

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders (LLWLs)

A Guide for LLWLs and Communities of Faith in East Central Ontario Regional Council (ECORC)

As of December-2024

Table of Contents

Overview

This guide is a supplement to the United Church of Canada document [Licensed Lay Worship Leaders](#). It focuses on practices related to LLWLs in the East Central Ontario region, and as such may differ from other regions of the United Church. It will be reviewed every year by the Licensed Lay Worship Leaders Forum and Network and updated as necessary. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact Forum chair Rev. Cathy Gradante revcathygradante@gmail.com. You may also wish to visit LLWL sections of the ECORC website, where you will find information about the [Forum](#) and [Network](#), a list of LLWLs available to lead worship, a list of frequently asked questions and more.

Please note that this guidebook uses “they” and “them” to refer to individuals in order to be respectful of all gender identities and expressions.

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders are members of the United Church of Canada who have felt a call to serve God. They are licensed by the East Central Ontario Regional Council to live out that call by serving communities of faith throughout the region. Often referred to as LLWLs, they bring a wide range of gifts from their careers in the business and non-profit sectors, in education and self-employment, as parents and volunteers, and as dedicated people of faith. They undergo special training to prepare them to create and lead worship services.

LLWLs differ from ordained clergy in that their sole responsibility is providing pulpit supply on a temporary basis. They are limited in the number of services they can lead and may not be employed by a community of faith. They are not permitted to perform the sacrament of baptism, to preside at communion or to officiate at weddings. LLWLs are able to officiate at funerals, as is any lay person. They typically undertake training at their own expense, and receive no pension or other benefits from the United Church of Canada. Each licensed lay worship leader must provide extensive documentation of their work and professional development in order to have their licence renewed by ECORC every three years.

Becoming licensed

Longer-serving LLWLs may have taken their training in a wide range of formats, from intensive study in a small group to multiple weekends over a period of years. New LLWL candidates are trained through United in Learning's online training program, which consists of four modules: Liturgy, Preaching, Prayers and Music, and All Ages and Special Events in Worship. Not all who take the program necessarily feel a call to serve as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader. Those who have successfully completed their training may wish to submit their names to the LLWL Forum for licensing in our region. In order to be licensed, the candidate must provide:

- a current criminal reference check including vulnerable sector.
- confirmation of membership in the United Church in the form of a letter from the chair of their home church's council or board, or the minister of the home church. This letter should state that the individual is a member in good standing and that their home community of faith supports their work as an LLWL in their own church as well as the wider ECORC.
- proof of completion of two mandatory online courses (Racial Justice and Personal and Professional Boundaries for Church Leaders).

The candidate will be interviewed by a group of three (one ordained clergy person and two LLWLs) members of the Forum to establish their suitability to serve as an LLWL and identify any areas for further reflection or work.

Licence renewal

LLWLs must renew their licence every three years by submitting these documents via email to the LLWL Forum secretary prior to the date the secretary specifies:

- a criminal reference check including vulnerable sector OR Annual Declaration Form, which includes the date of the last vulnerable sector check and asserts that a check less than five years old is still valid. If a check was obtained more than five years ago, a new one must be submitted.
- confirmation of membership in the United Church in the form of a letter from the chair of their home church's council or board, or the minister of the home church
- proof of completion of two mandatory online courses --- Racial Justice (one time) and Personal and Professional Boundaries for Church Leaders (within the past 5 years).
- a log listing where they have led worship since the last renewal process, including dates, the full name of the church and its location
- a sermon they preached on one of those occasions, together with sources used in its writing (e.g., books, websites, commentaries etc.). This can be submitted as written file or video.
- one original prayer of the people/pastoral prayer, and one original opening prayer
- information related to ongoing professional development and personal learning over the last two years, including courses, workshops, books, other training, video or podcast series, etc. that contributed to growth.

