

**Proposal to the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council
For Consideration and Possible Forwarding to the General Council of The
United Church of Canada**

Title

Regional Authorization of Selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to Preside at Holy Communion in Under-Served and Unserved Communities of Faith

Originating Body / Proposer

Originating body or proposer: [INSERT NAME OF COMMUNITY OF FAITH, NETWORK, CLUSTER, OR INDIVIDUAL PROPOSER]

Submitted by: [INSERT NAME]

Contact information: [INSERT EMAIL / PHONE]

Regional Council: Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council

Date of submission: [INSERT DATE]

1. What is the issue?

Many communities of faith within The United Church of Canada, particularly rural congregations, small congregations, and multi-point charges, have limited or irregular access to ordered ministry. As a result, some communities may have limited access to the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders provide worship leadership and pulpit supply in many of these same communities. They are trained, licensed, reviewed, and supervised by Regional Councils. However, under the current polity and practice of The United Church of Canada, Licensed Lay Worship Leaders are not permitted, by virtue of their licence, to preside at the sacraments, including Holy Communion.

At the same time, there are provisions by which communities of faith without regular access to ordered ministry may appoint an elder or other authorized person to administer the sacraments within that particular community of faith, subject to the appropriate policy and oversight. This provision is helpful, but it is limited in scope. In a multi-point charge, such authorization may not extend across the whole charge. In addition, some communities may find it difficult to identify elders who are willing, able, and appropriately prepared to undertake this responsibility.

This creates a pastoral and practical gap. A Licensed Lay Worship Leader may be authorized to lead worship across several communities of faith, but may not preside at Holy Communion. A locally appointed elder may be authorized to administer the sacrament within one congregation, but may not be able to serve the wider pastoral context in which the need exists.

The issue is how The United Church of Canada can ensure appropriate, reverent, and accountable access to Holy Communion in under-served and unserved communities of faith while maintaining the theological integrity of the sacrament and the oversight responsibilities of the church.

2. Why is this issue important?

Holy Communion is central to the worshipping life of the church. It is a sign of Christ's presence, grace, reconciliation, and the shared life of the people of God. Communities of faith should have meaningful and regular access to the sacrament as part of their worship and discipleship.

This concern is especially important for communities of faith that do not have regular ordered ministry. These communities continue to gather for worship, serve their neighbours, care for one another, and participate in the mission of God. Their access to the sacrament should not depend entirely on the availability of ordered ministry when faithful, trained, and accountable lay leadership is already present and serving among them.

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders are already part of the church's response to changing ministry realities. They serve under Regional Council authority and are entrusted with worship leadership and preaching. In many communities, LLWLs provide continuity, pastoral sensitivity, and familiarity with local congregational life.

This proposal does not seek to diminish the role of ordered ministry or the theological importance of the sacraments. It seeks to address a pastoral need in communities where ordered ministry is limited or unavailable and where the existing structures of LLWL training, licensing, supervision, and review could provide an appropriate framework for careful sacramental authorization.

3. What is the proposed response?

It is proposed that the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council consider requesting that the General Council authorize a time-limited regional pilot project by which selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders may be authorized, under Regional Council oversight, to preside at Holy Communion in under-served or unserved communities of faith.

This would allow Regional Councils that identify a pastoral need within their bounds to establish appropriate policies, training expectations, accountability measures, and limitations for such authorization.

The proposed response is not a blanket permission for all Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to preside at Holy Communion. It is a request for a careful, limited, and accountable process in which Regional Councils may discern:

- whether there is a demonstrated pastoral need;
- which communities of faith are affected;
- which Licensed Lay Worship Leaders may be suitable for this additional responsibility;
- what additional training is required;
- what limitations should apply;
- how supervision, reporting, and review should be carried out.

4. What action is requested of the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council?

That the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council:

1. Receive this proposal for consideration;

2. Discern whether the issue identified in this proposal reflects a pastoral need within the bounds of the Regional Council;
3. Consider taking ownership of the proposal, with any revisions the Regional Council deems appropriate;
4. Forward the proposal to the General Council of The United Church of Canada, requesting authorization for a time-limited regional pilot project permitting selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders, under Regional Council oversight, to preside at Holy Communion in under-served or unserved communities of faith;
5. If such authorization is granted by General Council, develop or amend Regional Council policy to provide clear criteria, training, oversight, accountability, and reporting requirements.

