

**Feedback on proposed changes
for Accreditation of Lay Preachers in English-speaking Parishes
July 2023**

These suggestions on changes for accreditation in English-speaking Parishes were circulated by email to all Lay Preachers, in a notification in the Connexional email in July and outlined to some Synod Superintendents at their July retreat.

Here is feedback from two zoom conversations (13 participants) and one email response.

- Someone seeking accreditation as a Lay Preacher will start by discussing it with his/her Parish Superintendent, Enabler, or Synod Superintendent if there is no presbyter – no real change.

No major discussion or suggestions for changes here.

- There will be two levels of training – further discussion is needed on how we name these.

If agreed, it could be “local worship leaders” and “nationally accredited Lay Preachers”. Further discussion needed.

Not everyone agreed, some reasoned that reaching a particular standard of competence in one’s own Parish should equip a Lay Preacher in any Parish across the country.

Those who had undertaken further study beyond *Lead Worship* were unanimous in advocating for more study than *Lead Worship* to equip Lay Preachers to lead worship in English-speaking Congregations other than their own, where the theology, dynamics and cultural contexts could be very different.

Q1 Parish or congregation?

“The idea of having two levels of accreditation is good; keeping in mind that there are in practical terms significant differences between one church parishes (in Auckland, Remuera and Mount Albert Devonport could be examples) and a circuit like Western Bay of Plenty (three churches) and Waitakere Parish with five congregations in four locations which is a circuit in all but name.

“Support for someone preaching within their own congregation or an agreed pairing.

We need a clear picture of what our starting point is before we know where we are heading.”

1. For ministry in that person’s own Parish or Congregation.

The study involved would be over a minimum of 2 years through a programme such as *Lead Worship*. Ideally this would be offered in the Parish, but it could be in the Synod or even at national level by zoom.

Lead Worship was recognised as a good basic starting point.

- Some Parishes are using the original version put out by David Bell, others are using variant/locally adapted versions (eg HCUC).
- Waikato-Waiariki Synod is currently using a rewritten version and offering it on zoom.
- Other Parishes have used completely different resources locally (eg Palmerston North and Whangapaoroa.)
- Of particular concern were the need
 - i) to train Lay Preachers in public speaking/voice production;
 - ii) to ensure that Lay Preachers have adequate language skills;
 - iii) for exposure to and respect for theological perspectives other than one’s own.
 - iv) to choose suitable and relevant hymns/songs.

Some people greatly appreciated the preaching offered by those who had expertise in other disciplines and incorporated these understandings into worship. Not all those who are academically able would wish to undertake further theological study. Anyone approved by a Parish is able to preach at Methodist services, but it does not mean s/he has the theological tools and training to lead worship regularly in any Parish. Such valued preachers could be recognised locally, or prior learning could be approved by Trinity as meeting part or all of the study requirements for national accreditation.

2. For ministry recognised nationally through accreditation.

The study would be over a minimum of 3 years through a year of *Lead Worship* and 3 papers through Trinity College; these could however be studied concurrently over 2 years. Courses of study through other institutions (eg Laidlaw College, Otago University) may be approved after consultation with Trinity College.

In general, the time frame was not seen as unreasonable.

All those who have undertaken theological study at Trinity or other recognised theological colleges affirmed the importance of adequate background study if the training is going to equip lay people to lead worship and preach in any Parish.

The cost of study could be prohibitive for some Lay Preachers in training.

Costs could be shared by the individual, the Parish, the Synod and/or from a Methodist Professional Development, Smethurst or (in the case of a CV or Union Parish) another Partner Church grant.

3. We would seek to remove the clause in the Law Book which allows those of “mature years” who have been preaching for more than 5 years to be accredited without further study. This was never intended to be a permanent means to accreditation.

There was general agreement for removal of this clause as a route to accreditation in future.

It does not mean that those who were accredited by this process will have their accreditation withdrawn, or that those on preaching plans but not intending to become accredited can no longer preach. Concern was expressed that sometimes those who are accredited through this clause feel they need undertake no further study or on-going education.

• Every trainee would have a mentor, who could be a Presbyter or experienced Lay Preacher.

This suggestion was affirmed by all respondents. The mentor would not have to belong to the same Parish as the Lay Preacher in training and there could be real advantages in a mentor coming from a different Parish or even another Synod.

• The last step for acceptance for leading worship locally or for national accreditation would be through the evaluated service and interview process, as at present. The interviewing team could recommend further study or training; their report would be sent to the Parish Presbyter for final endorsement by the Parish Council and also to the Synod Executive. The Synod is responsible for following up any recommendations for further study or training. The Synod Secretary retains a copy of the report.

As at present, the Lay Preacher in training would need to have been involved in leading a minimum of 10 services over 2 years.

The interviewing team consists of a presbyter, an accredited Lay Preacher and a member of the person's own Parish using an approved evaluation format.

