

Candidacy Pathway: Circle of Accompaniment

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The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

Candidacy Pathway: Circle of Accompaniment (December 2021)



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The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada
3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200
Toronto, ON
Canada M8X 2Y4
1-800-268-3781
www.united-church.ca



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“We are not alone, we live in God’s world.”
A New Creed

About This Resource

The United Church affirms that ministry leadership that is intentionally set apart is essential for the church to participate in God’s hope for the world. The Candidacy Pathway is the process that guides people as they discern their call to the vocation of ministry. It also enables the church to walk with a person as they seek to be ordained, commissioned to diaconal ministry, or recognized as a designated lay minister.

The requirements of the Candidacy Pathway are based on the following seven phases. These phases are not sequential:

- *Calling Forth*: It is the responsibility of the whole church to call forth leaders by encouraging people to open themselves to God’s call and by naming and nurturing gifts for ministry leadership.
- *Identify*: The various requirements of the Candidacy Pathway include identifying an individual’s giftedness and competence for ministry.
- *Accompany*: The church accompanies applicants and candidates by providing support and guidance in a variety of ways that are woven throughout the Candidacy Pathway journey.
- *Equip*: Applicants and candidates are equipped to live out God’s call to ministry leadership.
- *Assess*: The church assesses the promise, suitability, and readiness of applicants and candidates for ministry leadership.
- *Authorize*: The church authorizes candidates as ready for ministry leadership.
- *Celebrate*: The gift of leaders to strengthen the church’s participation in God’s mission is to be celebrated throughout the Candidacy Pathway process.

This resource provides best practices for one aspect of the *Accompany* phase of the Candidacy Pathway. It is intended to be used by members of a Circle of Accompaniment. It includes information to articulate the role of the Circle of Accompaniment and resources for the circle’s task.

The terms “applicant” and “candidate” have been used throughout this handbook to refer to a person in the Candidacy Pathway process.

Accompany: A Phase of the Candidacy Pathway

The Candidacy Pathway consists of seven phases that are woven together to guide the preparation of individuals for ministry leadership.

One phase is *Accompany*: to encourage, support, and nurture those who are preparing for ministry leadership. This phase acknowledges that isolation in ministry is a concern, and that the pathway to ministry is best travelled in the company of others. Both the church and the person preparing for ministry need to be intentional in forming accompanying relationships.

The *Accompany* phase is also grounded in the principle that people in ministry leadership should be able to receive support and be open to the wisdom of others. Establishing networks of support is a necessary skill that contributes to the health and vitality of people in positions of leadership. Therefore, applicants and candidates need to demonstrate an ability to seek support from others in appropriate ways.

The Circle of Accompaniment

A primary way that accompaniment is accomplished during the Candidacy Pathway is through a Circle of Accompaniment.

The person exploring their call to ministry is responsible for identifying people who will support them during their pathway. In considering their own needs, each applicant or candidate will invite people to mentor them and help them in their ongoing discernment.

Purpose and Goals of the Circle of Accompaniment

The purpose of the Circle of Accompaniment is to support the applicant or candidate during their Candidacy Pathway journey. This support focuses on the following:

Navigating Candidacy Pathway Requirements

The Candidacy Pathway journey can be onerous, complex, and demanding—as well as life-giving, rewarding, and transformative. The Circle of Accompaniment can help the applicant or candidate understand what is required of them and suggest whom to contact when questions or struggles arise. When an applicant or candidate is scheduled for an interview with the Candidacy Board, the Circle of Accompaniment can assist their preparation. This may include reviewing sample questions together, providing space for the applicant or candidate to practise their presentation, and checking in on the applicant’s or candidate’s emotional and spiritual preparedness. The circle is also a place to celebrate not only milestones but also every accomplishment along the way.

Attending to Ongoing Discernment

Discernment is a lifelong practice of listening for and attending to the promptings of the Spirit. The task of those in ministry leadership is to continuously discern and to seek to live by the Spirit’s guidance. During the Candidacy Pathway, applicants and candidates discern the next

steps of their learning and growth, the ministry identity that is taking shape within them, and their unfolding spiritual journey and call to ministry.

