

Interviewing Inquirers and Candidates for the Order of Ministry

The United Church of Canada



L'Église Unie du Canada



Copyright © 2007, 2009
The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4
1-800-268-3781
416-231-5931
www.united-church.ca

Permission is granted to photocopy this document for United Church work.

Copies of this guide are available from www.united-church.ca/handbooks and from:

Ministry Vocations

The United Church of Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4

Phone: 416-231-7680, ext. 4142
Toll-free: 1-800-268-3781, ext. 4142
Fax: 416-231-3103, Attn. Ministry Vocations
E-mail: minvoc@united-church.ca



This resource and the educational programs of preparation for ministry are financed by the Mission and Service Fund in partnership with local pastoral charges, presbyteries/districts, and Conferences.

Contents

1. Users of This Guide	5
2. Types of Interviews.....	6
3. Purpose of Interviews.....	6
4. Practical Considerations	7
Before the Interview	7
During the Interview	7
After the Interview	8
5. Discerning Suitability for Ministry	9
Qualities for Ministry.....	9
6. Conference Interview Board	10
Documents to Review Ahead of Time.....	10
Suggested Interview Questions	10
7. Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee.....	11
A. Assessing Suitability for Ministry.....	11
B. Assessing Readiness for Ministry-Based Educational Programs and Student Supply Appointments	13
C. Annual Candidacy Interview.....	15
8. Conference Education and Students Committee.....	17
Documents to Review Ahead of Time.....	17
Suggested Interview Questions	17
Suggested Questions for Written Response.....	18

1. Users of This Guide

This guide is recommended to the presbytery/district and Conference committees of the church that are responsible for interviewing inquirers and candidates for the Order of Ministry (ordained and diaconal ministers):

- Conference Interview Boards
- Presbytery/District Education and Students Committees
- Conference Education and Students Committees

A copy of the appropriate sections of this guide should be made available to the interviewee well before the interview takes place.

2. Types of Interviews

Interviews take place at several stages in the candidacy process:

1. The session/church board/council interviews potential inquirers.
2. Conference Interview Boards interview inquirers and candidates.
3. Presbytery/District Education and Students Committees interview inquirers who apply for candidacy.
4. Presbytery/District Education and Students Committees interview candidates annually.
5. Conference Education and Students Committees interview candidates recommended for commissioning and ordination.

3. Purpose of Interviews

In the candidacy process, interviews have six purposes:

1. to enable a person to discover and name her/his gifts for ministry
2. to monitor ongoing learning and formation
3. to assess a person's suitability and fitness for ministry in The United Church of Canada
4. to assess an individual's capacity to engage in a particular program
5. to assess a candidate's readiness to undertake an appointment
6. to determine a candidate's readiness for ordination or commissioning

4. Practical Considerations

Before the Interview

- Make sure this guide is in the hands of the interviewee and the interviewers well before the interview so some thought and preparation can be given to the interview and perhaps relieve some anxiety about it.
- Carefully study any written submissions by the interviewee (e.g., faith statement, forms, résumé, transcripts, internship evaluations, letters) before the interview. Be sure to refer to this written material during the interview, perhaps using it in your opening.
- Ensure the accompanying person has been invited to the interview and understands his/her role as a silent observer. The person who accompanies the interviewee is a member of the committee or court of the church the interviewee is from. That is, for Presbytery/District E&S interviews, the accompanying person is a member of the discernment committee. For Conference-level interviews, the accompanying person is from the Presbytery/District E&S Committee.
- Some committees divide their work so that an interview team conducts the interview. However, any decisions and recommendations should be discussed and voted on by the whole committee before reporting to the courts of the church.
- The interview team should determine before the interview
 - the process of the interview
 - which member of the interview team will begin the interviewThe process should be consistent for all applicants.