5. What action is requested of the General Council?

That the General Council authorize interested Regional Councils to conduct a time-limited pilot project permitting selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to preside at Holy Communion in under-served or unserved communities of faith, subject to conditions established by the Regional Council and consistent with the theology, polity, and sacramental practice of The United Church of Canada.

Such authorization would allow participating Regional Councils to:

- identify communities of faith where access to Holy Communion is limited because of the absence or scarcity of ordered ministry;
- establish criteria for selecting LLWLs for sacramental authorization;
- require additional training in sacramental theology, liturgical practice, pastoral care, and United Church polity;
- define the scope and limits of the authorization;
- provide supervision and review;
- report findings, concerns, and recommendations to the wider church.

6. Background and rationale

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders provide pulpit supply and worship leadership in many parts of The United Church of Canada. In some regions, LLWLs are especially important to rural congregations, smaller communities of faith, and churches that are under-served or unserved by ordered ministry.

LLWLs are trained, licensed, reviewed, and supervised through Regional Councils. Their ministry is recognized as a significant part of the worship life of the church. They are already entrusted with leading worship, preaching, and helping communities gather faithfully for the praise and service of God.

The present limitation is that LLWLs are not authorized to preside at the sacraments. This limitation creates difficulty where the LLWL may be the regular or most available worship leader for a community of faith, but Holy Communion cannot be celebrated unless ordered ministry or another specifically authorized person is available.

This proposal recognizes that Holy Communion is not merely another worship element. It is a sacrament of the church and must be treated with reverence,

theological care, and appropriate accountability. For that reason, any authorization for LLWLs to preside at Holy Communion should be selective, limited, supervised, and grounded in additional preparation.

A regional pilot project would allow the church to test this possibility carefully. It would allow Regional Councils to discern within their own jurisdiction, provide oversight, and add this function to existing or amended LLWL policies only where there is genuine pastoral need.

This approach would allow the church to proceed with care rather than creating an immediate church-wide change. It would also allow the wider church to gather experience, evaluate outcomes, and make future decisions on the basis of faithful practice, pastoral experience, and theological reflection.

7. Regional discernment and oversight

This proposal recognizes the existing role of Regional Councils in licensing, supporting, reviewing, and supervising Licensed Lay Worship Leaders. Rather than imposing a uniform practice across the whole church at once, the General Council could authorize Regional Councils to discern whether there is a pastoral need within their own bounds for selected LLWLs to preside at Holy Communion in under-served or unserved communities of faith.

Where such a need is identified, the Regional Council could establish appropriate policies, training expectations, accountability measures, and limitations. This would allow each region to respond to its own context while maintaining the theological and pastoral integrity of the sacrament.

Regional Councils could be asked to report back to the General Council or its appropriate body on:

- the pastoral need identified;
- the number of LLWLs authorized;
- the communities of faith served;
- the training and oversight provided;
- the frequency and context of communion services offered;
- any concerns, challenges, or learnings that emerge during the pilot period.

8. Suggested conditions for authorization

Authorization could be limited to LLWLs who:

- are currently licensed and in good standing with their Regional Council;
- have completed additional sacramental theology and practice training approved by the Regional Council;
- have demonstrated pastoral maturity and competence in worship leadership;
- are recommended by the appropriate Regional Council body or LLWL leadership team;
- are authorized only for specific communities of faith, pastoral charges, or defined pastoral contexts;
- serve under the oversight of the Regional Council;

- participate in regular review and continuing education;
- follow the worship and sacramental practices of The United Church of Canada.

Additional information may be required regarding:

- the body within EOORC that would review and recommend LLWLs for this authorization;
- whether the authorization would be attached to a specific community of faith, pastoral charge, cluster, or wider regional context;
- the length of authorization and renewal process;
- the required training modules or learning outcomes;
- the reporting process to EOORC and to the General Council or its appropriate body.

9. Suggested pilot framework

A pilot project could be time-limited, perhaps for three to five years, and authorized by General Council for participating Regional Councils.

