

# B5 ADMISSION OF MINISTERS COMMITTEE

## 1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE MANDATE OF THE COMMITTEE

At the Thirteenth Assembly in 2012 significant changes were made to the work of the Assembly regarding “the reception of Ministers from other denominations” (Constitution Clause 38(a)). In short, more responsibility was given to Synods in this process, whereas the Assembly was given more of a policy setting and oversight role.

The Thirteenth Assembly also introduced certain time limits and requirements on applicants from other denominations who sought to serve and then be admitted as a Uniting Church Minister. In the previous triennium (2012-2015), there was a period of transition from the previous Regulations to these new Regulations.

In this triennium (2015-2018) the Committee has now by and large tidied up most of the applications under the old Regulations (and the language used was ‘reception’ of Ministers), and fundamentally its work has been focused on the new (the 2015) Regulations and the current mandate (and the language of ‘admission’ of Ministers).

## 2. THE WORK OF THE ADMISSION OF MINISTERS COMMITTEE

The main responsibility of the Committee is to oversee the process of applications being handled by the Synods, and develop policy for the Church around the admission of Ministers from other denominations. The Committee does this in several ways:

### 2.1 DEVELOPS POLICY

In this regard the Committee has developed the following policies/guidelines:

1. A listing of ordinations recognised by the Church – see Reg 2.5.3(c)
2. A statement of principle on the ordinations which the Uniting Church recognises. (The Committee will assist the Synods in determining if an ordination is recognised by the Uniting Church and is not on the Reg 2.5.3(c) list.)
3. A “working list” of theological colleges recognised by the Uniting Church.
4. A process for determining the ‘good standing’ of a Minister within the denomination they are seeking to leave.
5. A statement of the educational and ministry formation standard required for a Minister from another denomination. (Currently under review.)
6. A statement on Ministers from other denominations and the Ministry of Pastor within the Uniting Church in Australia.

It is the hope of the Committee that these policies will soon be more widely available through the Assembly website.

### 2.2 MAINTAINS AN OVERVIEW OF CURRENT ADMISSION APPLICATIONS

The Committee maintains an overview of all the applications for admission as a Minister being processed by the Synods. At each of its monthly meetings a report from Synods currently involved in Admission of Ministers’ matters is received. This oversight is formalised by the requirement that the Committee issues a ‘certificate of completion’ that all the requirements for the process of admission have been completed: Reg 2.5.3(e).

## 2.3 CONSULTATION AND ADVICE

The Committee Chairperson and Secretary meet with representatives of the Synods involved in the admission of Ministers from other denominations (usually with the Synod Associate General Secretaries when they gather). They also provide advice to the Synods when called upon regarding the process and whether an ordination will be recognised.

## 3. CASE STUDIES

The Committee receives many enquiries about ordinations from churches within Australia and overseas. These can involve a range of enquiries and consultations as it seeks to determine whether the ordination is one of a denomination within the church catholic which the Uniting Church would recognise.

In one case in the last triennium this involved a close examination of the denomination's foundational documents and its understanding of ordination; discussions with the Christian Unity Working Group concerning the application, and indeed involvement of the Chair of that Working Group in our deliberations; enquiries of ecumenical bodies such as the National Council of Churches; and even a meeting with a representative of the denomination from which the applicant was coming. This was not an enquiry about the suitability of the applicant. It was about the Church's understanding of ordination within the other denomination.

Another area concerns work with partner churches. The Regulations require the Church to consider 'any mutual understanding, written or unwritten between the Church and a partner church concerning the placement of Ministers from the partner church into a ministry of the Church.' (Reg 2.5.1(c)(i)). This involves the Committee, through the good offices of UnitingWorld, contacting the partner church about the applicant. Usually this would involve questions of 'good standing' – see Reg 2.5.1(d)(i); however, it also may involve 'any mutual understanding, written or unwritten' concerning the admission of a Minister as a Minister of the Uniting Church. Often such 'church-to-church' dealings can be complex, and hence time-consuming.

## 4. ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

One area which is required to be considered by a Synod in assessing a person ordained in another denomination to serve in the Uniting Church is 'the language proficiency of the applicant relevant to the context' (Reg 2.5.1(d)(v)). This is an area in which the Committee seeks to 'provide guidelines or requirements' (see 2.5.1(d)(vi)); and it has been requested to do so by the Synods themselves. To this end it has undertaken a consultation process with the cross cultural leadership of the Church and the various National Conferences. The Committee concludes this is a fraught area, with clearly differing views being expressed to the Committee in this process.

What however, was apparent to the Committee was that the question of 'language proficiency' and in particular 'English language proficiency' was not just a question for guidelines relating to the admission of Ministers from other denominations. There were many other areas in which a language policy for the Church would be helpful and useful. Areas such as our recognition of Indigenous languages in the journey of reconciliation; the use of different languages in ministry formation, in worship, and how meetings of the Church should be conducted and how decisions and information should be communicated. In short, the Uniting Church would benefit from a language policy.

