

No. 9139

(Operational Business Item)

AMENDMENT TO THE DESIGN REGARDING LICENSED MINISTRY

ADOPTED by the General Assembly

BACKGROUND

The present supply of clergy is more than adequate for congregations which are able to support a full-time ministry. But smaller congregations, especially Black and Hispanic congregations, are facing a critical shortage of trained leadership. A report of the Task Force on Ministry of the General Board indicated that almost 60% of our congregations have fewer than 151 members. (Ecclesiologists consider churches with an average attendance of 160-170 at worship to be the most cost effective.)

The licensed minister (LM) has been recognized as a "dependable servant" in many small congregations. Almost all licensed ministers serve in congregations with fewer than 200 members. They are dependable, but are they wanted? The ordained ministry, even on a part-time (bi-vocational) basis, continues to be lifted up as the norm for all congregations.

There were a variety of ministries in the New Testament Church. But since all were inspired by the Holy Spirit, none was considered superior to the rest. Leadership depended on the needs of the local congregations.

Throughout its history, the Church has, and must continue to adapt its ministry to contemporary needs. Recent data show fewer people attending church. Yet they continue to profess faith in God. We must reach out to them and to all humanity. In this century, other communions have used worker-priests, lay pastors, and non-stipendiary ministers to bridge the gap between the world and the institutional Church.

The licensed minister could fill a similar role. But the office as presently defined is too narrow to adapt to changing needs. According to *The Design*, the ministerial functions of the LM are exercised by seminarians who serve part-time while continuing their education; commissioned workers engaged in full-time church vocations; and persons who serve **under the supervision of a pastor**, or in a mission field. Whether or not the intent of the definition was to limit the LM to the prescribed functions, in practice, this has been the consequence.

WHEREAS, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will be entering into the start of 200 new congregations this decade and after the initial phase of development, start-up funds may likely be depleted, thereby leaving struggling churches without pastoral leadership; and

WHEREAS, the accelerated rate of racial/ethnic transitions in our inner city communities places an added burden on congregations consisting of low-income memberships; and

WHEREAS, alternative forms of ministry have been recognized as a need of the church;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) meeting in Tulsa, Oklahoma, October 25-30, 1991, amend *The Design* for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) as follows:

Section VI, paragraph 93 becomes —

(b) The office of licensed minister bestowed by license and an appropriate act of dedication. Licensing permits the exercise of ministerial function in specific situations with periodic review, in such cases as the following: (1) a worker who is duly commissioned by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to a specialized full-time church vocation; (2) a theological student who has not yet fulfilled all qualifications for ordination, but who may be authorized to serve under supervision in ministerial capacity; (3) a person who has not fulfilled educational standards for ordination but in whom the church discerns manifest gifts for ministry and who may be licensed to serve under appropriate supervision as pastor of a particular congregation or in ministerial capacity on the mission field; and (4) **persons engaged in congregationally-based community ministries of justice and reconciliation where regional nurture and certification are deemed appropriate.**