During the Interview

- Interviews should take place in a comfortable, relaxed, and friendly atmosphere.
- The content of the interview is **confidential**. However, the recommendations and decisions of the committee are public information to be shared with the appropriate courts of the church. It may be useful for committee members to discuss their understanding of confidentiality and to share that understanding with the interviewee.
- Sexist language and asking sexist questions, questions about marital status, and questions about sexual orientation are inappropriate. There should be no difference between the questions asked of men and those asked of women, or between those who are known to be married and those who are single.
- One member of the interview team should take notes during the interview. These can be used to give feedback during the interview and afterwards as needed, as well as to keep track of the process. The notes should be kept in the interviewee's file and destroyed when her/his process is complete.

After the Interview

- Recommendations and decisions should be communicated verbally to the interviewee as soon as possible after the interview. A letter should be sent after the interview or after a decision has been ratified by the appropriate court of the church. We suggest that this letter contain a brief summary of the interview, some affirmations, any concerns raised, and any decisions.

5. Discerning Suitability for Ministry

The gifts and skills required for ministry personnel are multi-faceted. No one person will possess all the qualities. Committees, however, need to understand and have some consensus on the qualities that are sought by the United Church in its ministry personnel.

The qualities for ministry listed below are guidelines for making decisions about an individual's call to ministry, suitability, and/or readiness for ministry.

The decisions of your committee will, in part, determine the well-being of the church by discerning future leadership for The United Church of Canada.

Qualities for Ministry

As the presbytery/district and Conference are discerning suitability for ministry, they might consider evidence of, or potential for, the following gifts:

- **Deep spiritual life:** Ministry requires a profound sense and experience of the Spirit of God within the individual and ongoing discernment of the Holy.
- **Integrity of self:** The integration of the emotional and spiritual self with acquired knowledge and abilities is the grounding for authentic ministry.
- **Understanding of human behaviour:** Pastoral ministry requires a well-developed capacity for active listening. It also requires a psychological and sociological understanding of human dynamics in both individuals and groups.
- **Scholarship:** The ministry of leadership requires an ability to comprehend and teach theological concepts, the traditions of the church, and biblical scholarship, as well as to nurture the faith in others.
- **Passion for justice:** The commitment to work prophetically for all is the direct result of a robust faith.
- **Capacity for critical reflection:** The ability to be self-critical, to assess situations appropriately, and to reflect on one's actions and their effects on others is important.
- **Capacity to be a lifelong learner:** The openness to admit there is much to be learned and a growing demonstration of the willingness to integrate new ideas, patterns of behaviours, and skills are essential for ministry.
- **Appreciation of administration:** Ministry requires respect for, and knowledge of, church polity and the ability to oversee the institutional health and well-being of a congregation or community ministry. Does the individual understand administration to be part of the call?

6. Conference Interview Board

Documents to Review Ahead of Time

The interview team should read carefully and discuss the following before the interview:

- DIS 201: Action Recognizing an Inquirer
- DIS 202(a): Report and Recommendation of Discernment Committee
- CAN 202(b): Application to Be Received as a Candidate
- CIB 270(a): inquirer's responses to Conference Interview Board Personal Information Form
- CIB 270(c): Conference Interview Board Reference Form

Suggested Interview Questions

- What gifts do you bring to ministry?
- How do you handle stress in your life? Give an example of a stressful situation and how you handled it.
- What gives you joy in life?
- What gives you satisfaction?
- Describe an experience of grief or loss (death, moving) and how you handled it.
- Are you willing and able to receive care from others? Give an example.
- How do you deal with conflict? What is your natural inclination when you are in a conflict situation? Give an example.
- What biblical character, image, or story do you identify with at this point in your faith journey? Why did you choose this character, image, or story?
- How do you nurture your spiritual life? What sustains you in times of difficulty?
- What excites you about ministry? What frightens you?
- How do you organize your time/life? Do you know your limits? Are you able to say "no"?
- What gives you energy? What takes away your energy?
- Give an example of when you were caught up in the needs of others and how you would maintain your own self and needs if faced with that situation again.
- Give us an example of yourself in a one-on-one setting and in a group setting. How are you different? How are you the same?

7. Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee

A. Assessing Suitability for Ministry

Documents to Review Ahead of Time

The Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee should read carefully and discuss the following before the interview:

- DIS 201: Action Recognizing an Inquirer
- DIS 202(a): Report and Recommendation of Discernment Committee
- CAN 202(b): Application to Be Received as a Candidate
- CAN203: Report of Action by Session and Presbytery/District, including the report of the Conference Interview Board

Suggested Interview Questions

Personal Journey

- How has your personal Christian life developed over the years to bring you to this specific time? What is your own Christian story, and how do you sense God's call to ministry in your story?
- How have you been involved in the congregational life of your home church?
- What support (if any) do you get from your family and friends?

Intentional Journey

- What did you learn about yourself in the discernment process?
- What did you learn about ministry in the discernment process?
- What excites you about ministry?
- What makes you apprehensive about ministry?
- What gifts do you believe you bring to ministry?
- What is your vision of ministry for both laity and Order of Ministry?
- Why should the United Church consider you for diaconal/ordained ministry?
- We are all in ministry in the world regardless of our occupation. What difference does becoming a candidate make to your ministry? (Include both benefits and limitations.)

Spiritual Journey

- How does your faith influence your lifestyle?
- How do you nurture and sustain your spiritual life?
- What do you currently believe about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?

Church Requirements

- If you become a candidate and attend theological school, how do you intend to finance your education over the next four years?
- (*For people thinking about ordained ministry:*) The United Church requires an internship between the second and final years of theological study. What do you know about the internship program? How do you hope to meet this requirement? Are you aware of any conditions that would limit your participation in the internship program?
- The United Church requires all members of the Order of Ministry to be transferred and settled into their first appointment. How will you (and your family) be available to the church for this settlement?

Other

- Do you have any questions at this point regarding
 - the candidacy process?
 - internships?
 - theological education?
 - ministry?
 - transfer and settlement?
 - anything else?

If a university academic record is available, it should be reviewed with the inquirer at this time.

B. Assessing Readiness for Ministry-Based Educational Programs and Student Supply Appointments

Goal of Interview for Ministry-Based Programs

Is the candidate ready for appointment to a solo ministry position in a pastoral charge?

The Presbytery Education and Students Committee needs to make this assessment before any appointment takes place. They complete CAN 203(b): Approval of Appointment and forward it to the Pastoral Relations Committee of the appointing presbytery to be attached to MEPS 433 AP: Record of Appointment.

Suggested Areas to Cover and Questions

Independent Learning

Since ministry-based programs combine a pastoral charge appointment with ongoing academic study, the candidate needs to

- be suited to learning independently based on an action–reflection model
- possess adequate computer skills for online courses
- possess good time management skills

Possible Questions

- After a pastoral visit, what questions might you reflect on to assess your ministry?
- What computer skills do you have? How will you get the skills you need?
- What experience have you had of multi-tasking?
- How do you decide how to prioritize things when there is more than one demand on your time?

Worship and Preaching

- biblical knowledge
- theological grounding—knowledge of The United Church of Canada and appreciation of its diversity
- awareness of the effects of platitudes or simplistic answers in liturgy or sermons
- organization and presentation skills
- experience in leading worship
- understanding of the worship concepts of gathering, proclamation, response, and sending out

Possible Questions

- How would you describe your faith journey?
- How do you go about putting a worship service together?
- Where do you start when preparing a sermon? Why?
- How would you describe your beliefs and theology at this time?
- Describe a typical week for a minister in a pastoral charge.

Organization and Administration

- prioritizing
- time management
- delegation
- vision and belief of administration as ministry

Possible Questions

- How will your daily life change when you are in this new position?
- What do you anticipate being part of pastoral administration?
- In what ways can you see administration as a sacred aspect of your ministry?

Pastoral Care

- empathy
- active listening
- assessment of needs
- general knowledge of counselling, mental health, and illness
- knowledge of personal limits and risks to self in caring for others

Possible Questions

- Share with us your experience with death and dying. How will your experience hinder and/or help your pastoral care to the dying and to grieving families?
- *(Create a case study and ask the candidate how she/he would respond. For example:)* A parishioner invites you to his/her home and tells you he/she has been diagnosed with cancer. How would you respond? What would you be careful not to say or do?