To this end the Committee has written to the Assembly General Secretary, with the suggestion that the Church develop such a Language Policy. To date the Committee is unaware of any action being taken by the Assembly on this matter, but would hope it would be a matter for further consideration.

## 5. CHANGES IN MIGRATION POLICY

The changing face of Australia's migration policy is having an impact on the Church admitting Ministers from overseas. The current standard is that the Church would require permanent residency before admitting a Minister as a Uniting Church Minister. Through the last triennium the opportunity for Ministers from overseas to serve in the Church and then be admitted as Uniting Church Ministers is becoming more difficult and more complex. Synods report to the Committee that there is a clear decline in overseas Ministers seeking admission to the Church. The Committee keeps a 'watching brief' on such immigration matters and implication for the Church.

## 6. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP AND FAREWELLS

During the last triennium, the Committee thanked and farewelled one of its longest serving members – Rev. Dr Ian Breward. In an Assembly Standing Committee Minute of Appreciation it was noted that Rev. Dr Breward was the inaugural Chairperson of the Reception of Ministers Committee (the former Committee) and served in that capacity for many years. After relinquishing the Chairpersonship, he continued as a member of the Committee and then of the newly formed Admission of Ministers Committee. His love of the Church, his concern for the adequacy of ministerial formation and education, and his wide knowledge of theological education establishments across the world were invaluable to those two committees as they discharged their responsibilities to the Assembly. We thank Rev. Dr Breward for this contribution to the life of the Church.

Rev. Dr Geoff Thompson and Rev. (Deacon) Janet Munro left the Committee through the triennium. We thank them for their work and contribution. Meanwhile the Committee welcomed Revs. Sue Withers and Fiona Winn to its number.

## 7. REFERENCES TO THE COMMITTEE

In the preparation of the "2015 Edition of the Constitution and Regulations", the then General Secretary Rev. Terence Corkin noted that the revised Admission of Ministers' Regulations, adopted by the Standing Committee in November 2015 following the Thirteenth Assembly in 2012, were incorrectly numbered, named and in general contained certain typographical errors. As a consequence, the proposal below was brought to the Fourteenth Assembly and approved.

The Fourteenth Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia resolved in the following terms:

**15.18 ADMISSION OF MINISTERS COMMITTEE** authorise the Standing Committee, on the advice of the Legal Reference Committee, to amend the numbering, naming and setting out of the Admission of Ministers from another Denomination Regulations (Regulations 2.5.1 – 2.5.3) and the Admission of Former Ministers of the Church (Regulations 2.5.3.1 – 2.5.3.4) within the Regulations of the Church

Subsequently some minor changes and corrections to the "2015 Edition of the Constitution and Regulations" were made and they now appear on the Assembly website. However, not all matters were addressed. The Committee worked on this task, and submitted its 'tidying up' of the Regulations in March 2017.

## 8. FUTURE OF THE COMMITTEE

At the time of writing, the very future of the standalone nature of the Committee is in question. It is proposed that this committee, along with the Education for Ministry Working Group, merge and form a Standards for Ministry Committee. Although the Committee can see there are certainly cross-overs and synergies as the Church develops standards for Ministry, including in the area of admission of Ministers, the Committee fears the hands-on oversight with regard to individual cases (like those case studies outlined above) will be lost in the proposed new committee structure and mandate. The

current Committee meets face-to-face monthly and as a Synod of Victoria and Tasmania Committee with willing volunteers, literally costs the Assembly nothing. To move, as is proposed, to a national Committee, with infrequent meetings will both be more expensive – but critically, will lose corporate memory built up over years of cases and precedents and not be able to provide timely and appropriate advice to the Synods which it currently does.

## 9. ADMISSIONS OF MINISTERS TO THE UNITING CHURCH IN THE LAST TRIENNium

Old Rules Applications completed: 4

(NSW/ACT 1, QLD 2, VIC/TAS 1)

Old Rules Applications completed but awaiting placement: NIL

New Rules Applications completed: 38

(NSW/ACT 12, QLD 3, VIC/TAS 10, NRTN 1, SA 2, WA 8)

New Rules Applications in process: VIC/TAS 2

<b>International Church</b>	<b>Ministers</b>
Methodist Church of NZ	2
Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ	5
Presbyterian Church of South Africa	2
Dutch Reformed Church of Southern Africa	4
Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa	
Korean Methodist Church	
Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea	5
Church of the Nazarene Korea	
United Church of Papua New Guinea	
Methodist Church of Samoa	
United Church of Christ USA	
Presbyterian Church of the USA	
Methodist Church in Ireland	

<b>Australian Church</b>	<b>Ministers</b>
Federal Conference of the Churches of Christ	2
The Anglican Church of Australia	3
Wesleyan Methodist Church	2

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**Rev. Dr John Evans**  
**Chairperson**  
**Admission of Ministers Committee**