

Discerning a Call

June 2010



The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

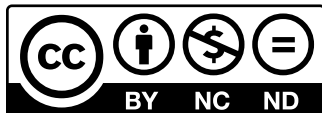
DIS 200/2010

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



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This updated handbook amalgamates and replaces *Discerning a Call to the Order of Ministry* (DIS 200/2009) and *Discernment for Designated Lay Ministry and Congregational Designated Ministry* (DIS 500/2009). It includes policy updates that come into effect with *The Manual, 2010*.

Introduction

We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.
For the sake of the world,
 God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry.
In the church,
 some are called to specific ministries of leadership,
 both lay and ordered;
 some witness to the good news;
 some uphold the art of worship;
 some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering;
 some build up the community of wisdom;
 some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.
To embody God's love in the world,
 the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship
 of all believers.

—“A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of The United Church of Canada” (2006)

As our Song of Faith clearly identifies, all are gifted and called to live out the ministry of Jesus Christ in the world. The ways of doing so are many and varied.

The English word “ministry” has its origin in the Greek word *diakonia* (in Latin, *ministerium*), which is best translated as “service.” All Christians are called to ministry, or service, as the people of God. It is the laying on of hands at baptism that initiates a life of Christian service modelled after Jesus.

As individual gifts are identified, one's call to particular areas of ministry becomes more clearly defined. Through processes of discernment, testing of call, and confirmation of call, the church seeks to nurture and encourage each person's call to service and discipleship. There are specific processes for those who experience God calling them to particular roles as ministry personnel in the church. These processes determine suitability and readiness for such leadership roles. It is the faith community that tests and confirms those who sense themselves called to paid accountable ministry positions in the church.

This guide is designed for individuals, faith communities, and committees seeking to support and help people to understand, clarify, and respond a call to ministry leadership in The United Church of Canada. This includes a call to leadership in congregations, theological institutions, and education centres; with youth; and in outreach ministries, camps, and community ministries.

Considering Call and Vocation

The concept of call and our understanding of call to ministry have often been misunderstood or distorted by the notion that call is reserved for certain people who are “set apart” to provide leadership in pastoral, prophetic, and priestly roles. People who are called are seen as having a particular vocation in the church.

For Christians, call and vocation have a much deeper meaning than simply noting where one works, what one does, and how much one is paid. For the people of God, call and vocation are focused on the call from God for us to live faithfully in who we are and what we do. Vocation for Christians includes both our being and our doing as we respond to God’s call. Our response is expressed in our relationships, our community, our stewardship of God-given gifts, and our daily work.

The United Church of Canada recognizes that God’s call is to the whole church and its participation in God’s mission. Every member is called to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the gospel in church and society.

Four Elements of Call

In considering call and vocation, we are guided by theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, who describes four elements of call.¹

1. The Call to Be a Christian The call to be a Christian is the common calling we all share, the call to discipleship of Jesus Christ—to hearing and doing the Word of God. The letter to the Ephesians (4:1) includes the reminder “to lead a life worthy of the calling [vocation] to which you have been called.” All Christian believers have a vocation to be “co-creators” and stewards of community and all creation, in order to fulfill God’s purposes for humanity. This is the call of *all*.

2. The Call from God to a Specific Leadership Role The call from God to a specific leadership role may come to some in the church. This is the call of *some* from within the call of all. In The United Church of Canada, people called to the Order of Ministry serving in paid, accountable ministry positions are known as ministry personnel.

The inner call to a specific leadership role may persist for a long time. For some, it is felt as a discomfort with current life plans; a struggle to find meaning in life; a nudging, yearning feeling; or a growing awareness of God’s purpose for one’s life. For some, the call may come in a highly dramatic fashion—one or more “mountaintop” experiences or a bolt out of the blue. One thing inward calls have in common is that each is different. Each of us is unique and special in God’s sight, so God approaches us in unique ways.

However, many different voices call to us, so it is necessary to listen for and separate out the voice of God from the voice of society or our own self-interest. A personal spiritual experience that is the call to be a Christian may not be a call to ministry leadership.

1. Adapted from H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956).

3. The Outward or Providential Call Hence, the third call that comes to some is the outward or providential call. This call, which comes from the wisdom, care, and guidance provided by God, recognizes God-given gifts and talents necessary to exercise the office of leadership as affirmed by the faith community. The purpose of the outward call is to examine and confirm the preliminary intuition of the call to a specific leadership role. The people of the faith community who nurture and support those who feel called in their struggle to find meaning, and the committees that interview those who feel called, are all part of this outward call.

Note that the call to a specific leadership role, or the outward call, is not more important than the call to be a Christian. They are different expressions of how God calls all of us to faithful living as we exercise our gifts for the glory of God and the well-being of our world and its inhabitants.

4. The Call of Gifts The call of gifts is the confirmation and invitation of the church to engage in ministry leadership in the church. In The United Church of Canada, presbyteries/districts and Conferences determine suitability and readiness through processes of discernment, education, formation, accompaniment, and examination. The role and function of ministry personnel requires a great deal from a person. As the church is discerning the outward call and the call of gifts, it might consider the 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, ongoing discernment of the Holy, and passion for being part of God's mission in the world.
- *Integrity of self:* Authentic ministry is grounded in the integration of the emotional and spiritual self with acquired knowledge and abilities.
- *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 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.
- *Commitment to and longing 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?

