



East Central Ontario Regional Council Handbook for Licensed Lay Worship Leaders (LLWLs)

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

East Central Ontario Regional Council
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Overview

This handbook is a supplement to The United Church of Canada (UCC) document [Licensed Lay Worship Leaders](#). It focuses on practices related to LLWLs in the East Central Ontario Region (ECOR), and as such may differ from other regions of the UCC. The licensing and relicensing requirements of LLWLs within the bounds of the ECORC are compliant with the document [Licensed Lay Worship Leaders](#) and are described in full in this handbook. It will be reviewed every year by the Licensed Lay Worship Leaders (LLWL) Forum and Network and updated as necessary. If you have questions or suggestions, please contact the LLWL Forum chair or secretary. 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.

RESOURCES

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

<https://ecorcuccan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/ECORC-Governance-Handbook-May-2025.pdf>

Introduction

LLWLs are members of The (UCC) who have felt a call to serve God in worship leadership. They are licensed by and serve under the direction of the regional council. the East Central Ontario Regional Council (ECORC) to live out that call by serving communities of faith (CoFs) throughout the region. They bring a wide range of gifts from their careers in the business, government 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.

The range of responsibility of LLWLs is quite limited as compared with ordered ministry personnel in that the sole responsibility of LLWLs is to provide pulpit supply on a temporary basis. They are limited in the number of services they can lead and may not be employed by a CoF. They are not permitted to perform the sacrament of baptism, to preside at communion or to officiate at weddings. LLWLs can officiate at funerals, as may any lay person. They typically undertake training at their own expense and receive no pension or other benefits from the UCC. LLWLs must provide extensive documentation of their work and continued professional development in order to have their licences renewed by ECORC every three years.

Serving as an LLWL is a profoundly meaningful way for the laity of The UCC to offer their gifts to communities of faith (CoFs), to live out their calling, and to deepen their own spiritual lives.

The two-year on-line program through which LLWL candidates train offers adult students from all over Canada the opportunity to learn from a facilitator and each other. The mentors are knowledgeable and supportive and enrich the learning of the participants. Lay members of The UCC who discern a call to this path of ministry are encouraged to speak with the chair of the LLWL Forum or the ECORC Pastoral Relations Minister and to visit the LLWL Network and LLWL Forum pages on the ECORC website.

All LLWLs and students from the East Central Ontario Region enrolled in the United in Learning/Church LLWL program are members of the ECORC LLWL Network, a group sponsored by the LLWL Forum. Its purpose is two-fold; educational and supportive. Usually, the LLWL Network meets 3-4 times annually, including two in-person LLWL professional development sessions, organized by the LLWL Forum. The sessions also provide opportunities for the LLWLs to share and learn from each other as a community of practice.

Licensing and Relicensing Requirements

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 the United in Learning/ChurchX 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 discern a call to serve as an LLWL. Those who have successfully completed their training and who wish to do so then 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;
- A letter of support from their home CoF. This letter simply needs to affirm that the candidate is a member in good standing of the CoF and that it supports the work of the candidate in their congregation and the region. This letter must be voted on by the membership at a congregational meeting or the governing body of the CoF, if the membership has delegated that responsibility to its governing body; and
- 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 two or three members of the Forum (one ordered ministry personnel and one or two LLWLs) to establish their suitability to serve as an LLWL and identify any areas for further reflection or work.

When the LLWL Forum is satisfied that the candidate meets the suitability and readiness requirements and has identified any areas for further reflection or work, the LLWL Forum member who is serving as the Corresponding Member to the Covenant Support Team (CST) requests the CST to approve the licensing of the candidate by the ECORC.

Services of Licensing and Renewal of Licences

At the fall meeting of the Regional Council in a service of worship led by the Speaker, ECORC covenants with both those LLWLs whose licences are being renewed and with those lay members who the ECORC has agreed have met the suitability and readiness requirements to be licensed to serve as LLWLs within the jurisdiction of ECORC and under the direction of ECORC. The license is for a three-year period and may be renewed.

Annual Requirements

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

- A new letter of support from their home community of faith. (The content and CoF approval is the same as the original letter of support.)

- 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 Police Vulnerable Sector Check if the last one was obtained more than five years ago;
- a Pulpit Supply Log for the previous calendar year;
- a listing of professional development (PD) activities completed during the previous calendar year; and
- a new Boundaries Refresher course confirmation if the previous course was not taken within the past five years.

Professional Development

LLWLs are 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 continue to improve their knowledge, leadership skills, and personal growth through participation in other forms of professional development, such as reading, watching documentaries and video series, listening to podcasts, and participating in workshops. Webinars offered by the UCC, individual communities of faith, ECORC, and social justice organizations are other sources of professional development. Participation in Bible studies or other faith development groups in their home CoFs are another source of professional and personal growth.

