

More than just acronyms: FAQs on the GC DLM decision

Everything you need to know about General Council's decision on Pathway to Testamur for individual DLMs (but were afraid to ask)

At the October 2023 Annual Meeting of the 44th General Council, General Council offered individual Designated Lay Ministers a pathway to commissioning or ordination. Here is some additional information that may be helpful.

Does this decision undermine the church's earlier decision not to adopt the One Order of Ministry proposal in 2018?

The 2018 One Order of Ministry proposal involved moving the entire stream of Designated Lay Ministry into the Order of Ministry. This required a remit because it would have changed the definition of ordered ministry in the Basis of Union. If the remit had passed, designated lay ministry would have become a third stream of ministry within the Order of Ministry. In rejecting One Order of Ministry, the church determined that lifelong vocational calls to ministry are expressed through commissioning or ordination to the Order of Ministry, and not through recognition as a Designated Lay Minister.

Why didn't this proposal require a remit, since One Order of Ministry required one?

General Council's decision in October 2023 pertains solely to individual DLMs, rather than to the entire DLM stream of ministry. It recognizes that many, though not all, DLMs are indeed practicing a lifelong vocational call.

This most recent decision does not:

- change the church's understanding of ministry;
- the Basis of Union, nor
- eliminate DLM as a stream of lay ministry.

Therefore, it did not require a remit.

Remits are required when "Substantive or denomination-shaping changes" are proposed (https://united-church.ca/sites/default/files/2023-12/the-manual-2024_0.pdf *The Manual* 7.4.1).

Why are DLMs being offered this option?

Designated lay ministry was originally imagined as a time-limited way to meet ministry needs in a person's home community of faith only. However, many DLMs identified that theirs is a lifelong vocational call to ministry.

Vocation: The October 2023 decision means that individual DLMs who feel a lifelong vocational call to ministry **and** whom the church has discerned have a lifelong vocational call to ministry, now have a pathway to ordination or commissioning, and, therefore, to becoming part of the Order of Ministry.

Time limits: The church consistently asks DLMs to serve communities of faith outside of their home community, and to serve as members on local, regional, and national governing bodies as ministry personnel. However, DLMs can currently only serve under appointment and, therefore, are always dealing with time-limited pastoral relationships (though frequently renewed).

Ordered ministry: For many DLMs, residential academic studies for ordered ministry are a barrier, and so by becoming a DLM, they could pursue their lifelong vocational call to ministry. DLM training offered accreditation – through theological education and formation (including their supervised ministry education) – to people who had gifts for ministry, but who couldn't pursue residential academic studies.

Do all DLMs have to agree to be commissioned or ordained?

No, this process is voluntary. DLMs may choose to apply for testamur eligibility, which would make them eligible to be commissioned or ordained. DLMs may also choose to remain DLMs and continue to offer their ministry to the community of faith where they are currently appointed or to serve in ministry in a different community of faith.

Is there precedent for General Council to grant testamur?

Previously, the General Council Executive or sub-executive has authorized testamur (eg. Sub-executive meeting April 25, 2003, see also November 1997 GCE minutes, found on the Commons).

What is the process for DLMs to apply for testamur?

Individual DLMs in pastoral ministry (at least five years' post-recognition, at a minimum of half-time) may apply to have their training and experience assessed by the Credentialling Committee to determine whether testamur ought to be granted, so they may enter ordained or diaconal ministry. The decision by General Council forges a pathway to the Order of Ministry for individual DLMs who demonstrate they have equivalent training and experience, as well as a lifelong vocational call to ministry.

Please see <https://united-church.ca/leadership/entering-ministry/processes-entering-ordered-ministry/dlms-seeking-testamur-eligibility> for more information.

What is testamur?

Testamur identifies that a person has completed the course of study for ministry laid out by the church.

Does this decision devalue the church's commitment to "an educated clergy?"

The church values the integration of knowledge and practice in its ministry personnel:

- from initial formation and education at a theological school, including in-field education;
- through development of skills for ministry in supervised settings, and
- in its commitment to continuing education for ministry personnel.

As the [Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership](#) state, "The competencies for lifelong ministry leadership are determined by the needs of the church, the social and global contexts in which it finds itself, and the professional standards of practice in ministry." Further, "demonstrated competence in these areas relies not only on knowledge and skills gained through programs of education and formation, but also depends on character, spiritual maturity, and integration of faith in the practice of ministry."

The education options have changed significantly since 2000, when the DLM stream was introduced. Currently, most of our theological schools do not require an undergraduate degree to enter a degree and diploma program that leads to ordination or commissioning. Today, unlike in 2000, most schools provide distance-learning, online program options.

At our theological schools now, students are assessed based on educational background and prior learning assessments. Schools also provide additional supports to students who may need accommodation around learning and other disabilities. Schools also regularly tailor their programs to students' needs and interests in theological education and formation for ministry.

Will this affect our full communion agreements?

No, this does not affect our full communion agreements. Our full communion partners affirm the formation, ordination, and commissioning processes of the United Church of Canada and would accept a minister in good standing. Our partners use a competency-based criteria for assessing formation, fitness and readiness for ministry, which means that a degree or a diploma is not the only route to ordination.