In addition to the above gifts, the potential to develop certain skills is important. Leadership in ministry requires the ability to develop skills in preaching, counselling, outreach, education, leadership, administration, and group dynamics. This list is not meant to identify the "perfect" person or to provide a shopping list of qualities and skills. Clearly, no one person will ever embody all of these qualities perfectly. Nevertheless, it is a helpful guide in thinking about responding to a call to ministry.

Ministry in The United Church of Canada

People may be called to paid accountable ministry at various times in their lives. There is no “right” age. In the United Church, ministry is open to women and men of all races, ages, sexual orientations, gender identities, and ethnic origins.

Ministry personnel—members of the Order of Ministry and appointed designated lay ministers—are accountable to the presbytery/district.

The 40th General Council 2009 approved the following statement on paid accountable ministry:

Statement on Paid Accountable Ministry

The church is a community of believers (*ecclesia*) called into existence by the presence of Jesus Christ and the call to continue Christ’s ministry in the world. Through the Spirit, who enlivens and renews the church, all members are called to discipleship to contribute to Christ’s ministry, the work of the church. The church is about God’s mission in the world; that there will be shalom for God’s creatures and healing for God’s creation. Mission and ministry cannot be separated.

While all members share in Christ’s ministry, the church from its earliest days has recognized that God calls some from within the community through specific gifts to ordered expressions of ministry. These ordered ministries are based in God’s call and therefore serve to remind the community to whom we belong. The capacity to respond to God’s call is tested by the community and is therefore a reminder that these ministries belong to the body of Christ. The United Church of Canada recognizes ordained and diaconal orders of ministry. The church also has recognized the emergence of lay expressions of ministry in local and time-limited contexts, and identifies them as designated lay ministry.

Ordered and designated lay ministries are called to distinctive roles of leadership within the church by virtue of their membership in a presbytery (or district). Through this membership, they are called to exercise governance and leadership, shared with elected elders, in the ministry of the church. Ordered ministers and designated lay ministers in paid accountable ministry positions are paid office holders within The United Church of Canada. While there may be elements similar to employment, the essential nature of the relationship is a covenant with the presbytery, pastoral charge or presbytery recognized ministry, and God.

The various ordered ministries of the church can be expressed in the following ancient expressions given current meaning: sacramental remembrance and enlivening worship (*leitourgia*); being faithful inheritors and communicators of the tradition (*kerygma*); responding to the needs of the community and the world (*diakonia*); nurturing faith, making the wisdom of the ages relevant for today (*didache*); and building up the community of faith as the beloved community of God (*koinonia*). The present social context of the church in Canada calls the church to acknowledge aspects of societal witness at the heart of ordered ministry (*marturia*); in other words, being sent into the midst of society as representatives of Christ and the church, in particular to bring the theological witness of the church into engagement in these contexts. Ordered and designated lay ministries always function within and on behalf of the community and are constituted by the community.

Ministry is prophetic in character, meaning that it enables communities formed by God’s Word and Spirit to resist the powers of evil, and to be living messengers of the kingdom of God that is to come. Ordered and designated lay ministries are called to leadership in forming the prophetic community by God’s Word, in discerning the signs of the times and in presiding over the liturgy.

Ministry is representational in character, meaning that it is on behalf of someone else. It reflects the character of Jesus, who is among us as one who serves. Ordered and designated lay ministries are representative of the community of faith—the body of Christ—in words and action, and of the presbytery, which represents the unity of the church.

Ministry is relational in character in that it is based in the gifts of the Spirit given to build up the body of Christ. Ordered and designated lay ministries belong to the community and are brought into being in relationship with the community. Modelling the ministry of Jesus, ordered and designated lay ministries are also enabling in character, meaning that they are primarily focused on supporting and strengthening the ministry of the members of the community of faith.

Ministry is collaborative in character, in that the church's life is based in partnership. Ordered and designated lay ministries are always exercised in partnership with members of the community and collegially within the presbytery.

Ministry is accountable in character, in that it is exercised on behalf of and therefore with the authority of the faith community. Ordered and designated lay ministries in their various forms begin with a call that is tested by the community and is exercised under the discipline of a presbytery.

Ministry is of the heart and soul as well as of the mind. Spiritual depth, wisdom, sensitivity, and compassion are all attributes that define ministry, and are gifts or charisms of the Spirit that can be found in all effective leaders. Ordered and designated lay ministries require attention to spiritual life, authenticity, integrity, and passion.

Offices of Ministry Leadership

Ordered ministry and designated lay ministry are the offices of ministry leadership appointed within The United Church of Canada. They encompass ordained, commissioned, and designated lay ministries in which members of the church experience and discern a call to ministry, and are tested and authorized by the church to provide accountable leadership in the mission and ministry of the church.

Ordained and diaconal ministers are ordered by the denomination and serve the mission and ministry of the whole church. Preparation for ordered ministry involves a minimum of university theological study and an extensive assessment process. As such, ordered ministry personnel are seen to be those who carry the responsibility of inheritors and communicators of the tradition enacted either in word and sacrament or in education and service. Ordered ministers therefore maintain the historic connection of the United Church to the Church Catholic through the witness to apostolic succession and through the faithful interpretation of the living faith tradition. Ordered ministers in particular serve as the church's resident theologians, called to bring the church's theological heritage into the context of God's mission in the world.