Annual requirements

In non-renewal years, LLWLs must provide these four documents to the LLWL Network secretary by March 31:

- A new letter of support from their home community of faith. This letter simply needs to affirm that the LLWL is a member in good standing of the faith community, and that it continues to support the work of the LLWL in their congregation and the wider ECORC. This letter should be voted on by the membership at the annual general meeting, or should that not be possible, it should be voted on by the community of faith's governing body (Official Board, Church Council, etc.).
- An Annual Declaration form that they have no charges or convictions under the Criminal Code of Canada since their last criminal reference check (which must have been obtained within the past five years) OR a new criminal reference check if the last one was obtained more than five years ago.
- Pulpit Supply Log for the previous calendar year.
- PD Learning activities in the previous year.

Also, the LLWL must submit a new Boundaries Refresher course confirmation if the previous course was not within the past five years.

Professional development

Each LLWL is expected to participate in at least one of the two workshops to be offered each year by the LLWL Forum. They are also expected to read, and perhaps watch documentaries, listen to podcasts or find other ways to continuously work on improving their knowledge, leadership skills and personal faith. It is also important to take part in other training opportunities, such as webinars offered by the United Church of Canada, individual communities of faith, ECORC, social justice organizations, etc. LLWLs are not typically reimbursed for the cost of books, courses or other expenses incurred as part of their professional development.

Frequency of leadership

ECORC policy is that an individual LLWL should lead worship in a given community of faith for a maximum of five of eight consecutive Sundays, to a maximum of 12 Sundays per year in the same community of faith. If a community of faith wishes to have an LLWL lead worship for more than this number of worship services, it must seek approval from the ECORC Pastoral Relations Minister. These measures are intended to ensure that communities of faith work toward a pastoral relationship with ordained clergy or a Congregational Designated Minister rather than simply relying on LLWLs to provide worship without a consistent source of leadership and pastoral care.

Home Community of Faith

A community of faith that has sponsored a LLWL is expected to invite them to lead worship at least once a year, with payment at the recommended rate, to show support and encouragement. LLWLs are not permitted to serve as their community of faith's regular worship leader. Any who have been doing so must refrain from acting in this role as of June 30, 2023.

LLWLs are encouraged to develop a strong relationship with the minister of their home community of faith for mutual support, theological and professional discussions, and more. In churches where there is no minister, or where an LLWL might be in a position that makes such a relationship difficult (as a member of the Ministry and Personnel committee, a search committee, etc.), or if the minister is otherwise not available for this relationship, the LLWL should contact the Chair of LLWL Forum.

Payment

The recommended rate in 2025 for anyone providing worship leadership is \$254. It is important to note that this rate is per day, not per service, so an LLWL may be asked to lead more than one worship service. This rate compensates the LLWL or other person providing pulpit supply for time spent on research, reflection, writing liturgy and the message and communicating with church staff, as well as for the actual leadership of in-person or virtual worship. The community of faith must provide a cheque, including the mileage amount, to the LLWL on the same day they provide leadership. It is not acceptable to ask the LLWL to wait for payment unless they have explicitly agreed to another arrangement e.g. being mailed a cheque.

If a faith community cancels its service because of inclement weather, the LLWL does not receive payment regardless of whether material has already been prepared. If the LLWL is unable to lead worship because of illness, hazardous road conditions or for any other reason, but provides a full liturgy that is read by a member of the congregation, the LLWL should be paid in full for the work involved.

Mileage

The often-considerable distances worship leaders must drive to one or more communities of faith on a given day is recognized with a payment of 55 cents/km (2025 rate). It is a good idea to review the location of a given LLWL to be aware of the mileage involved in having them lead worship.

Provision of T4A form

A community of faith must issue T4A forms to all LLWLs to whom it paid more than \$500 per year. For instance, if an LLWL drives 30-km round-trip to lead worship twice in a given community of faith, they must receive a T4A from that church. The amount on the T4A should include both a pulpit supply fee and any mileage reimbursement, since LLWLs are categorized

as non-employees by the Canada Revenue Agency. More information for church treasurers is available through the ECORC website's [LLWL Forum](#) page.

Respecting local practices and traditions

Each Licensed Lay Worship Leader brings unique gifts to their work. LLWLs are also expected to ask about and take into account the preferences of the community of faith they are serving in areas such as worship format, hymn selection and style of worship leadership.

