



**The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada**

Ministry Vocations, Human Resources Unit
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Process for Discernment and Candidacy for the Order of Ministry

Always check the United Church website (www.united-church.ca) for the most up-to-date forms and guidelines.

Beginning the Discernment Process

Individual

Before becoming an inquirer, a person must be a full member of The United Church of Canada for *24 months* and currently involved with a congregation (*The Manual*, section 022(b)).

1. People who believe they have received a call to ordered ministry should contact their session, church council, or church board and ask that the congregation set up a discernment committee for the purpose of reflecting on their call to ministry.
2. The individual fills out the first part of form **DIS 201: Action Recognizing an Inquirer** and gives it to the session.

Session or Equivalent

1. The session meets with the individual and decides whether they will recognize the person as an inquirer and set up a discernment committee.
2. If a discernment committee is to be initiated, the session names two representatives to the committee and the inquirer names one. All members of the committee need to be members of the congregation, including the person chosen by the inquirer, and one should be an elder or equivalent.

When naming committee members, the session looks for some of these qualities: willingness to share faith, good listener, good questioner, knowledge of the United Church and its ministry, and ability to be supportive as well as analytical.

3. If proceeding, the clerk of session (or equivalent) completes **DIS 201** (page 1), and sends it to the Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee.

Presbytery/District Education and Students (E&S) Committee

1. The Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee receives the applicant as an inquirer and appoints one or two representatives to the discernment committee.
2. The committee also completes **DIS 201** (page 2) and distributes copies as indicated on that page.

The 12 months of the discernment process begin on the date recorded by the Presbytery/District E&S Committee on DIS 201.

Discernment Committee Meetings

The presbytery/district representative to the discernment committee is responsible for calling the first meeting and preparing the discernment committee for its work.

Discernment Committee

1. The discernment committee meets with the inquirer at least six times over a 12-month period to discuss issues of belief and spirituality, ministry and call, leadership and lifestyle, the United Church, and educational requirements.

The education requirements can be found in the appendix to this leaflet.

Discerning a Call (DIS 200) contains helpful information about meetings, processes, and requirements, as well as sample services of covenanting. It is available at www.united-church.ca/handbooks or from United Church Resource Distribution.

2. At the end of the process, the discernment committee recommends the type of call that has been discerned: ordained or diaconal, or continued active lay ministry in the congregation.

Required Forms

1. The discernment committee fills out **DIS 202(a): Report and Recommendation of Discernment Committee** and forwards it to the session or board of the congregation.
2. Depending on the recommendation of the discernment committee, the inquirer completes **CAN 202(b): Application to Be Received as a Candidate** for ordered ministry (diaconal or ordained), and the discernment committee presents its recommendations and the application to the inquirer's session.

Concluding the Discernment Process

Session

1. The session receives the discernment committee's recommendations and the inquirer's application and makes a decision.
2. The session completes **CAN 203: Action by Session and Presbytery/District Regarding Inquirers**, page 1, and sends it with the original of **DIS 202(a)** and the application **CAN 202(b)** to the Presbytery/District E&S Committee.

Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee

1. If the inquirer is applying for candidacy for ordered ministry, the Presbytery/District E&S Committee completes **CAN 203**, page 2 top, and sends it to the Conference Interview Board (CIB) with **DIS 202(a)** and the application from the inquirer.
2. The CIB meets with the inquirer. Following the interview, the CIB fills out **CAN 203**, page 2 bottom, and returns it to the E&S Committee with the CIB's recommendation.
3. The E&S Committee interviews the inquirer and makes its recommendation to the presbytery/district regarding candidacy.
4. Two members of the E&S Committee sign **CAN 203**, page 3, "Police Records Check." This section must be fulfilled prior to the presbytery/district decision.
5. Then they send **CAN 203**, **DIS 202(a)**, and **CAN 202(b)** to the presbytery/district secretary.
6. The E&S Committee also makes recommendations on educational programs using **CAN 204: Initial Certification to School or Program**.
7. The presbytery/district secretary completes and signs **CAN 203** (page 3) and distributes it as indicated on that page.
8. Candidates who opt for ministry-based educational programs for ordination *need to arrange an appointment* as part of their educational process. Once this appointment is in place, the E&S Committee completes **CAN 203(b): Approval of Appointment**.