Ordained ministers function in all aspects of ministry and are formally called to word, sacrament and pastoral care. This involves presiding in worship and sacrament, care for the faithful inheritance and communication of the tradition, nurturing and strengthening the beloved community of God, making the wisdom of the ages relevant for today, and being representatives of Christ in the world in seeking justice and wholeness for all of creation.

Diaconal ministers also function in all aspects of ministry and are called to a specific emphasis on education, service, social justice, and pastoral care. Diaconal ministry, rooted in the tradition and history of *diakonia*, encourages a growing faith, speaks truth to power, seeks mutual empowerment, proclaims prophetic hope, nurtures life-giving community, and fosters peaceful, right relationship within the church and the whole of creation.

By virtue of their training and recognition, ordered ministry personnel are representatives of the church, expressed through their lifelong membership in presbytery. Consistent with the historic traditions of the church, ordination and commissioning take place through the laying on of hands and once enacted, ordination or commissioning is not re-enacted. Ordination and commissioning are liturgically enacted at a Conference level.

Their training and recognition by the denomination also affords ordered ministers flexibility in their exercise of ministry leadership, including the possibility of being retained on the roll of ministry without appointment. Because their ordered ministry is to the mission and ministry of The United Church of Canada (within the Holy Catholic Church), their ordination or commissioning can function in any presbytery recognized ministry, or they may be retained on the roll of presbytery while engaging other vocational or personal activities. Ordered ministers, by virtue of their training and accountability, are entrusted to initiate new forms of ministry, including the possibility of non-stipendiary ministries authorized and accountable to presbytery.

Ordered ministries encompass lifelong accountability and function everywhere.

Designated lay ministers are members of the church who exercise gifts for leadership in mission and ministry that emerge from within a local congregation or community ministry. Their ministries are presbytery accountable and serve local communities. Because their ministry emerges out of a local pastoral or ministry need, educational preparation may vary. Designated lay ministers are required to complete an educational program while under appointment, and completion of the program provides eligibility for subsequent appointments. While under appointment, designated lay ministers function in the aspects of ministry leadership relating to their appointment and they are also accorded membership in presbytery. At the end of an appointment, the presbytery and designated lay minister discern together questions of ongoing ministry and presbytery membership. Because designated lay ministry is dependent on appointment, it is celebrated (re-enacted) at each appointment. The appointment of a designated lay minister is liturgically enacted by the presbytery either in a presbytery meeting or in the local ministry.

Designated lay ministry is flexible, responsive to local need and responsive to the gift of the Spirit. Designated lay ministers are appointed to varied leadership in the ministries of the church specific to the work undertaken.

Accountable ministry takes form in The United Church of Canada in ordered and designated lay ministry roles. Ordered and designated lay ministers are called by God to exercise leadership within the church. They respond to the yearning of the church to be faithful in its participation in God's mission in the world. To be faithful and effective in that mission, accountable ministers need to be grounded in their spiritual life; secure in their identity; passionate in their mission; and effective in their organization, directed toward equipping the members of the body for engaging the mission and ministry of Christ's church. Because of the importance of all of these tasks, the church recognizes ordered and designated lay ministers and holds them accountable for the faithful exercise of leadership.

The Order of Ministry

The church has one Order of Ministry in which there are diaconal ministers and ordained ministers.

Diaconal Ministers

In 1926, following church union, women in the Deaconess Order of the United Church worked mainly in social work and health care; ministry to the urban poor, immigrants, and First Nations people; and overseas missions. Following World War II, congregational ministries for deaconesses increased in the areas of Christian education and outreach.

In 1980, deaconesses and certified churchmen became known as diaconal ministers, and diaconal ministry became part of the Order of Ministry as one of two equal, but different, categories of ministry.

Currently, a Conference commissions to the diaconal ministry of education, service, and pastoral care. Since there are fewer diaconal ministers than ordained ministers, this particular ministry often goes unnoticed or unrecognized. It is hoped that informed Discernment Committees will help to raise the profile of this ministry.

Education for diaconal ministry is available through the Centre for Christian Studies (a theological school recognized by the United Church) located in Winnipeg. The centre offers a community-based program consisting of four years of study while serving in a ministry setting.

People preparing for diaconal ministry in an Aboriginal ministry setting may study at the Francis Sandy Theological Centre or the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre. Both Native Ministry programs consist of five years of study while serving in a ministry setting.

Ordained Ministers

In the early decades of the church, ordination meant accepting a primary vocation that excluded all others. It was the lifelong, permanent, and singular focus of one's life. Although the church has grappled with concerns about who may be ordained, the practice of ordination has always been accepted as self-evident. The responsibilities for conducting Sunday services, administering the sacraments, and providing pastoral care and oversight for a pastoral charge were what defined ordained ministry.

The church has rarely defined "ordination" by what it uniquely is; usually, it has defined it by what it is not:

It is not better than other forms of ministry; it is not a marker of greater spirituality; and it is not a replacement for the ministry of the laity.

—"Ministry Together: A Report on Ministry for the 21st Century," 37th General Council (2000)

Currently, Conference ordains to a ministry of word, sacrament, and pastoral care. The focus of the work is preaching and teaching the gospel, administering sacraments and rites of the church, and exercising pastoral care and leadership in a community of faith and the world.

Education for ordained ministry normally consists of an undergraduate program leading to a bachelor's degree, followed by a Master of Divinity degree from a theological school recognized by the United Church.