Renewing Licences

ECORC must renew the licences of LLWLs every three years. The renewal process begins with the LLWL submitting the four documents submitted in non-renewal years. In addition, the LLWL must meet the following requirements:

- submission of 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;
- submission of one original prayer of the people/pastoral prayer and one original opening prayer;
- participation in an informal interview by two or three members of the Forum (one ordained clergy person and one or two LLWLs).

Note: Documents are required to be submitted via email to the LLWL Forum secretary prior to the date the secretary specifies:

Note: Due to the number of interviews required, a third of the LLWLs are interviewed every calendar year.

The LLWL Forum will submit the names of those LLWLs seeking to have their licenses renewed to the CST for approval.

Ending Service as an LLWL

When LLWLs opt to retire from service, they will be recognized by the chair of the Forum and the ECORC Pastoral Relations Minister or designate at the fall meeting of the Regional Council.

Oversight and Discipline

The LLWL Forum supports the ECORC Covenant Support Team (CST) and the ECORC Pastoral Relations Minister in recruiting, training, interviewing and recommending the licensing of LLWLs. The Forum is also responsible for oversight of the LLWLs and for calling to the attention of the CST any programmatic or performance issues that may arise, including any that may require disciplinary action.

Under the auspices of the CST and the ECORC Pastoral Relations Minister, the Forum sets in place procedures to ensure adherence to the policies of The UCC and ECORC relative to LLWLs and to periodically review the practices and procedures described in the following pages.

Policies

In addition to the policies and procedures relative to the licensing and renewal of licensing and annual requirements laid out in the preceding pages ECORC has instituted the following policies governing the use of the services of LLWLs.

Frequency of Leadership

- Generally, ECORC policy is that an individual LLWL may lead worship in a given community of faith for only five of eight consecutive Sundays, to a maximum of 12 Sundays per year. But, as part of the 12 Sundays per year, an LLWL may lead worship in a community of faith for the entire season of Advent & Christmas Eve and/or Lent into Easter Sunday.
- As well, an LLWL may lead worship in their own home community of faith to a maximum of 10 Sundays per year.
- 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. Any affected LLWL should also contact the LLWL Forum chair. These measures are intended to ensure that CoFs work toward a pastoral relationship with ordered ministry personnel rather than simply relying on LLWLs to provide worship without a consistent source of leadership and pastoral care.
- LLWLs are not permitted to serve as their CoF's regular leader; they are limited to providing worship leadership in their home CoF to 10 Sundays a year.

Remuneration

The pulpit supply rate compensates the LLWL providing pulpit supply for time spent on research, reflection, writing liturgy and message and communicating with church staff, as well as for the actual leadership of in-person or virtual worship. The following policies apply:

- ECORC policy is that LLWL minimal remuneration shall be in accordance with the Visiting Ministry Personnel rate as stated in the current UCC Minimum Salaries & *Reimbursements for Ministry Personnel* except that if there are two or more services and locations, the minimum remuneration pulpit supply rate is an additional 25% above the minimum rate of a Visiting Ministry Personnel.
- If there are other scenarios (i.e., three services on a given Sunday or two different liturgies required), the LLWL and CoF representative shall agree upon the remuneration in advance of the services of the LLWL.
- Mileage is also remunerated in accordance with the current UCC Minimum Salaries & *Reimbursements for Ministry Personnel*. This rate is a return rate from the LLWL's home to the preaching location, inclusive of travel between points if there is more than one location.
- The community of faith must provide a cheque (or eTransfer) that includes the Pulpit Supply and the mileage amount, to the LLWL on the same day they provide leadership.
- The pulpit supply rate is also paid in full in the event of a shift from in-person to online on a given Sunday.
- If a faith community cancels its service because of inclement weather, or other reason, the LLWL is still paid the agreed-upon Pulpit Supply remuneration.
- If the LLWL is unable to lead worship (i.e., personal illness, family emergency, hazardous road conditions) or for another legitimate reason, but provides in advance a fully prepared service (including all the prayers and other text, as well as a written sermon) to the point where someone else could lead the service, the LLWL should also be paid in full. Otherwise, there is no payment.

Provision of T4A Form

In accordance with the Canada Revenue Agency guidelines, the CoF must issue T4A forms to all LLWLs to whom it paid more than \$500 during the year. The amount on the T4A should include both a pulpit supply fee and any mileage reimbursement. More information for church treasurers is available through the ECORC website's [LLWL Forum](#) page.

Practices

Home Community of Faith

A CoF that has sponsored an 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. Home CoFs are encouraged to reimburse a portion of the yearly professional development costs of those they sponsor as LLWLs.

User Communities of Faith

CoFs are encouraged to review their insurance coverage to ensure appropriate coverage of visiting worship leaders is included in their policies. The umbrella policy covering liability for Trustees and other Church officers does not provide coverage for LLWLs.