Discernment takes practice, intention, and skill. The Circle of Accompaniment fosters an environment of listening, of asking open and honest questions, and of seeking to constantly be about the work of discernment.

Encouraging Learning and Growth

Ministry leadership is a demanding vocation that requires commitment to education and formation. The Candidacy Pathway requires significant learning and growth. The Circle of Accompaniment helps the candidate to grow in personal awareness and integrity.

The circle also assists the candidate in developing and honing learning goals based on the pathway's Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership. The candidate is encouraged to share their various Learning Outcome assessments and vocational assessment, and to seek guidance and feedback from the Circle of Accompaniment on the focus of their learning goals each year.

The circle creates space to give the candidate honest and compassionate feedback on their growth and development throughout their journey.

Creating a Safe Space

Authentic reflection and growth require an environment of trust. The Circle of Accompaniment is intended to be a safe space where those preparing for ministry can freely express their struggles, hopes, dreams, and challenges. It is a place where an applicant or a candidate shares their stories, experiences, and unfolding spiritual journey—including their questions and doubts.

The conversations in the circle are confidential in order to foster a sense of freedom and safety, not only for the applicant or candidate but also for all of the circle's members.

Members of the Circle of Accompaniment do not play an evaluative role in the Candidacy Pathway process.

Attending to the Ethical Standards for Ministry Personnel

The United Church has articulated [Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel](#). Members of the Circle of Accompaniment must know this document.

The Candidacy Pathway policy states:

If information comes to the attention of a Circle of Accompaniment that raises serious concerns about a candidate's promise, suitability, fitness, and readiness for service as ministry personnel (refer to the Ethical Standards to identify disqualifying behaviour) then the Circle of Accompaniment has a duty to report the behaviour. The concerns are communicated to the Candidacy Board to address with the candidate. The Circle of

Accompaniment must notify the candidate that concerns are being shared with the Candidacy Board.

The Circle of Accompaniment can seek advice and support from an Office of Vocation Minister regarding this policy.

Format of a Circle of Accompaniment

There is no prescribed format for the Circle of Accompaniment that applies to all applicants and candidates in the Candidacy Pathway. Accomplishing the purpose and goals of the Circle of Accompaniment is the focus; there is flexibility for this process to take different forms.

At the appropriate time on their pathway, the applicant or candidate, along with their Candidacy Board, determines a suitable format for their Circle of Accompaniment. Factors such as their ministry stream and the requirements of their program of study, which may already include some systems of support, should be taken into account.

All applicants and candidates have a Circle of Accompaniment; the following are two possible formats:

Group Format

The Circle of Accompaniment may be a small group of people, perhaps four or five, that the applicant or candidate gathers for regular meetings.

Individual Format

The circle may be made up of individuals who are identified to fill particular supporting roles with whom the applicant or candidate meets one-on-one. Put differently, the circle may be a group of dispersed people who surround the applicant or candidate and accompany them in specific ways. The relationships that form this type of Circle of Accompaniment may include

- a spiritual director—or Elder, if preparing for ministry within the Indigenous context—to focus on ongoing discernment, personal awareness, and identity
- a mentor who is well versed in the requirements of the Candidacy Pathway and of the applicant's or candidate's chosen ministry stream, who helps navigate their journey
- a person who helps shape the applicant's or candidate's learning goals and provides feedback on their ongoing growth and development

Those who are asked to be a part of a Circle of Accompaniment need to know the expectations—whether they will be a member of a group that meets regularly or whether they will meet individually with the candidate to fulfill a particular role.