People preparing for ordained ministry in an Aboriginal ministry setting may study at the Francis Sandy Theological Centre or the Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre. Both Native Ministry programs consist of five years of study while serving in a ministry setting.

The education program for ordained ministry may be a residential campus-based model or a ministry-based program that is completed while serving an appointment as student supply.

For a list of theological schools, refer to Appendix B or see www.united-church.ca/contact/schools. Descriptions of specific programs and degrees offered are best found on the schools' websites because they change from time to time.

Lay Pastoral Ministry

In 1946, the lay supply category was created as a way for pastoral charges that had not been able to call or settle an ordained minister to have leadership until an ordained minister was available. Until 1968, the definition of a lay supply in *The Manual* was “a layman employed temporarily to conduct public worship and to exercise pastoral care on a pastoral charge.”

Over the years a training program for lay supply was developed, and in 1991 the designation “lay supply” was changed to **lay pastoral minister**.

Staff Associates

In the 1970s, congregations began to employ laypeople to work alongside ordained ministers in the areas of Christian education, youth ministry, pastoral visiting, and outreach. With an increase in the number of these employees and uneven practices related to hiring, salaries, and benefits, the demand for some order and consistency grew, leading to the development of policies, salary scales, benefits, and hiring practices for staff associates.

Staff associates work in the areas of education, pastoral care, and outreach ministry. Their appointment is for a specified period, and they always work with a called, settled, or appointed minister in a pastoral charge.

Designated Lay Ministry

In 2003, the 38th General Council established the category of Designated Lay Ministry. In 2006, the 39th General Council approved two categories of paid lay ministry in the United Church: **Designated Lay Ministry (DLM)** and **Congregational Designated Ministry (CDM)**.

Designated Lay Ministers: A designated lay minister (DLM) is a lay member of The United Church appointed by a presbytery to serve in a presbytery accountable ministry. (*The Manual, 2010*, Section 001)

See Appendix A for information about the DLM educational program.

When the individual has completed the training requirements, the presbytery Education and Students Committee may recommend that the DLM be recognized by presbytery. Once recognized by presbytery, a DLM is eligible for appointment by any presbytery to serve in a presbytery vacancy.

Designated lay ministers are appointed to a presbytery vacancy for a specific period of time. They are not eligible for call or settlement. When appointed, the DLM is a member of and accountable to presbytery. A DLM does not retain the DLM status when not appointed.

Designated lay ministers may function in positions of overall leadership in a congregation or in specific areas such as Christian education, pastoral care, and outreach. They may work solo or in team ministry positions. When serving in a presbytery appointment they are considered to be ministry personnel.

Congregational Designated Ministers: A congregational designated minister (CDM) is a baptized lay person employed by a pastoral charge in a specific ministry position designated by the presbytery as accountable to the official board or church board or church council of the pastoral charge. (*The Manual, 2010*, section 001).

Congregational designated ministers may function in a variety of roles, usually with a specific focus in a congregation. A CDM is always employed as part of a ministry team along with one or more presbytery accountable ministers. A CDM is not a member of presbytery by virtue of her or his appointment and does not retain the CDM status when not appointed. A CDM is not considered to be ministry personnel.

The policies governing Designated Lay Ministry and Congregational Designated Ministry are found in *The Manual, 2010*, sections 343 and 345. Relevant procedures are found in the policy and procedures handbooks for DLM and CDM.

The Discernment Committee

What Is Discernment?

One way of describing discernment is “a faithful inquiry into understanding what God is doing and what we are to do in response to God.”² This inquiry is an intentional process of reflection that takes place over a period of time. In fact, discerning God’s call for our lives is lifelong. The Discernment Committee formed jointly by the presbytery/district and congregation provides a circle of caring, reflective people to be part of a faithful inquiry into God’s call to a brother or sister in Christ.

Purpose of the Discernment Committee

The United Church of Canada has consistently affirmed that nurturing and calling forth individuals to specific ministry occurs within the community of faith. The Discernment Committee acts on behalf of the congregation or faith community and the whole church in fulfilling this mandate. The role of the committee is very important and has implications for the ongoing life and witness of the United Church. To fulfill this responsibility takes courage, faith, love, wisdom, insight, energy, and time. The committee members need to know, to nurture, to pray for, and to talk with the person who requests this opportunity for discernment.

This inquiry or discernment time honours the Christian tradition of raising up leaders who have been called by God and by the community of faith. A call to a specific leadership role in the church and a person’s suitability for a particular ministry is discerned in the context of the congregation or faith community setting and the gifts and life situation of the individual.

A call as initiated by God is a combination of choosing and being chosen. To discuss a call to ministry with a faith community is a gift for everyone who participates—the inquirer and the members of a Discernment Committee. We trust that the Spirit moves in the discernment and that the conclusions are the right ones.

The responsibilities of the Discernment Committee are twofold:

- It is responsible to the church for identifying and nurturing those who, by their gifts and call, show promise to be ministry personnel in the United Church. On behalf of the church, the committee is also responsible for redirecting individuals whose call is best fulfilled in other ways.
- It is responsible to the individual who is inquiring into a call. As the individual’s gifts and call are revealed, the Discernment Committee provides encouragement and guidance in determining the best way to respond to God’s call.