Each participating Regional Council could:

- identify communities of faith where access to Holy Communion is limited because of the absence or scarcity of ordered ministry;
- establish criteria for selecting LLWLs for sacramental authorization;
- provide additional training in sacramental theology, liturgical practice, pastoral care, and United Church polity;
- define the scope and limits of the authorization;
- review the ministry of authorized LLWLs annually;
- report findings, concerns, and recommendations to the wider church.

The pilot project could include an evaluation process addressing:

- whether access to Holy Communion increased in under-served or unserved communities of faith;
- whether communities experienced the practice as faithful, reverent, and pastorally helpful;
- whether LLWLs felt adequately prepared and supported;
- whether Regional Councils were able to provide appropriate oversight;
- whether any theological, pastoral, or polity concerns emerged;
- whether the pilot should be continued, amended, expanded, or discontinued.

10. Implications

Pastoral implications

This proposal could increase access to Holy Communion for communities of faith that currently have limited sacramental ministry. It could support rural congregations, small congregations, and multi-point charges where ordered ministry is scarce or unavailable.

Theological implications

The proposal affirms the theological importance of Holy Communion by requiring additional training, careful discernment, and Regional Council oversight. It does not treat sacramental presidency as an automatic extension of LLWL licensing.

Polity implications

This proposal would require General Council authorization because current LLWL licensing does not include permission to preside at the sacraments. The pilot model allows General Council to authorize a limited trial while Regional Councils provide local discernment and supervision.

Regional Council implications

Participating Regional Councils would need to establish or amend policies, provide training or approve training resources, supervise authorized LLWLs, and report on the pilot project.

Resource implications

There may be modest resource implications related to training, administration, supervision, and reporting. These could be managed through existing LLWL structures where possible.

[INSERT ANY KNOWN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS FOR EOORC, IF AVAILABLE]

11. Suggested motion for the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council

That the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council receive the proposal titled **“Regional Authorization of Selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to Preside at Holy Communion in Under-Served and Unserved Communities of Faith”**; and that the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council forward this proposal, with any revisions it deems appropriate, to the General Council of The United Church of Canada;

and that the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council request that the General Council authorize interested Regional Councils to conduct a time-limited pilot project permitting selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders, under Regional Council oversight, to preside at Holy Communion in under-served or unserved communities of faith; and that, if such authorization is granted, the Eastern Ontario Outaouais Regional Council develop appropriate policy provisions for discernment, training, authorization, supervision, accountability, and reporting.

12. Suggested wording for the request to General Council

That the General Council authorize interested Regional Councils to conduct a time-limited pilot project, for a period of [INSERT NUMBER] years, permitting selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to preside at Holy Communion in under-served or unserved communities of faith, subject to Regional Council discernment, additional training, defined limits of authorization, ongoing supervision, and regular reporting; and that participating Regional Councils report to [INSERT APPROPRIATE GENERAL COUNCIL BODY] on the pastoral need identified, the communities served, the LLWLs authorized, the training and oversight provided, and any learnings or concerns arising from the pilot project;

and that the General Council or its appropriate body evaluate the pilot project and determine whether further action, amendment, continuation, or discontinuation is warranted.

13. Additional information still needed

The following information should be added before final submission, if available:

- Name of the originating body, proposer, or sponsoring community of faith;
- Name and contact information of the person submitting the proposal;
- Name of the Regional Council member or representative who will bring the proposal forward;
- Preferred length of pilot project, for example three years or five years;
- Identification of the EOORC body that would provide oversight, if known;
- Any current EOORC policy language that should be referenced directly;
- Any local examples of under-served or unserved communities of faith where access to Communion is limited;
- Any known consultation already undertaken with LLWLs, ministry personnel, communities of faith, or regional leadership;
- Any desired wording changes from the Regional Council representative.

14. Conclusion

The United Church of Canada has long valued ordered ministry, lay leadership, regional discernment, and faithful adaptation to changing pastoral realities. This proposal seeks to honour all of those commitments.

Permitting selected Licensed Lay Worship Leaders to preside at Holy Communion, under Regional Council authorization and oversight, would offer a careful and accountable response to communities of faith that currently have limited access to the sacrament.

A regional pilot project would allow the church to proceed with care, humility, and faithfulness, while listening to the lived experience of communities most affected by the present limitations.

The question before the church is how the church can ensure that communities of faith, especially those most under-served, are able to gather at Christ's table with regularity, reverence, and joy.