Gifts and Qualities of Members

Members of the Circle of Accompaniment require certain gifts and qualities to support the circle's goals. They also commit to continuing to hone their skills in these areas in order to provide ongoing support to the applicant or candidate. A member of the circle

- is able to reflect about experiences and engage in theological thinking
- is able to offer feedback that is constructive and non-judgmental
- is capable of bringing a mutual approach to learning
- is committed to ongoing discernment and to their own evolving journey of faith
- is willing to be open and vulnerable
- values lifelong learning—is a passionate learner rather than a “knower”
- pays attention with sensitivity and compassion
- fosters an atmosphere of trust and safety
- respects the freedom of others to make choices for themselves
- remains present through struggles and difficulties
- respects confidentiality

The circle cannot include

- a member of the applicant’s or candidate’s family
- an individual in a close personal relationship
- a person who plays an evaluative role, such as an educator, instructor, or supervisor of the applicant or candidate (*Exception:* If the candidate is in the diaconal stream, the designated lay ministry stream, or a program of study where Supervised Ministry Education is integrated into the requirements, then those in supervisory roles are already fulfilling the purpose of one aspect of the Circle of Accompaniment by providing support to the candidate in relation to their learning goals.)
- a member of a Candidacy Board or the Board of Vocation

Time Commitment

Members are asked to make a long-term commitment to walk with the applicant or candidate during their journey to ministry leadership. Continuity of the circle membership is desirable, but circumstances may prevent a member from staying in the circle until the process is complete. The applicant or candidate may need to seek out new members as their process unfolds.

There is no prescribed meeting schedule. Regardless of the circle’s format, the applicant or candidate will decide and discuss with potential members the time commitment involved. The number of meetings or sessions will be guided by the candidate’s needs, and it may shift over the course of their pathway.

At a minimum, the applicant or candidate should attend to their ongoing discernment once every few months, and discuss learning goals and growth at least twice a year. Support for the pathway requirements is provided as necessary; certainly, before interviews with the Candidacy Board.

Members of the Circle of Accompaniment are also encouraged to regularly hold the applicant or candidate in prayer.

First Meeting

Group Format

In a group format, the first meeting focuses on getting to know one another, orienting members to the circle's purpose and goals, agreeing to norms, and covenanting together. (See Circle of Accompaniment First Meeting Orientation in the Resources section.)

The orientation gathering can be self-led by the circle, or the applicant or candidate might invite a resource person, such as an Office of Vocation Minister, to assist.

Individual Format

If the circle will meet with the applicant or candidate individually, the applicant or candidate begins a formal, intentional relationship with each member. The members should be introduced to this handbook to clarify the role they are committing to. Each individual and the applicant or candidate will seek to covenant together; they can modify the sample covenant provided in the Resources section.

Ongoing Meetings

Group Format

The circle continues to have regular contact with the applicant or candidate throughout the pathway. The applicant or candidate should initiate meetings as needed, following the minimums outlined above. Members of the circle hold the applicant or candidate accountable for scheduling meetings and suggesting topics for discussion.

The focus of meetings may be identified by the applicant or candidate, or agreed upon by the circle as an area of exploration that invites learning and growth.

The circle may meet face to face, hold conference calls, or use online technology such as Skype or Zoom.

A typical meeting might follow this outline:

Welcome

Opening worship (shared on rotation)

Round-the-table check-in

Conversation based on guiding questions or issue that has been identified

Confirm next meeting

Closing prayer or blessing

Individual Format

The applicant or candidate will have different types of meetings or sessions with each individual in their circle depending on the individual's role. These individuals, along with the applicant or candidate, follow an agreed-upon time for regular sessions together.

*The church is grateful to those who take on this important work
of accompanying those who are preparing for ministry leadership
within our beloved denomination.*

Prayer for the Journey

God of the Way,

you are the road we travel,
and the sign we follow;
you are bread for the journey,
and the wine of arrival.

Guide us as we follow in your way,
holding on to each other,
reaching out to your beloved world.

And when we stray,
seek us out and find us,
set our feet on the path again,
and lead us safely home.

In the name of Jesus, our Companion, we pray. Amen.

—Janet Cawley, 1996 (*Voices United* 648), used with permission

Resources

Online Resources

Discernment resources: resources the Circle of Accompaniment can use with the applicant/candidate, available on www.united-church.ca; videos of Call Stories (available on the [United Church of Canada Entering Ministry](#) YouTube playlist) that can be reviewed and discussed together; and worship resources with a focus on [call and vocation](#).

[Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel](#): articulates expectations for ministers; members of the Circle of Accompaniment review and refer to this document.

[Candidacy Pathway: Candidacy Board](#): handbook that provides guidance for assessing candidates, including sample questions that may be asked during an interview; useful for preparing for an interview.

[Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership](#): the basis for assessing the applicant or candidate's learning and growth. The applicant or candidate forms learning goals throughout their pathway based on the Learning Outcomes.

Providing Feedback

The Circle of Accompaniment helps the applicant or candidate to articulate their beliefs, experiences, and sense of call to ministry. It also helps the candidate to identify areas for further learning and the need to develop learning goals. To do so, the circle needs to provide effective and useful feedback.

Feedback is a way of helping someone consider making changes by offering information about how they affect others. It involves naming both positive areas and areas that need more growth.

Feedback is most useful when it is

- **Descriptive:** Be descriptive rather than judgmental. By describing your own reaction, you leave the other person free to use the feedback as they see fit. By avoiding judging language, you reduce the likelihood of a defensive reaction. It is important to use "I" language in offering feedback, thus owning your observations, perceptions, and feelings.

Example: "When you use the word 'girl' when referring to me, I feel put down and not recognized as an adult woman."

- **Specific:** Be specific rather than general.

Example: To tell someone they are "dominating" is not as useful as saying, "Just now when we were deciding the issue, I felt you were not listening to what others said. I felt forced to accept your arguments."

- **Appropriate:** Take into account the needs of the receiver of the feedback. Feedback can be destructive when it serves only the giver's needs. Try to make your feedback supportive and responsible.

Example: "You once shared that you find extemporaneous prayer challenging. I appreciated the effort it took tonight to come to our meeting without a prepared prayer. The prayer you spoke from the heart was sincere and helpful to me."

- **Timely:** Time your feedback carefully. In general, feedback is most useful soon after a given behaviour, if the person is ready to receive it and support is available from others. But unless you are prepared to spend time with the person, it is not helpful to make a quick critical comment immediately following an observed behaviour.

Example: "I find prayers more meaningful if they are offered using inclusive language. Can we set a time to meet as the circle again soon to share more about the importance of language?"

- **Clear:** Ensure you are communicating clearly. One way of doing this is to have the receiver try to rephrase the feedback to check whether it corresponds to what the giver had in mind.

Example: "Let me see if I understand what you are saying. Was it the specific word I used in the prayer that concerned you, or the expression of my theology that you heard?"

- **Accurate:** Check for accuracy. When feedback is given in a group, both the giver and the receiver have an opportunity to check its accuracy with others. Is this person's impression a shared one?

Example: "I would prefer if the candidate could provide the focus for the meeting in advance. What do others think would be helpful?"

Sample Topics

A Circle of Accompaniment might consider discussing topics such as these:

- How do we balance serving others with self-care?
- Think of a time you had to rely on someone else for help. What was that like for you?
- What gifts for ministry have you identified?
- What do you do to nurture your spiritual care?
- Reflect on a recent prayer practice you have engaged in.
- Reflect on a recent biblical passage you have been studying, struggling with, or have found comforting.
- Read A New Creed and/or A Song of Faith. What resonates with you, and why?
- Bring in a favourite hymn and explore its theology.
- How is leadership shared in your community of faith? What are your expectations when it comes to leadership and delegating authority?
- What energizes you? What drains you?
- Name a moment you felt very close to God or very distant from God. How is your faith affected by these moments?
- What contributes to your sense of God's presence in your life?
- How have/are your views changing with respect to your faith and belief in God?
- Do you feel you are exercising your gifts in a way that is life-giving to you? to those around you?

Spiritual Gifts Inventory

A common conversation with those discerning a call to ministry is exploring their gifts for ministry. To those discerning this is often new, and they may have a difficult time finding language to talk about their gifts. One way of helping is to use a spiritual gifts inventory. There are many forms of this tool. Here are links to some resources available online:

[Gifted 2 Serve](#): from Andrew Kulp, a Baptist ministry consultant

[Spiritual Gifts Inventory](#): a United Methodist resource

Qualities of Effective Ministry Personnel

This exercise can be used by the Circle of Accompaniment to talk together about where they see opportunities for growth in the applicant or candidate, where there are affirmations of gifts already evident, and where there is uncertainty as to the qualities or gifts described.