C. Annual Candidacy Interview

Documents to Review Ahead of Time

The Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee should read carefully and discuss the following before the interview:

- CAN 205: Candidate Self-Assessment Form
- SME 207: Application for Supervised Ministry Education Experience
- CAN 217: Annual Theological School Report to Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee
- SME 225: Internship Evaluation (if applicable)

Suggested Interview Questions

- Throughout this past year, what have you been doing to prepare for ministry?
- With reference to your school report, what courses challenged and developed your faith? How and why did this happen? Are you having any problems with your academic course load?
- What courses this past year taught you the most about yourself and your style of ministry?
- What are your learning goals for your field placement? How will you accomplish them?
- (*Refer to the person's response to question 5 on CAN 205 about a biblical image/story:*) Please say more about the biblical image/story you chose that captures the essence of your life at this moment.
- Over this past year, how has your sense of call been confirmed or unsettled?
- At this time in your journey, where do you see your need to learn and grow in your preparation for ministry?
- What are you learning about the ethos and doctrine of the United Church? What does it mean for you to be in essential agreement with the Basis of Union?
- What are your plans for responding to the transfer and settlement process?
- How are you handling your finances?
- What is your current understanding of the Trinity, salvation, and grace, and how might this have changed over the past few years?

Where the start of an internship is anticipated in the coming year, the following additional questions are suggested:

- What two or three main learning goals do you hope to work on during this internship?
- What kind of internship are you hoping to do—for example, congregational, alternative, overseas, or student supply?
- In what geographic area are you hoping to be located?
- Are there any limiting conditions that would affect your participation in an internship?

Note: The committee may need to clarify how it will deal with an application for an internship. This may include future consultation with the candidate, the time frame for making the decision, negotiation about learning goals, and so on.

Where an internship has been completed, the following questions are suggested:

- What were the strong points of the internship for you?
- How were you able to meet your learning goals? Were you satisfied?
- What were the points of stress or dissatisfaction for you?
- How has the internship confirmed, or caused you to question, your call to ministry?
- How did you manage your time in the internship? What strengths, weaknesses, and challenges did you discover in your time management?
- How do you feel that this internship prepared you for ministry at this point in your journey? Was it adequate? Are there any major or minor areas of concern?

Where the candidate is in the final year and a recommendation regarding readiness is required, the following questions are suggested:

- Do you feel ready to be settled in a pastoral charge at the end of your studies?
- What excites you about the possibility of being ordained/commissioned?
- What makes you apprehensive about being in the Order of Ministry?
- The United Church requires all members of the Order of Ministry to be transferred and settled into their first appointment. How will you (and your family) be available to the church for this settlement?
- Are you in essential agreement with the Basis of Union? What does “essential agreement” mean to you? What do you like about the Basis of Union, and what can you not accept?
- Are you willing to abide by the polity of the United Church and be subject to the discipline of presbytery/district? What does this mean to you?

8. Conference Education and Students Committee

Documents to Review Ahead of Time

The Conference Education and Students Committee should read carefully and discuss the following before the interview:

- CAN 220: Presbytery/District E&S Committee Summary Report
- the candidate's written response to questions about his/her faith stance and theology as requested by the Conference E&S Committee

Suggested Interview Questions

Call and Commitment

- What is your understanding of call and commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ and how you will live that out in the United Church?
- Why do you want to be an ordained/diaconal minister?
- What gifts for ministry do you bring?

Doctrinal Beliefs

- From your understanding and experience of the United Church's doctrine and beliefs, what can you accept and what does not fit who you are?
- What is the significance of Jesus Christ for you? What is your understanding of God and the Holy Spirit?
- What is your understanding of the place or role of scripture in the life of the church? How do you interpret the scriptures?
- Describe your understanding of the sacraments.
- Describe your understanding of the various expressions of ministry in the United Church.
- Are you facing any critical theological issue?
- If you could throw anything out of the church, what would it be?
- Are you in essential agreement with the Basis of Union and willing to abide by the polity of the United Church?

Practice of Ministry

This section could involve a case study.