Concern was expressed over a report being seen by all members of a Parish Council, so it is suggested that simply the result (achieved/not yet achieved) be communicated. In the case of a trainee not achieving the required standard, an appropriate sub-committee would read the full report and ensure that any recommendation for further experience/study is followed through and completed before another service is evaluated.

It was suggested that every accredited Lay Preacher could benefit from having services evaluated on a regular basis by teams whose membership reflect the needs of the Lay Preacher and Parish.

- Those trained for local ministry would receive a certificate from the Parish; those who are nationally accredited would receive a certificate through the NZLPA, as at present.

Generally agreed.

- It is envisaged that the *Lead Worship* programme will continue to be updated and also could be used by those who have completed their training at any level as one way to undertake on-going education.

This will be a work in progress, but *Lead Worship* has to be a dynamic course that stays updated and relevant. More discussion and work needed here.

- We strongly advocate on-going training through one or more of these methods:
 - regular reading in preparation for services (visit the Kinder library in Auckland and Hewitson library in Dunedin for on-line resources and postal services),
 - attending training sessions and workshops and lectures offered through any of the partner churches (Anglican, Christian Churches of New Zealand, Methodist, Presbyterian),
 - taking papers or attending lectures at theological colleges (Trinity College, St John's, Knox, Auckland and Otago universities)
 - or registering for on-line courses from recognised religious institutions here or overseas.

It was agreed that continuing education for accredited Lay Preachers is essential. This is best followed up by the Parish asking "what training have you undertaken?" Financial support to purchase books/journals/on-line resources and attend courses should be provided by the Parish to all who preach on a regular basis.

Feedback summarised from one respondent on Pasifika congregations combined in a Parish with English-speaking congregations.

How does this model deal with the situation of independent cultural congregations who have varying degrees of relationship within their local Parish and particularly within the Synod? [Eg Waterview and the Glen Eden Ekalesia congregations, St Johns; Hutt City Uniting Congregations; Palmerston North Tongan and others].

- In theory, all Pacific congregations should be under the umbrella of their cultural Synod; in practice this is far from the case.
- There is huge diversity among these congregations ranging from largely English-speaking, but still retaining a cultural identity, to more traditional than some of the cultural Synod congregations.

- Training for accreditation in the past was bespoke training at the discretion of the Presbyter using various versions of *Lead Worship* or other training material.
- Some of these lay preachers were described as "Pacific lay preachers" for reason of language.
- Some came through the mature criteria. It was felt that it was impractical for them to attend Trinity.
- The resourcing role that the cultural Synod inherited from the old advisory committees beyond the walls of their own parishes exists in name only.
- Some cultural congregations that have increasingly used English because of the New Zealand born generation's needs. In practice many of these lay preachers also preach in the English-speaking congregations.

These issues partly arise from the diversity and unique identity of each congregation. Trying to impose a "one size fits all" resolution will be difficult and unpastoral. However, maybe training offered that fits the local Parish and specific congregation may be a helpful approach so that Lay Preachers are trained and recognised locally and able to offer ministry in specific congregations.

These guidelines have already been agreed for those Lay Preachers accredited in another country or language coming to an English-speaking congregation: (from Information Leaflet # 153)

Lay Preachers accredited in English from other cultures

Consideration must be given to Lay Preachers qualified in English who come from other cultures. Such Lay Preachers are encouraged to spend some time in Aotearoa New Zealand congregations, study a course in the bicultural church or undertake a recognised course in Māori studies (e.g. through te Wananga) and must seek approval of the Parish or Leaders' Meeting.

Accreditation in English as a second language

These guidelines were discussed informally with Mission Resourcing and the Superintendents of the cultural Synods at Conference 2014. They apply to those who have been accredited in one language and then seek accreditation in English as a second language.

• Worship

- Gain experience through leading worship (prayers, liturgy, sermon) for English-speaking congregations over 2 years;

- Lead a service that is evaluated by a team appointed by the English-speaking geographical Synod; team to consist of:

- * one lay person from the English-speaking congregation,
- * an accredited Lay Preacher from the English -speaking/ geographical Synod and
- * a presbyter from the English-speaking/ geographical Synod.

- This team will conduct an interview with the Lay Preacher to ask about his/her faith journey and ensure that s/he has an understanding of the bicultural journey and adequate English language skills.

• Study

The team may recommend consulting with Trinity College for advice on further study.

• Congregational Life

Attend a minimum of 6 Leaders' Meetings of an English-speaking congregation in order to understand the structure and regulations of an English-speaking Methodist, United or Co-operating Parish.

Thank you to those who responded to the invitation to discuss the suggested changes to accreditation. Further feedback is invited.

There will now be discussion with Tauwi Strategy, Mission Resourcing and Trinity College before bringing the ideas to Conference.