From Inquirer to Candidate

1. When the discernment process is complete, the discernment committee arranges to recognize the inquirer's journey of faith and celebrate the decisions that have been made.
2. This recognition should be part of the congregation's worship life. Recognition for individuals who have been commended to continue active lay participation in the congregation should also be recognized during a worship service.
3. The discernment committee and the congregation together should discuss how they will continue to support their candidate for vocational ministry through the years of education and formation.

Continuing the Candidacy Process

- The Presbytery/District E&S Committee retains a central role throughout the candidacy process. The committee
 - conducts an *annual interview* to help candidates reflect on their faith journey and academic work
 - helps to *clarify* candidates' goals concerning the supervised ministry education component and assesses successful completion
 - makes *final recommendations* to the Conference Education and Students Committee about ordination and commissioning
- Each year, candidates are required to complete **CAN 205: Candidate Self-Assessment Form**. The theological institution fills out **CAN 217: Annual Theological School Report**. Both of these forms go to the Presbytery/District E&S Committee.
- Each year the Presbytery/District E&S Committee completes **CAN 206: Annual Confirmation of Status by Presbytery/District** and sends it to presbytery/district for confirmation.
- Candidates should maintain a current file of documents of their process.

Completing the Candidacy Process

1. At the beginning of the final year of formal academic studies, candidates for ordered ministry complete **CAN 209**. The theological school fills out the "Theological School Recommendation" section and sends the form back to the candidate, who sends it to the Presbytery/District E&S Committee by November 15.
2. The E&S Committee has a final interview with the candidate and sends **CAN 220: Presbytery/District E&S Committee Summary Report** to the Conference Education and Students Committee.
3. The theological school completes the final report on candidacy and Testamur (the certificate issued upon satisfactory completion of the course of study required by General Council for candidates for ministry) using **CAN 218: Final Theological School Report to Presbytery/District/Conference** and distributes as indicated on the form.
4. The Conference E&S Committee interviews the candidate (sometime between the end of November and the end of February) to assess readiness for ministry. Their recommendation is conveyed in writing to the Conference Executive, the candidate, and the Presbytery/District E&S Committee.
5. The General Council Transfer Committee sends an information package and response form to each candidate for ordered ministry, who is then interviewed by a representative of the Conference Settlement Committee.
6. The General Council Transfer Committee meets before the end of April to determine Conference transfers for settlement.
7. The Conference Settlement Committee meets to match ordinands and commissionands with pastoral charges seeking settlement.
8. The Conference Annual Meeting votes on a motion to ordain or commission to diaconal ministry.
9. Commissioning and ordination take place at a Conference Celebration of Ministry Service.

Appendix: Education Requirements

Refer to *The Manual*, sections 720–732.

Diaconal Ministry

- A university degree.
- or*
- Mature student standing (based on prior education and work experience, plus entrance to an undergraduate program at a recognized university).
 - Four years of theological education based at the Centre for Christian Studies, Winnipeg. This program combines work experience under educational supervision, academic courses, and learning-in-community educational circles.

Native Ministry

- Individuals from Aboriginal congregations may study at a Native Ministry theological school. The five-year program combines study with service in a ministry setting under educational supervision. The Native Ministry Program prepares candidates for Order of Ministry and Designated Lay Ministry.

Ordained Ministry

- A university degree.
 - Campus-based: A two- or three-year program leading to the Master of Divinity at one of the United Church theological colleges.
- or*
- Ministry-based: A five-year Master of Divinity program that combines courses in classic theological disciplines, taken as intensives on campus and through distance education, with an ongoing supervised ministry placement. This program requires the student to have an appointment under educational supervision in a local congregation, so the student must be named a candidate for ordered ministry before the appointment. It is currently being offered at the Atlantic School of Theology (Summer/Distance M.Div.).

The Shorter Course (*The Manual*, section 723)

- The Shorter Course provides an option for a person who does not have a university degree and for whom it would be difficult to consider completing an undergraduate degree followed by a three-year course in theology.
- It consists of a minimum of one year of undergraduate studies (10 semester courses) at a recognized university and three years at a United Church theological school, and leads to ordination.
- It is available to candidates who have been recommended to the Shorter Course by the Conference Interview Board and the Presbytery/District E&S Committee.
- **SC 211: Application for Admission to the Shorter Course** may be completed only by individuals who have been named candidates for ordained ministry.
- **SC 212: Presbytery/District Recommendation re Shorter Course Application** is completed and forwarded to the General Council Office, Human Resources Unit, with **SC 211**.