- How do you live with the tensions between your personal goals for the church and the reality of a congregation's life and history?
- It is important in ministry to develop a support system. What is your style for doing this?
- How do you offer the gifts and abilities you have?
- What is your sense of the role of minister as pastor, priest, or prophet (or any other models you have adopted)?
- What is your understanding of the mission of the church?

- What is your understanding of the ministry of pastoral care, service, and Christian education?
- How does your understanding of personal and professional boundaries affect your practice of ministry?
- How do your theology and understanding of ministry address concerns in areas such as

sexism	Aboriginal rights	liberation struggles
environment	marriage/sexual ethics	peacemaking
death and dying	employment/unemployment	sexual abuse/harassment
Third World	abortion	aging

Personal Life and Faith

- Where have you found growth in the educational/candidacy process? Frustrations?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- What excites you as you look forward to authorized ministry? What frightens you?
- What sustains or inspires your faith or spiritual life?
- How will the transfer and settlement process affect you (and your family)?
- In what areas will you seek continuing education (lifelong learning)?
- Are you willing to become a member of the pension plan?

Suggested Questions for Written Response

Following is a list of questions used by various Conferences in the past. Choose or adapt the ones your Conference wants to use for the written material from the candidate. The total written response should not exceed six to eight pages.

1. To help the committee members as we prepare to interview you, we request a written statement about your journey toward ordination or commissioning. We appreciate hearing about
 - your call to and concept of ministry
 - your strengths and weaknesses
 - significant people who have challenged you in your life, and why
 - how you have grown theologically and personally in the past few years, providing illustrations where possible
 - how you offer ministry and how you receive ministry
 - anything else that will introduce you to us
2. Write a one-page response to the following examples, drawing on your understanding of scripture and doctrine and your experience:
 - You are parachuted into your first pastoral charge. You can take only three books for your library (assume there are Bibles already). Which three books would you take, and why?
 - An infant died before being baptized. What does this mean to you, the child’s family, and your congregation?

3. Write a one-page reflection on the following: In light of the Exodus story, where do you see the United Church? Where do you see yourself?
4. Discovering theology in life is exciting. Write a one-page evaluation of a recent movie/video, bringing your theology to bear on its theme.
5. At the time of ordination or commissioning, you are asked whether you are in essential agreement with the doctrine of the United Church. Why are you glad that “essential agreement” is what is required? Where does your sense of the scriptures, your experience of faith, or your experience of the church bring you into tension with United Church doctrine?
6. We are all called to ministry, and some are called to ordained or diaconal ministry. What is your theology of ministry? What do you imagine will be at least the starting style of your ordered ministry?
7. Most of us have a love/hate relationship with the church. How do you care for the church? What do you think God is doing in and through the church? Address your remarks to The United Church of Canada and the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.
8. Several documents in your file contain statements you have made over the past few years about your sense of call. Can you give us an update? This could include some personal reflection about the push or pull you may be experiencing as you approach ordination, and any areas of your life where you are particularly working at hearing and answering God’s call.
9. Looking back over your past years of academic preparation for ministry, what surprises particularly stand out about how you have developed?
10. Internships are an opportunity to develop skills and grow in understanding of self and ministry.
 - a. Tell us about your summer/winter internship.
 - b. Tell us one important thing you discovered about yourself as a minister during your internship.
11. In what ways have you been able to give expression to your growing faith through social action?
12. What do you understand as the differences between personal devotions and corporate worship, and how will you live out this understanding?
13.
 - a. How do you see yourself relating to The United Church of Canada?
 - b. How do you see yourself relating to the ecumenical church?
 - c. How do you see yourself relating to people of other faiths?
14. At this point in your preparation for ministry, and knowing your strengths and weaknesses, in what areas of your ministry do you think you will need to rely on lay people and others to help you? In what areas of ministry do you expect you might have difficulty sharing with the laity of your congregation?
15. Given that stress management is important, what are your insights into what causes you stress in ministry? What coping “tools” have you developed so far?

16. All members of the Order of Ministry are subject to the discipline and oversight of The United Church of Canada.
 - a. What does the exercise of this discipline and oversight mean for members of the Order of Ministry and for the church?
 - b. What are your views on being subject to this discipline and oversight?