A decision to pursue a call to be ministry personnel is as valid as one not to. Too often, a decision not to pursue paid accountable ministry can be interpreted as a failure or a sign of inadequacy. The decision can, however, be a mature and responsible decision to exercise one’s gifts in an appropriate and meaningful way that will strengthen the Body of Christ for participating in God’s mission.

² Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Projects That Matter: Successful Planning and Evaluation for Religious Organizations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2003), p. 89.

When the United Church makes a wrong decision and ordains, commissions, or recognizes a person who does not have the calling and gifts for ministry, the committees of the church do a disservice to the individual and to the whole church. The result may be future pain and conflict in a congregation, a large financial burden, and frustration and anger on the part of the individual. To “speak the truth in love” and to be honest about perceptions and concerns early in the discernment process will help an individual make a decision that, hopefully, will be the right one for both the church and the person.

How the Process Begins: The Inquiry Stage

Individuals who believe they are called by God to a specific ministry in The United Church of Canada may ask their church board, council, or session to enter into an inquiry period. The inquiry stage provides an opportunity for the congregation and the individual to reflect on ministry and call, to discern gifts for specific ministries, to understand the expectations of the church, and to discern together how the individual will respond to God’s call.

The session should meet at its earliest opportunity with the applicant to discuss the request for a Discernment Committee. The session must make a decision regarding the request and inform presbytery accordingly (*The Manual*, s. 022(c)).

The session has the freedom and responsibility to decide whether to set up a Discernment Committee or not. To make an informed decision, the session should become familiar with and discuss the procedures and timeline for the work of a Discernment Committee. A member of the Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee can assist with this task.

The session might ask itself the following questions:

- Has this person been a member of The United Church of Canada for at least 24 months?
- Has this person been in close association with the congregation over the last year or more?
- At this time, does the congregation know the individual well enough to establish a Discernment Committee?
- Would it be advantageous to wait six months to give everyone an opportunity to get to know one another better?
- How will the congregation provide ongoing support, both spiritual and tangible, for the individual whether it decides to proceed with a Discernment Committee or not?

Setting Up the Discernment Committee

If the session decides to enter into discernment with the individual, it must appoint two members of the congregation to the Discernment Committee. At least one must be a member of the church board, council, or session.

Here are other criteria for members of the Discernment Committee:

- They are not family members of the inquirer or people with whom the inquirer is in a relationship.
- They are not ministry personnel serving in the pastoral charge, although ministry personnel are expected to be available for pastoral care and as a resource to the process; the responsibility of discerning a call lies with the congregation and the presbytery/district.

- The members ideally have some of these qualities:
 - secure in their faith and willing to discuss faith issues
 - tolerant and sensitive to other faith perspectives
 - good listeners
 - able to ask questions in an inviting way
 - knowledgeable about the United Church and the role of ministry
 - able to express support and yet have the ability to evaluate and make decisions

In addition:

- The inquirer names a member of the congregation or faith community to the Discernment Committee. This person cannot be a family member of the inquirer or a person with whom the inquirer is in a relationship.
- Once the Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee has been notified of the session's decision on the application, the E&S Committee appoints one or two members of the presbytery to the Discernment Committee.

Discernment Committee Meetings

Initial Training Session

The presbytery/district representatives contact the members of the Discernment Committee to arrange an initial training session for the committee members before meeting with the inquirer.

The training session includes the following:

- the United Church's understanding of a call to be ministry personnel
- a review of this entire handbook
- the role and style of meetings for the Discernment Committee
- the candidacy process for the Order of Ministry
- the differences and similarities between ordained and diaconal ministry in the United Church
- the Designated Lay Ministry application and recognition process
- educational requirements
- church requirements, including forms to be completed
- discussion of appropriate and inappropriate questions
- final report and recommendation to the church board, council, or session
- deciding who will convene and chair the meetings, and who will take notes
- making a date for the first meeting with the inquirer
- reminder of confidentiality of personal information shared at meetings

Subsequent Meetings

Purpose

The meetings of the Discernment Committee are intended to be a time of mutual sharing for the inquirer and other members of the committee. Presbytery representatives are full members and bring with them knowledge of the process and a willingness to enter into discernment with others.

While meetings are not intended to be simply question-and-answer periods for the inquirer, the inquirer is expected to take the initiative to research, gather information, and take time for personal reflection to prepare for discussion on the topics of each meeting. It is hoped that the experience of being on a Discernment Committee will be an opportunity for all to learn and grow in faith while keeping in mind that the focus is on the inquirer and his or her discernment.

It is important for all members, including the inquirer, to leave behind preconceptions of the outcome. The process of discernment requires a willingness to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to be silent, to speak, and to listen to others and to God's wisdom.

Number of Meetings

The 12 months of the inquiry process begin on the date recorded by the Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee on form DIS 201: Action Recognizing an Inquirer by Session and Presbytery/District (www.united-church.ca/forms).

At least six meetings of the committee take place over this period of 12 months. Discernment takes time, so it is not acceptable to complete all six meetings in the first two or three months.

It is possible that, at the end of 12 months and six meetings, the Discernment Committee does not feel ready to make a recommendation to the session. The committee has the freedom and the right to ask that the discernment phase continue for a longer period of time. If this occurs, it is helpful to set a clear time limit rather than leaving the timeline indefinite.