Exploring these qualities together could lead to a fruitful discussion about gifts and skills for ministry as well as pointing the applicant or candidate toward possible learning goals.

Process

Print or copy these pages of qualities, and cut out the squares. Give each member of the circle one set.

Invite participants to review the qualities that are written on each square and identify gifts that the candidate exhibits that complement the qualities, as well as areas for growth and development.

Members of the circle write down the affirmation and growth areas on the back of each square, perhaps selecting at least three squares to focus on.

Spend some time sharing these thoughts verbally with the candidate.

At the end of the process, all of the squares that are written on are given to the applicant or candidate, who can use them for ongoing reflection.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Deep spiritual life</i></p> <p>Ministry requires a profound sense and experience of the Spirit of God within the individual and ongoing discernment of the Holy.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Integrity of self</i></p> <p>The integration of the emotional and spiritual self with acquired knowledge and abilities is the grounding for authentic ministry.</p>
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<p><i>Understanding of human behaviour</i></p> <p>Pastoral ministry requires a well-developed capacity for comprehending and responding to others. It also requires a psychological and sociological understanding of human dynamics in both individuals and groups.</p>	<p><i>Scholarship</i></p> <p>The ministry of leadership requires an ability to comprehend and teach theological concepts, the traditions of the church, and biblical scholarship, as well as an ability to nurture the faith in others.</p>
<p><i>Passion for justice</i></p> <p>The commitment to work prophetically for all is the direct result of a robust faith.</p>	<p><i>Capacity for critical reflection</i></p> <p>The ability to be self-critical, to assess situations appropriately, and to reflect on one's actions and their effects on others is important.</p>
<p><i>Capacity to be a lifelong learner</i></p> <p>The openness to admit that 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.</p>	<p><i>Appreciation of administration</i></p> <p>Ministry requires respect for, and knowledge of, church polity and the ability to oversee the institutional health and well-being of a community of faith.</p> <p>Does the individual understand administration to be part of the call?</p>

Biblical Images for Talking about Call

Those preparing for ministry leadership are consistently asked to share their sense of call. This question often probes for a biblical story to help frame that call. The following stories are examples of how scripture can explore the story and meaning of “a call to ministry.”

(Source: United Church of Christ USA, used with permission.)

The Call of Abram and Sarai *Genesis 12:1–9*

God commands Abram and Sarai to “go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.”

- What were Abram and Sarai asked to leave behind in order to follow God?
- What were they promised?
- How was Abram’s faith expressed during this journey?
- What might you need to leave behind in order to follow where God leads? Who else will be affected?
- How do you understand God’s promise in your life right now?
- How are you expressing your faith on this ongoing journey of discernment?

The Call of Moses *Exodus 3–4*

No exploration of “call” would be complete without considering the call of Moses at the burning bush. This story has many elements to explore: the sacred appearance of the Divine, a clear command from God, and Moses’ struggle to accept not only the call but also that he had the right qualifications for the job.

- How was God present to Moses in this calling?
- What arguments did Moses have for not feeling adequate for answering the call of God?
- How did God address Moses’ concerns?
- What does Moses come to know about God and God’s relationship with himself and with the Israelite people in this encounter?
- What are your own concerns about your ability to answer God’s call in your life? These would be good to bring to God in prayer, where you can listen for God’s answer.
- What do you know about God’s identity—God’s presence in your life and the life of God’s people? How have you learned this?

Esther’s Call *Book of Esther, especially 4:13–17*

In the Book of Esther, we have the opportunity to explore another type of call. Esther, a Jew, finds herself in a position of power and influence as queen in the court of the Persian emperor. When the Jewish people are threatened, her uncle asks her to consider whether God has raised her to a position of power “for such a time as this.”

When you have time, read Esther’s entire story. Pay special attention to the fourth chapter. Then consider:

- What power did Esther have, and what power did she not have?
- What risk did Esther take to try to rescue her people?
- How did she discern her course of action?
- Consider times in your own life when you might have been challenged to use what you have been given for the benefit of others who were being oppressed. How did you respond?
- Who has asked you to consider whether you, too, have been given gifts “for such a time as this”?

