress. A recent meeting of the Assembly MEC recommended that all Synods explore ways of entering into partnership with regional congress bodies in formation for ministry, for the mutual benefit of indigenous and non-indigenous people.

## **Decisions**

- 22. The CTM develop an explicit policy of engaging suitably qualified people from the wider church who can contribute to the formation processes for lay and ordained ministries.**
- 23. An intensive process of consultation with Presbytery Ministers: Mission and Education and the Commission for Mission be held over 2011 with a view to identifying common areas of work and strategies for future cooperation in education for ministry.**
- 24. The CTM,**
  - (a) explore an appropriate form of partnership with each of the regional Congress of Victoria and the regional Congress of Tasmania so that opportunities are created for the greater mutual understanding between indigenous and non-indigenous people in ministry**
  - (b) invite all Congress candidates for specified ministries to participate as fully as appropriate in the life of the CTM.**
- 25. The CTM initiate and host regular gatherings of a reference group including CTM staff, Presbytery ministers (M and E) and Commission for Mission staff for the purposes of continuing reflection on formation for ministry for leaders of the church.**

## TECHNOLOGY

The current opportunities afforded by developments in information technology must be grasped if we are to develop the CTM's vision of a 'web of learning'. IT will be a core component in enabling greater flexibility in formation pathways and patterns, not least as a way of developing possible regional learning opportunities. The CTM was built with a solid IT infrastructure in place and is supported in the maintenance and development of this infrastructure by the Synod IT department. What Synod IT cannot provide, however, is expert guidance in the development of online theological education. In particular, we need help in the following areas:

- Educational theory for online learning.
- The development of infrastructure to enable live streaming of educational events at the CTM (for example in Tasmania).
- The purchase of and training in the use of equipment that will make creative dissemination of CTM learning resources: for example, podcasting, videocasting, video and DVD production.
- The development of an online educational platform that will make online delivery of formal and informal courses a possibility.
- The development of the CTM's web presence, online profile, publicity and marketing opportunities.

We note that the MCD, through the agency of the UFT and Trinity College, already provides an online platform for theological education: Theology Online. This platform currently provides opportunity to study units at Graduate Level (MDiv) and Diploma Level (DipMin). We also recognize that the CTM currently employs a staff member whose task is both to develop the CTM website and enable the development of an online learning environment (VLE) that can be used by the CTM.

### Decisions

- 26. The CTM secure appropriate professional expertise with specialist experience in educational provision to develop and implement an online learning development plan for the enhancement of teaching and learning.**
- 27. The Faculty of the CTM moves to make it possible to study for the Diploma of Ministry qualification in an online environment with the support of regional tutors / study mentors.**
- 28. All CTM staff be invited to submit a plan for the development of their own area of teaching and learning and to identify the IT needs which would enhance this.**

## PROMOTION

What the CTM offers the church and how the processes of formation for ministry are carried out in the CTM are little known in the wider church. There is a significant communication gap between the CTM and the wider church. In addition, there are basic resources of information (e.g. Ministry of Pastor, Period of Discernment) which are needed by the church.

It is essential that as part of an effective process for formation there is an equally accessible level of communication with the synod as to what is possible for prospective candidates for all ministries.

It is not uncommon for opinions about the style and practice of education for ministry to be based on incorrect or outdated information. The CTM must take responsibility for clear and timely communication with the wider church.

### Decisions

- 29. The CTM produce a regular article for Crosslight which promotes an aspect of the work of the CTM and which informs the wider church of the developments in the processes of formation for ministry.**
- 30. The CTM prepare appropriate promotional material which explains the work of the CTM and which sets out the processes of formation for ministry.**
- 31. The CTM staff use the website more intentionally as a resource for promotion and information related to the work of the CTM and the processes of formation.**
- 32. The CTM update its information and promotional resources for the lay specified ministries as well as the PoD resources.**

## FUNDING

Increasingly, the resources of the Synod for funding the CTM will reduce, placing more pressure on staffing the CTM. It is certain that, if the CTM continues to rely so heavily on the funding resources of the Synod, then there will be a reduction in staffing.

Alternative financial means need to be found to fund the personnel and resource the programs of the CTM.

This includes an increasing portion of the CTM resources being applied to technological infrastructure to ensure and support the decisions arising from this report. Technological infrastructure needs to be upgraded and developed to support online learning in all its forms.

### Decisions

- 33. The CTM evaluate its bequest resources as a means of funding the implementation of these review findings.**
- 34. The CTM identify and access further funding sources other than Synod funding for supporting personnel and programs of the CTM.**

## IMPLEMENTATION

It is important that this review of education for ministry be followed through. In order to do this adequately, deliberate attention must be given to the implementation of the decisions of the Board, and the timetable for that implementation. Many of the matters mentioned are weighty and implementation will require considerable time and effort.

There are several experiences of review findings and decisions being made across the church on matters of theological and ministerial education which have borne little fruit.

The review team recognizes that part of the challenge of effective implementation lies in the existing workload of current personnel. It seems unwise to assume that the staff of the CTM might be able to take sole responsibility for the implementation process.

However, it may be feasible for staff of the CTM to be allocated responsibility for one of the key areas of formation for ministry identified above, and that this person report on progress every three months or so.

In terms of oversight and guiding the decisions to fruition the Board may determine that it is the responsibility of the Executive Director. In this oversight role a combination of a steering group, small task groups and individuals could be assigned specific tasks to accomplish.

It is essential that the processes and tracking of the implementation progress be a matter for primary focus and reporting to the Board to ensure ongoing success in the implementation of decisions made.

### Decisions

- 35. The Executive Director establish a process to**
  - a) develop an action plan based on the review findings and Board decisions; and**
  - b) guide the implementation of the Board's decisions arising from the review of education for ministry reporting at each Board meeting as to progress.**

# Overview of review of education for ministry framework

guiding principle

personal formation for ministry in a multi-cultural church

**FLEXIBILITY**

Key Issues

**INTEGRATION**

**PEDAGOGY & CURRICULUM**

**DISCERNMENT & SELECTION**

**MULTI-CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Supportive Issues

partnerships

funding

technology

promotion

implementation