Involving a Spouse, Family Members, and Others

God calls each person in unique and sometimes surprising ways. Still, each of us has relationships with family and others who are affected by our response to God's call. While the discernment process focuses on the inquirer, that person's significant relationships need to be taken into consideration.

While there is no requirement that a spouse, family members, or other significant people be involved in a meeting of the Discernment Committee, it is strongly encouraged, in consultation with the inquirer. Alternatively, a social time could be arranged that includes these significant people. This type of gathering gives all members a chance to get to know the inquirer in a more casual way, and it gives the people in the inquirer's life an opportunity to share their support or apprehensions and ask questions about the discernment process.

Note, however, that family members or friends of the inquirer should not attend all meetings of the committee or meet with the committee when the inquirer is not present.

Location

Meetings need to take place in a quiet, private setting where people feel comfortable talking about their lives and faith. This may mean a room at the church or in a member's home where there will be no interruptions. Discernment is a sacred task, so attention to the meeting location and space is important.

Outline of Meetings

Generally, the meetings begin with a time to check in with one another and share worship—a prayer, a song, or silence. Check-in is not meant to be a discussion time but rather a time for each member to name and perhaps let go of those things in life that might inhibit participating in the meeting, and it is a time for others to listen.

The main part of the meetings is a discussion about particular topics, issues, or questions that will help the inquirer uncover or perhaps discover how she or he will respond to God's call. It is expected that all will learn and grow in faith.

Each meeting might end with a time of reflecting either individually or as a group on how the meeting went and on any insights or learning that has happened. The committee may decide to end each meeting with a particular ritual or prayer. Affirmations and concerns should be shared during regular meetings, not kept until the final meeting. Every member should be aware of the topic for the next meeting in case any preparation or information gathering is needed.

After the meeting, after the inquirer has left, the other committee members might take a few minutes to discuss or summarize how the process is going and what gifts or challenges the inquirer may face in responding to a call.

Meeting 1: Getting Started

This meeting is an opportunity to get to know one another and decide how to proceed.

- Provide an opportunity for people to briefly share information about their daily life, why they agreed to serve on the committee, or their involvement in the congregation.
- Review and discuss the purpose and requirements of the Discernment Committee, including, but not limited to: meaning and process of discernment, role of presbytery/district representatives, role of the inquirer, and involvement of spouse, family members, or others.
- Discuss how the information for forms and the final report will be compiled, the dates for submission, and how copies will be made available for reading before the final meeting.
- Discuss and record group norms—practices and expectations about how the meetings will be conducted, including but not limited to: location of the meetings, time commitment for each meeting, responsibility for refreshments, worship, and confidentiality.
- Schedule the dates for future meetings.
- Discuss the members' understanding of mutual sharing. Remember that all members should have an opportunity to contribute.
- Discuss appropriate and inappropriate questions. Be mindful of questions that reflect a particular bias related to age, gender, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.
- Decide how notes will be kept for the final report and what information should be included in the report.

Meeting 2: Faith and Spirituality

This meeting focuses on sharing experiences, beliefs, and questions about faith and Christian spirituality. Using the meeting outline that was decided when you first met, you might consider these ideas and questions to start your conversation:

- Take a moment of silence and think about those moments in your life when you have felt very close to God and when you felt the absence of God. Share your reflections with the group.
- How are your faith and your relationship with God affected by these moments?
- What do you do to nurture your spiritual life?
- What helps you have a sense of God's presence in your life?

- Is there a particular place or time that draws you nearer to God?
- Reflect on the practice of prayer, reading the Bible, or meditation in your life.
- How have your views or belief in God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit changed during your faith journey?
- Agree to try some different spiritual practices in the time until the next meeting. Keep a journal or some notes about your reflections that you might share with others.

Resources

- “Affirmations of Faith, Creeds...” *Voices United*, pages 918–930
- “A Song of Faith,” www.united-church.ca/beliefs/statements/songfaith
- Abigail Johnson, *Reflecting with God: Connecting Faith and Daily Life in Small Groups* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2004).
- Anne Martin, *Exploring Faith Questions: Journeys of Spirituality and Discovery* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2004).

Meeting 3: Ministry and Call

The focus of this meeting is understanding what ministry means to each person and how each person is called to use his or her God-given gifts to fulfill God’s mission for the world. Refer to “Considering Call and Vocation” on pages 6–7. Some topics and questions to guide the meeting are:

- Discuss your understanding of the call to ministry for the whole people of God.
- Discuss what you understand God is calling you to be and do.
- Discuss how you know and discern God’s call.
- What is the difference between each person’s call to discipleship and service and a call to be ministry personnel in the church?
- What are the challenges of fulfilling God’s call to a specific leadership role in the church?

Resource

Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Leading Lives That Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006).

Meeting 4: Leadership and Lifestyle

The focus of this meeting is to consider the lifestyle and role of a minister. Some areas to discuss are:

- Leadership styles: What are the pros and cons of different styles?
- How is leadership shared in the congregation?
- What are the inquirer’s leadership strengths and challenges?
- What written and unwritten leadership expectations do congregational members have?
- Discuss how the inquirer thinks her or his current lifestyle would need to be changed or adapted.
- Discuss whether the inquirer’s financial situation supports the costs related to education. Has the inquirer reviewed the United Church salary guidelines?
- What energizes the inquirer, and what drains him or her?