The Call of Samuel *1 Samuel 3:1–10*

This story of call reminds us that we sometimes need help distinguishing the voice of God from other voices. The story also reminds us that God calls not only adults but also youth. It is young Samuel’s mentor, Eli, who first recognizes that God is calling the boy and helps him to properly respond. After reading the story consider the following questions:

- How does Eli discern that God is calling Samuel?
- What do you suppose it means that “the word of the Lord was rare in those days; visions were not widespread”?
- Who have been/are the mentors in your life who help you to discern God’s voice?
- How do you listen for God?
- How do you know if the sense of call you feel is God or something else (like your own ego, or what someone else thinks you ought to do with your life, for instance)?

Matthias’ Call *Acts 1:15–26*

Sometimes in the Bible a person is called by the community to serve as a leader. This is the case for Matthias. Read the story of his call in Acts and consider these questions:

- What need prompted Matthias’ call?
- What were his qualifications?
- How was he chosen?
- Has the community called you? In what ways?
- How is the need for “witnesses” to Christ a compelling reason to call people to ministry?

Mary’s Encounter with an Angel *Luke 1:26–38 (39–56)*

It’s not every day that a person receives a visit from an angel! Yet, Luke tells us that is just what happened to Mary. The announcement of her “call” to be the mother of Jesus awakens all sorts of feelings and responses in this young woman, and her assent changes her life forever.

- How did Mary respond to the angel’s announcement?
- The angel told her, “Do not be afraid.” Is fear a part of the call experience? What do you fear about your own emerging sense of call?
- What risks did Mary take to say “yes” to God?
- What risks might you need to take to say “yes” to God?

- In the Magnificat (vs. 46–56), Mary declares that God’s coming turns everything upside down. How is this a message you have experienced? How do you proclaim this message?

The Call of the Disciples *Matthew 4:18–22; Mark 1:16–20; Luke 5:1–11; John 1:35–51*

All four gospels tell the story of Jesus’ call to the first disciples. Three of the accounts are fairly similar. John’s account looks at the event from a different perspective. Read all four accounts, and then consider the following questions:

- How do those called by Jesus respond?
- What differences do you notice among the four accounts?
- What do you suppose Jesus meant when he told the fishermen they would now be fishing for people?
- To follow Jesus, what might change in your professional or personal life?
- Have you ever felt like Peter in Luke’s account, where his response is to ask Jesus to “go away”?

The Call of Paul *Acts 9:1–9 (10–19)*

The story of the conversion of Saul (Paul) is a powerful and evocative story of call. The writer of Acts presents it as a key turning point in the history of the early church. As you read this story, consider these questions:

- What was it that enabled Saul to turn around?
- Might the writer of Acts want us to understand Paul’s physical blindness (vs. 8–9) as a symbol of something else? If so, what?
- How does God call Ananias?
- Both Saul and Ananias experience their encounter with God as a radical disconnection from what they had previously believed to be true. How do they deal with this?
- How has God’s call in your life caused you to rethink what you thought you knew to be true?
- Has God spoken to you through dreams? If so, how? How have you heard God’s voice/discerned God’s desire for your life?

Mary’s Choice *Luke 10:38–42*

Although not a classic story of “call,” this scene between Jesus and the sisters, Mary and Martha, contains many elements of call: discerning God’s desire, making choices, and listening to Jesus even in the face of opposition. As you read the story, imagine yourself as one of the characters.

- Whom do you identify with? Why?
- What prevents you from sitting at Jesus’ feet and listening to him?
- What would it feel like to have permission and support to do just that?
- How do you balance the “Martha” and “Mary” in you as you seek to discern your call to ministry?

Summary Reflection

Hopefully this resource has offered some ways to help you on your journey toward discerning a call to ministry. Is God calling you to ministry? Perhaps. You must listen like Samuel for God's voice. You must be open like Mary to the risks and possibilities of following God's desire for you. You must listen like Matthias for the voice of the community as well. Whether your journey leads to authorized ministry or to a deeper understanding of your discipleship as a Christian, it is important to remember that God is calling you!