Respecting commitment to community of faith

On occasion, an LLWL may not be able to lead worship after having promised to do so. It is essential that they communicate as soon as possible with the community of faith in order to allow a replacement to be secured.

Inclusive language

Because God is beyond words, we can only ever attempt to capture part of the nature of God in language. There are many ways to conceive of God, which is why LLWLs are expected to use a variety of ways to refer to the Divine. Limiting the language we use, particularly to traditionally male imagery, also limits our understanding even as it creates hurdles for some in their relationship to God and personal faith development.

Original work

As is the case with clergy, Licensed Lay Worship Leaders may wish to use material in their liturgy from other sources on occasion. If so, the author of the material must be clearly credited in the order of service. Because each worship service is unique, LLWLs are encouraged to write new liturgical material as often as possible. The sermon, message or a reflection should be the LLWL's own work. On rare occasions, it is acceptable to use someone else's sermon provided the worship leader has obtained permission and clearly states the original source of the material. Reading someone else's sermon without attribution is plagiarism and may be grounds for non-renewal of an LLWL's licence.

Personal worship practice

In order to nurture their own spiritual life and faith development, it is important that LLWLs only accept leadership invitations to an extent that they are still able to attend worship themselves. LLWLs are also expected to read works related to spirituality, theology, the Bible, etc., and spend time in prayer and reflection.

Personal conduct

Although Licensed Lay Worship Leaders are not employees of the United Church, ECORC or individual communities of faith, they are representatives of the Christian faith and our

denomination. They are expected to act accordingly, with honesty, compassion, fairness, inclusivity, integrity, humility and kindness.

Mandatory workshops

All Licensed Lay Worship Leaders are required to have completed the workshop on United Church Policies on Healthy Boundaries and Sexual Abuse Policy and Racial Justice. Candidates must be current for both these workshops in order to be licensed, whether first-time or renewal

Funerals

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders may preside at a funeral, as indeed anyone can. An LLWL should, however, only preside at a funeral for members or adherents of a community of faith at the invitation of the called or appointed minister, or if there is no appointed or called minister in the community of faith, at the invitation of the pastoral charge supervisor or the Official Board/Church Council of the community of faith. If an individual, the family or a funeral home contacts an LLWL directly about presiding at a funeral service, it is expected the LLWL will not enter into any arrangement before consulting as above. If an LLWL conducts a funeral, they must ensure that the information about the service is properly entered in the burial register of the community of faith.

Non-permitted functions

Being licensed to serve as an LLWL does not qualify a person to:

- serve as a pastoral charge supervisor or representative of the region at Official Board/Church Council meetings.
- apply to or fill pastoral vacancies.
- use the title Reverend. An LLWL does not have the training or experience associated with this title.
- wear a clerical collar, stole or gown. It is important not to confuse people about the role of a Licensed Lay Worship Leader.
- preside at services of communion or baptism, nor does it allow an LLWL to perform marriages. In keeping with the ethos and practice of The United Church of Canada, Licensed Lay Worship Leaders may not seek to be recognized by or affiliated with outside religious organizations in order to perform these functions. Doing so will result in non-renewal of one's licence.
- enter into an ongoing relationship of pastoral care with a community of faith or individual members of a congregation. It is expected that the Licensed Lay Worship Leader will refer any requests or requirements for pastoral care (counselling, home visitation, hospital visitation) to the called or appointed ministry personnel or the pastoral charge supervisor for follow-up.
- advertise their services or solicit invitations to lead worship, through any means, except via appropriate venues designated by ECORC.

- be “on call” with local funeral homes. Funerals require competency in the area of pastoral care for which Licensed Lay Worship Leaders are not normally trained; therefore, conducting funerals as a side business may be grounds for non-renewal of one’s licence.