- How easy or difficult is it for the inquirer to say “no”?
- If, as Christians, we are called to serve others, how does the inquirer balance serving others with self-care?
- Talk about times the inquirer asked others for help. Why and when did she or he ask for help?
- Discuss expectations about lifestyle standards that affect all Christians regarding finances, stewardship, relationships, honesty, and so on.
- Review the United Church’s Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel: www.united-church.ca/minstaff/pastoral/guidelines.
- Discuss how family or personal health conditions may affect one’s ability to prepare for and serve as ministry personnel.
- The United Church does not tolerate, and seeks to eradicate, any behaviour by its members, lay and Order of Ministry, adherents, volunteers, or employees that constitutes sexual abuse or child abuse. Because of the nature of their work, ministry personnel often face situations of intimacy with others. Discuss issues of healthy boundaries and the responsibility to identify sexual and child abuse situations. For more information, refer to the United Church’s Sexual Abuse Policy and Procedures: www.united-church.ca/minstaff/pastoral/guidelines.

Resource

Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2005).

Meeting 5: Identifying the Future Path

This meeting is an opportunity to focus on what has been discerned to this point in the process and to discuss future options. Possible questions and topics for discussion are:

- What gifts for ministry have been identified?
- How is God calling the inquirer to fulfill a call to ministry? Discuss all forms of paid accountable ministry—diaconal, ordained, designated lay—as well as opportunities to use gifts in the local ministry setting in responding to a call.
- Is the call to a vocation of paid accountable ministry leadership in the church, or is it a call to use personal gifts in local ministry settings while pursuing another vocation or job? Be clear that using one’s gifts in other than paid accountable ministry leadership in the church is equally important and is not considered a failure of the discernment process.
- The Discernment Committee affirms the third element of call (see page 7). If the committee has discerned with the inquirer a call to ministry personnel leadership in the church, the committee will want to have further discussion about evidence of the call of gifts (see page 7). These gifts will be the focus of the presbytery’s work with the inquirer.
- Discuss the educational and church requirements for diaconal, ordained, and designated lay ministers.

Resources

- *The Manual, 2010*
- the process information leaflets on www.united-church.ca/handbooks
- appendixes A and B in this handbook

Note: A preliminary draft of the final report needs to be prepared in advance of the final meeting so it can be discussed with the inquirer at that meeting. It is suggested that the Discernment Committee meet before the final meeting without the inquirer to prepare the report.

Meeting 6: Concluding the Process

This meeting is a time to review the discernment process and prepare for the next steps.

- Take some time to discuss what this journey together has meant for each person.
- Share the final report with the inquirer. The report should be a summary of the conversations at the meetings, so there should be no surprises at this point. Should the inquirer not agree with the report, take care and time to consider the concerns by meeting further with the inquirer or separately as a committee. The presbytery representatives on the committee can provide guidance, or the presbytery can be asked to help resolve the dispute.
- Discuss the report, clarifying what is written and what is intended. Note any editing or other changes to be made. Remember that the final report requires the signatures of all members of the Discernment Committee.
- While it is hoped the committee will be in agreement about the recommendation, if there is no consensus the committee may need to meet again or report the difference of opinion in the report.
- Plan a time of worship and ritual to give thanks for the time together and to mark the end of your gatherings.
- Make arrangements for the report to be presented to the board, session, or council for decision. If the report recommends the Order of Ministry or Designated Lay Ministry, the appropriate application form accompanies the report. Note that the decision of the board, session, or council may not be appealed (*The Manual*, s. 077(b)).
- Name a member of the committee to accompany the inquirer at meetings of the Presbytery/ District Education and Students Committee.

Celebration with Faith Community

When the Discernment Committee process is completed, and regardless of the outcome, acknowledging and celebrating the process during a service of worship is appropriate.

The Discernment Committee should consult with the congregation's ministry personnel about such a service.

Appendix A: Educational Requirements

The following is based on sections 720–732 of *The Manual, 2010*.

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.).

Shorter Course (Ordained Ministry)

- The Shorter Course provides an option for a mature person who does not have a university degree but has substantial life experience 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. This program leads to ordination.
- The Shorter Course is available to candidates who have been recommended to the Shorter Course by the Conference Interview Board and the Presbytery/District E&S Committee. Please refer to *The Manual*, section 723, for requirements.
- An application for the Shorter Course may be completed only by individuals who have been named a candidate for ordered ministry by their presbytery/district.

Designated Lay Ministry

The educational program for Designated Lay Ministry is offered by Calling Lakes Centre. The overall design is a three-year community-based program consisting of three components:

1. **Supervised Ministry Education.** Three years of reflection and integration on the practice of ministry with an educational supervisor and Lay Supervision Team in a presbytery appointment at a Conference-approved learning site. The appointment is at least half-time.
2. **Learning Circles.** Six residential learning circles over three years, each of 10 days' duration, to be held in January and June. The learning circles introduce theory and theology, guide students in reflection on integrating the content with the practice of ministry, and provide a peer setting for deepening formation in lay ministry. A Web-based online community supports preparation for and follow-up after the learning circles. The learning circles are required for all students regardless of previous formal learning or experience.
3. **Complementary Courses.** Complementary courses are chosen to round out the educational program based on the learning needs and particular ministry focus of the student. Three courses, each a semester or equivalent, are taken at theological school, university, or educational centre or other venue, as approved by the Designated Lay Ministry program coordinator and Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee.

