

Mentors to Ministers in the Admission Process

What Is a Mentor?

A mentor in the United Church context is someone who engages in an ongoing relationship with a newly appointed minister who is in the process of being admitted to the Order of Ministry of The United Church of Canada.

The mentoring process offers an opportunity for shared reflection on ministerial identity in The United Church of Canada on issues in ministry and the particular significance for people who are new to ministry in the United Church. It is hoped that this process will be of value to both people involved—the Admission Minister and the mentor—and that the opportunities for learning will be mutual.

From *Admission to the Order of Ministry Policy and Procedures* (www.united-church.ca/handbooks):

Context of Learning

When the minister has secured employment in the United Church, the following takes place:

- **The Office of Vocation assigns a mentor.**

The relationship with a mentor creates a safe place for reflection and growth. The mentor provides support to help the minister learn based on the learning outcomes that are best developed through the in-ministry experience?

The mentor is a guiding and supportive role, not an evaluator of the minister. The mentor does not report to the Admission Board. For this reason, the mentor cannot be the same person as the pastoral charge supervisor.

A mentor should be compassionate and committed. They should have the qualities of an educator and the skills to communicate effectively. They must have an understanding of intercultural ministry. Those appointed as mentors must have experience in both ministry and leadership in the United Church.

Responsibilities

1. Role Model

There are different streams of ordered ministry in the United Church, and there is also variety in the communities of faith in which ministry personnel live out their vocation. The hope is that the mentor will be a model of a United Church minister who is, or has been, effective in

engaging the community of faith in God’s mission, adheres to the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel*, complies with the required trainings, and respects the variety of expressions of ministry present in our United Church.

2. Reflector

Use the tool of intentional reflection to assist the Admission Minister in identifying their learnings from experiences

- **in their community of faith (with the governing body, committees, in worship services, pastoral care, and outreach):**
 - The experiences of the governing body of the community of faith may be a distinct point of learning, as governance models vary within the denomination, vary from the minister’s own denomination, and vary from the minister’s country of origin (where applicable). In some instances, there may need to be reflection on the shift to being paid accountable staff of the governing body as opposed to being appointed to the community of faith through an episcopal or hierarchical structure.
 - As the Admission Minister adjusts to leading worship in a new faith setting, possibly with a different theological slant, interesting points of reflection, theological wrestlings, and learning may emerge. Attention may need to be given to struggles around the use of gendered language, time constraints on worship services, and variations in levels of active participation by congregants in a worship service. The latter variations range from meditative reflection as the ministry personnel leads through to having strong physical involvement and responses in and during the time of prayers, music, and singing, or as responses are elicited during the sermon.
 - The Admission Minister may want to reflect on the expectations around pastoral care, regular visitation, and crisis response. Expectations about church building and planting and how mission is done may also be distinctly different from the denomination of origin. How will the Admission Minister shift the local congregational culture to be more open to church growth and welcome?
- **in the community in which they live:**
 - The need for reflection on experiences around the community where the Admission Minister lives will vary depending on the minister’s point of origin. If the minister is applying from a denomination in Canada, there may be fewer challenges in adapting to the wider community, and the minister may already be familiar with the Canadian context.
 - Admission Ministers who move to Canada from the United States or England will be adjust to the Canadian lifestyle, which may be similar to what they are moving from, with some unique features. Those moving from other European countries will have the added layer of language and accents to contend with.
 - Those who move to Canada from Africa, the Caribbean, South or Central America, or Asian countries tend to make more significant adjustments. They have the already identified challenges of being in a new country, with a different lifestyle, and sometimes using a language that is their second, third, or even fourth. Added to all this, they must become familiar with new foods, new weather patterns, and

- differences in the cultural contexts in which they serve. All of this will be intensified if they move to communities where they are a visible minority, whereas in their country of origin they may have been in the majority.
- Experiences in the wider community with people who hold varying beliefs about the role of immigrants and the value and dignity of all races and cultures, may provide important points for reflection and learning.

3. Sounding Board

Where it is helpful, the mentor provides a sounding board for ideas and action plans that the Admission Minister may be considering. These plans may be related to family, their community of faith, or the wider community.

4. Encourager

The mentor is expected to encourage the Admission Minister to move out of their comfort zone when it is appropriate, to recognize when it is a good time to retreat from a potentially dangerous situation, and when it may be a good time to regroup and reassess a situation.

5. Spiritual Support

The mentor and the Admission Minister may agree to share specific spiritual practices, which can be a valuable point of learning for both parties.

6. Cheerleader

The mentor may wish to celebrate with the Admission Minister when milestones have been achieved, and these will be many: completing one or more of the mandatory trainings or specified courses for admission, successfully negotiating the first snowfall, navigating another immigration challenge, or successfully traversing the complicated world of governing bodies and hierarchies in the community of faith. These cheerleading moments may run the gamut from the very simple (but meaningful) verbal expression, a written card, a celebratory coffee, or another mutually agreed celebration.

Appointment and Accountability

The mentor is appointed by the Office of Vocation, in consultation with the Regional Council Minister, and where it is possible and practical, in consultation with the Admission Minister. The mentor and the Admission Minister become accountable to each other, with no expectation of reporting to the Office of Vocation, the Regional Council Minister, or the governing body of the community of faith. The discourse between the Admission Minister and the mentor is considered confidential, except when there needs to be disclosure where there abuse, self-harm, or harm to others is suspected or being contemplated.

Meeting Times and Methods

Ideally, the Admission Minister and mentor meet once a month. The nature and length of the meeting depend on what needs to be addressed at the particular time. Meetings can occur in

person (ideally) or using technology: Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp, telephone calls, texts, or e-mail.

Length of Commitment

The mentorship should continue throughout the time it takes the Admission Minister to complete the process of admission and is formally recognized as a member of the Order of Ministry in The United Church of Canada.

Resources

Thank you for agreeing to be a mentor to an Admission Minister. You are the greatest resource the Admission Minister will have. The wealth of information you have gained in your life's journey forms the bedrock of this experience. It is hoped that the following materials may also be helpful to you:

Admission to the Order of Ministry Policy and Procedures: www.united-church.ca/handbooks

Immigration matters: www.canada.ca/en/services/immigration-citizenship.html

Work permits: www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/work-canada/extend-permit.html