Arranging for an LLWL to lead worship

A list of approved Licensed Lay Worship Leaders is available on the East Central Ontario Regional Council website [*insert direct link*] or by contacting LLWL secretary Paul Kneebone. The representative of the community of faith is encouraged to contact a given LLWL well in advance. At the time the LLWL is booked to lead worship, the representative should provide:

- contact information for the church secretary
- information about when the order of service needs to be provided
- contact information for the music director, as needed
- information about the community of faith’s preferences about hymns and other aspects of worship, including whether the order of service is printed or projected
- details about whether there is a PowerPoint or other visual aspect, and if so, who prepares it
- notice as to whether the service is simultaneously available live via Zoom to congregants, and/or recorded for viewing later online.
- information about how to obtain a past order of worship for the LLWL’s preparation purposes
- an idea of whether the congregants tend to prefer a more formal or relaxed style

Welcoming an LLWL to your community of faith

The first time a Licensed Lay Worship Leader comes to your community of faith, they will be unfamiliar with everything from the layout of the building to the way people interact before the service to where to park. It’s a great idea to designate someone to greet the LLWL and show them around—the location of washrooms is especially helpful! —and explain how the service works. Some things to explain might include:

- if there is a Christ candle, who lights it and when
- where there are special monthly activities e.g., birthday recognitions, special offerings, etc.
- who handles announcements
- whether those in attendance like to name people to be remembered in prayer
- what typically happens after the end of the service

If you have concerns about an LLWL

In rare instances, your community of faith may have a bad experience with a Licensed Lay Worship Leader. If so, you are welcome to contact the current LLWL Forum Chair and/or ECORC

Pastoral Relations Minister Rev. Darren Liepold Dliepold@united-church.ca to express your concern so that it can be taken up with the LLWL. It is important to ensure ECORC is aware of any problems that may arise so that the appropriate action can be taken and the standards of leadership be upheld.

How LLWLs are governed

All Licensed Lay Worship Leaders, as well as students in the LLWL program, in the East Central Ontario Region, are members of the LLWL Network. LLWLs are approved for licensing and renewal by the LLWL Forum, which is responsible to the Covenant Support Team. The Pastoral Relations Minister provides additional support and oversight.

Insurance not provided for LLWLs

The East Central Ontario Region does not cover LLWLs under its insurance policies.

Recognizing new licensees and renewal of licences

LLWL licences are renewed every second year. The next meeting of the Regional Council after the renewals are approved will set aside a minimum of 15 minutes for a liturgy that recognizes and celebrates LLWLs whose licences have been renewed. Newly approved LLWLs will be likewise recognized and celebrated at the same meeting. The Pastoral Relations Minister, working with the chair and secretary of the LLWL Forum, is responsible for organizing this service of recognition.

Support for LLWLs

If an individual LLWL has a question or concern, they should take it to the chair of the LLWL Network, or, if the concern is with the chair, to the chair of the LLWL Forum. Members of the Network provides informal community, connection and learning to each other. The Forum organizes two training events for LLWLs each year.

Ending service as an LLWL

When a Licensed Lay Worship Leader opts to retire from service, they will be recognized by the chair of the Forum and the Pastoral Relations Minister with a spoken acknowledgement at the next Regional Council meeting and a card of appreciation.

Becoming an LLWL

Serving as a Licensed Lay Worship Leader is a profoundly meaningful way to offer your gifts to communities of faith, to live out a calling and to deepen your own spiritual life. [United in Learning](#) offers a two-year online training program, in which adult students from all over Canada learn from a facilitator and each other in preparation for lay ministry in many capacities within our church. There are four modules, with two offered each year: Liturgy, Preaching, Prayers and Music, and All Ages and Special Events in Worship. The mentors are knowledgeable, supportive and enrich your learning, as do the others you meet in the Zoom

platform courses. If this path into ministry is of interest and you would like to explore it further, you are encouraged to speak with the chair of the LLWL Forum, Rev. Cathy Gradante revcathygradante@gmail.com or ECORC's Pastoral Relations Minister Rev. Darren Liepold Dliepold@united-church.ca and visit the [LLWL Network](#) and [LLWL Forum](#) pages on the ECORC website.

RESOURCES

<https://pacificmountain.ca/support/for-lay-leadership/licensed-lay-worship-leaders-information-and-resources/>

<https://united-church.ca/leadership/entering-ministry/lay-ministry-and-discipleship/licensed-lay-worship-leaders>