Ministry Streams in The United Church of Canada

The Circle of Accompaniment can review together the *Statement on Ministry* found on the [United Church website](#) and discuss the applicant's or candidate's deepening or shifting sense of call to a particular stream of ministry.

Here is a summary of the three streams of ministry in The United Church of Canada as articulated in the *Statement on Ministry*:

Ordained ministers serve in all aspects of ministry and are formally called to word, sacrament, and pastoral care. This involves presiding in worship and sacrament, 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 serve in all aspects of ministry and are formally called to 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, fosters peaceful, right relationship within the church and the whole of creation....” (Quoted from [Diakonia of The United Church of Canada](#) Statement of Vision)

Designated lay ministers are members of the church called to exercise gifts for leadership in mission and ministry that respond to a need within a local congregation or community ministry.... Designated lay ministers function in various aspects of ministry leadership relating to their appointment.... Because designated lay ministry is dependent on appointment, it is celebrated (re-enacted) at each appointment.

Questions for Reflection with the Applicant or Candidate

- Why do you feel called to the ministry stream you have chosen?
- What do you appreciate about the streams of ministry that you do not feel called to?
- How is your ministry identity being formed by the stream you feel called to?

Circle of Accompaniment First Meeting Orientation

Members should come prepared having read the Accompany section of this handbook, the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice, and other information that may be identified.

Opening

Welcome and briefly get to know one another. Begin with prayer.

Role of the Circle of Accompaniment

Review the purpose and goals of the Circle of Accompaniment. Invite questions from those gathered. If necessary, provide a brief explanation of the phases and other requirements of the Candidacy Pathway.

Norms for the Circle of Accompaniment and Covenanting Together

Invite everyone to reflect during a moment of silence on an experience they had of feeling completely safe, able to be authentic, and vulnerable in a group setting. What qualities of the group made this possible? Invite individuals to silently distill their reflection into one word or short phrase that describes the qualities they experienced. Share these qualities aloud, and record them together.

Once everyone has had a chance to share, discuss whether these qualities could form the basis for the norms of your group. Are any norms missing? Add them. Finalize a list of norms, and agree to a group covenant.

Sharing Story and Faith

Invite everyone to share a brief reflection on the following: Describe a moment in your life when you had a sense, an intuition, or a clear message that God was calling you.

Hearing from the Applicant or Candidate

The applicant or candidate shares their story of call and outlines the plans they have so far for how they will fulfill the requirements for preparing for ministry.

Organizing for the Work

Discuss how often you will meet, how gatherings will be prompted, shared responsibilities, how conversations will be framed, and so on.

Next Steps

What support does the applicant or candidate need from the circle in the near future? When will you meet next?

Closing Prayer or Blessing

Sample Circle of Accompaniment Covenant

The Circle of Accompaniment is a vital component of the Candidacy Pathway in which a person preparing for ministry leadership and those the person chooses to support them make a commitment to journey together. This covenant affirms our commitment to the roles and responsibilities of the circle.

Section for Applicant/Candidate:

- I _____ undertake with God’s help to
- take responsibility for gathering the Circle of Accompaniment as I discern my call to ministry, seek conversation that will inspire growth, and look to others for encouragement and support
 - build trust with members of the Circle of Accompaniment
 - be honest and open in sharing my journey
 - value the gifts of those who walk with me as members of the Circle of Accompaniment
 - call myself and others to honour the agreed-upon norms for the Circle
 - engage the Circle of Accompaniment as a safe place that holds confidentiality, with the exception of behaviour that grievously breaches the Ethical Standards for ministry personnel

Signature

Date

Section for Members of the Circle:

- I _____ undertake with God’s help to
- be a member of the circle for the agreed-upon period of time, recognizing that this is a long-term commitment
 - call myself and others to honour the agreed-upon norms for the circle
 - be intentional in accompanying _____ in discernment and growth
 - offer encouragement and support, recognizing that questioning and challenging are also part of providing support
 - hold _____ in prayer and care
 - engage the Circle of Accompaniment as a safe place that holds confidentiality, with the exception of behaviour that grievously breaches the Ethical Standards for ministry personnel

Signature

Signature

Date

Signature