Licensed Lay Worship Leaders

Developing Relationship with Ministry Personnel

LLWLs are encouraged to develop a strong relationship with the minister of their home CoF 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 conflictual (such as a the LLWL is a member of the Ministry & Personnel committee, a search committee, etc.), or if the minister is otherwise not available for this relationship, the LLWL should contact the LLWL Forum chair.

Respecting Local Practices and Traditions

Though LLWLs bring unique gifts to their work, they are also expected to ask about and take into account the preferences of the CoF 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 CoF in order to allow a replacement to be secured.

Using Inclusive Language

In accordance with UCC practice, and 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.

Using Work Credited to Others

As is the case with clergy, LLWLs may wish to incorporate 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. The sermon, message or reflection should be the LLWL's own work.- Plagiarism may be grounds for immediate suspension and 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 accept leadership invitations only 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 LLWLs 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.

Affiliation or Recognition with Other Religious Groups

In keeping with the ethos and practice of the UCC, LLWLs may not seek to be recognized by or affiliated with outside religious organizations in order to perform marriages. Doing so will result in revocation and non-renewal of one's licence.

Pastoral Care

LLWLs 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.

ECORC

The ECORC Pastoral Relations Minister will organize a service of worship at which the Speaker will preside and which will (1) include worship and (2) will culminate in a liturgy of celebration and recognition of LLWLs who are retiring or have retired during the year, that celebrates and covenants with those LLWLs whose licences are being renewed and those those lay persons who are being newly licensed as LLWLs. The chair and secretary of the LLWL Forum will assist the Pastoral Relations Minister in the planning of the service

Procedures

Arranging for an LLWL to Lead Worship

A list of LLWLs is available on the ECORC website, specifically, the LLWL Forum webpage. CoFs may also gain access to the list by contacting the LLWL Forum secretary directly. The CoF representative is encouraged to contact a given LLWL well in advance and to confirm the number of points for which the services of the LLWL are being requested and the pulpit supply and milage rates, as stated earlier in this Guide;

At a minimum of two weeks before the LLWL is to lead the Sunday service, the representative should provide the following information:

- contact information for the church administrator/secretary;
- a recent order of service;
- information about when the order of service needs to be provided;
- contact information for the music leader, as needed;
- information about the CoF's preferences and availability for hymnal sources used, 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 (or other platform) to congregants, and/or recorded for viewing later online;
- an idea of whether the congregants tend to prefer a more formal or relaxed style;
- whether there is a requirement for a children's story time during the service;
- if there is a Christ candle, who lights it and when, whether it is battery-operated or a wick;
- participation of lay reader and other individuals during the service;
- whether those in attendance like to name people to be remembered in prayer;
- how the offering takes place;
- whether the choir wishes to meet with the LLWL prior to the service, and
- what typically happens after the end of the service.
- the website address so the LLWL can do a 'virtual visit'; and
- parking information.

Welcoming an LLWL to Your CoF

The first time an LLWL comes to your CoF, 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. Explain how the service works. Some things to explain might include:

- if a wireless microphone, get the LLWL setup, as well as doing an overall sound check;

- location of washrooms is especially helpful, as well as providing water (bottle or glass) for the visiting LLWL;
- If your church offers fellowship time before or after Sunday church service, extend an invitation to the visiting LLWL
- If there are other special elements in the service on a given Sunday.

Reporting Concerns about an LLWL

- In rare instances, your community of faith may have a bad experience with an LLWL. In that case, you are encouraged to contact the current LLWL Forum chair and/or ECORC Pastoral Relations Minister to express your concern so that the concern can be taken up with the LLWL. It is important to ensure ECORC is aware of any problems that may arise so that appropriate action can be taken and the standards of leadership be upheld.

Restricted and Non-Permitted Functions

Funerals

LLWLs may preside at a funeral, as indeed anyone can. An LLWL should, however, only preside at a funeral for members or adherents of a CoF at the invitation of the called or appointed minister. If there is no appointed or called minister in the CoF, the LLWL may preside at the invitation of the pastoral charge supervisor or the chair of the governing body of the CoF. If an individual, the family or a funeral home contacts 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 CoF.

Funerals require competency in the area of pastoral care for which LLWLs are not normally trained; therefore, conducting funerals as a side business may be grounds for revoking and non-renewal of one's licence.

Non-permitted LLWL Functions

Being licensed to serve as an LLWL does not entitle 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;
- wear a clerical collar, stole or gown;
- preside at services of communion or baptism;
- perform marriages;

- enter into an ongoing relationship of pastoral care with a community of faith or individual members of a congregation;
- 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.

Acronym List

CoF	Community of Faith
CST	Covenant Support Team
ECORC	East Central Ontario Regional Council
LLWL	Licensed Lay Worship Leader
PD	Professional Development
UCC	United Church of Canada