For more information, contact the DLM program coordinator at

Calling Lakes Centre

Box 159

Fort Qu'Appelle, SK S0G 1S0

Tel: 306-332-5691

Fax: 306-332-5264

E-mail: office@callinglakes.ca

Web: www.callinglakes.ca

Appendix B: United Church Theological Schools

Atlantic School of Theology
660 Francklyn St.
Halifax, NS B3H 3B5
Tel: 902-423-6939
Website: www.astheology.ns.ca

Centre for Christian Studies—
Education for Diaconal Ministry
Woodsworth House,
60 Maryland St.
Winnipeg, MB R3G 1K7
Tel: 204-783-4490 or 1-866-780-8887
Website: www.ccsonline.ca

Dr. Jessie Saulteaux Resource Centre—
Education for Native Ministry Contexts
P.O. Box 210
Beausejour, MB R0E 0C0
Tel: 204-268-3913
Website: www.mts.net/~drjessie

Emmanuel College
75 Queen's Park Cres., Suite 102
Toronto, ON M5S 1K7
Tel: 416-585-4539
Website: www.emmanuel.utoronto.ca

Francis Sandy Theological Centre—
Education for Native Ministry Contexts
P.O. Box 446
Paris, ON N3L 3T5
Tel: 519-442-7725
Website: www.fstc.ca

Queen's School of Religion
Theological Hall
Queen's University
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6
Tel: 613-533-2110
Website: www.queensu.ca/religion/theology.html

St. Andrew's College
1121 College Dr.
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0W3
Tel: 306-966-8970 or 1-877-644-8970
Website: www.usask.ca/stu/standrews

The United Theological College/
Le Séminaire Uni
3521, rue University
Montréal, QC H3A 2A9
Tel: 514-849-2042 or 1-888-849-2042
Website: www.utc.ca

Vancouver School of Theology
6000 Iona Dr.
Vancouver, BC V6T 1L4
Tel: 604-822-9031 or 1-866-822-9031
Website: www.vst.edu

Appendix C: Forms and Handbooks

Forms are designed to support accountability among parties responsible for ensuring that the policies of The United Church of Canada are followed. Up-to-date forms and handbooks can be found at www.united-church.ca/forms and www.united-church.ca/handbooks. From time to time their numbers or titles change. We encourage you to refer to the website for the most current versions.

Discernment

- DIS 200 Discerning a Call
- DIS 201 Action Recognizing an Inquirer by Session and Presbytery/District
- DIS 202(a) Report and Recommendation of Discernment Committee

Candidacy

- CAN 200 Record Card for Inquirers/Candidates
- CAN 202(b) Application to Be Received as a Candidate for the Order of Ministry
- CAN 203 Actions by Session and Presbytery/District Regarding Inquirers
- CAN 203(b) Approval of Appointment (must be attached to PR 433 AP Appointment Forms)
- CAN 204 Initial Certification to School or Program
- CAN 205 Candidate Self-Assessment Form
- CAN 206 Annual Confirmation of Candidacy Status by Presbytery/District
- CAN 209 Application for Ordination/Commissioning
- CAN 210 Process for Discernment and Candidacy
- CAN 213 Procedures for the Presbytery/District Education and Students Committee
- CAN 217 Annual Theological School Report to Presbytery/District E&S Committee Regarding Candidates for the Order of Ministry
- CAN 218 Final Theological School Report to Presbytery/District/Conference
- CAN 220 Summary Report for Final Interviews for Candidates for the Order of Ministry
- CAN 233 Interviewing Inquirers and Candidates for the Order of Ministry

Designated Lay Ministry

- DLM 500 Presbytery/District Record Card for Designated Lay Ministers
- DLM 502(b) Application for Appointment as a Designated Lay Minister
- DLM 503 Actions by Session and Presbytery/District Regarding Applicants for Designated Lay Ministry
- DLM 503(b) Approval of Appointment for Applicants for Designated Lay Ministry
- DLM 504 Initial Certification to DLM Education Program
- DLM 505 Applicant Self-Assessment Form
- DLM 506 Annual Confirmation of Designated Lay Minister Status by Presbytery/District
- DLM 508 Designated Lay Minister Evaluation Report of Educational Supervision
- DLM 509 Application to Be Recognized as a Designated Lay Minister

Shorter Course

- SC 211 Application for Admission to the Shorter Course
SC 212 Presbytery/District Recommendation re Shorter Course Application

Supervised Ministry Education

- SME 207 Application for Supervised Ministry Education for any of the following
- Eight-month pastoral charge or alternative placement (formerly internships)
 - Canadian/global partner placement
 - Designated Lay Ministry appointment
 - Application to be appointed a student supply for ministry-based education program or for supervised ministry education requirement
- SME 208 Application by a Pastoral Charge to Be Approved as a Supervised Ministry Education Site
- SME 221 Supervised Ministry Education: An Overview
- SME 222 Lay Supervision Team: A Guide
- SME 223 Process for Supervised Ministry Education
- SME 224 Financial Information for Supervised Ministry Education
- SME 225 Internship Evaluation
- SME 226 Learning Together: A Covenanting Resource for Supervised Ministry Education
- SME 227 Procedures for the Conference Committee on Internship and Educational Supervision

Conference Interview Board

- CIB 270(a) Conference Interview Board Personal Information Form
- CIB 270 Procedures for the Conference Interview Board
- CIB 270(c) Conference Interview Board Reference Form

