

**Guidelines for the Ordination of Licensed Ministers**  
**Living Waters Association, Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ**

Approved by the Church and Ministry Committee **on December 8, 2012** for submission to the Council of the Living Waters Association. This document is based on the draft submitted to the Church and Ministry Committee on November 9, 2012 by:

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The Council of the Living Waters Association adopted these guidelines at its meeting on January 12, 2013.

**Statement on Ministry and Multiple Paths**

“The United Church of Christ continues to evolve. It is committed to becoming a multi-racial, multi-cultural, open and affirming, accessible to all, and just peace church. It seeks and welcomes an increasing diversity of persons and communities. The world in which the United Church of Christ lives and serves is also changing creating new opportunities and challenges. In addition, population shifts, geographic ethos and economic factors affect the mission and leadership needs of our local congregations. Thus, the church’s understandings of and needs for ministry are not only being re-formed but expanded.

“The diversities within the Church challenge the assumption that the same paths and preparation for ministry are appropriate for all.

“The 25<sup>th</sup> General Synod invites all in the United Church of Christ to join in repentance of those actions and practices which have prevented the leadership of some of its members from being effectively recognized, encouraged and authorized.

“Ministry is grounded in the mission of God. This priority must be clear. The Church exists not to fulfill its own mission, but rather to fulfill the mission of God. Otherwise, the Church can lose its way by focusing on itself, procedures, requirements, or prerequisites for authorization, forgetting the base out of which ministry emerges.”<sup>1</sup>

In response to the call of the 25<sup>th</sup> General Synod, we in the Living Waters Association commit to “Develop, support and engage in multiple patterns of preparation for authorized ministers, recognizing that preparation must be appropriate for the individual, the particular faith community, the United Church of Christ, and the ministry for which authorization is required.”<sup>2</sup>

This must be rooted within an on-going process of educating all of our members in their roles as ministers and the part they play within the mission of the church. This includes preparation of all members with attention to the history, theology, polity, and covenantal relationships of the

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<sup>1</sup> “Ministry Issues: Forming and Preparing Leaders for God’s Church,” Passed by General Synod 25 in 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

United Church of Christ. This must also be rooted in covenantal relationships with all authorized ministers that encourage lifelong learning, continuing education, and accountability.

Of direct concern is the role of licensed ministers and how licensed ministers might proceed to ordained ministerial standing outside of the seminary path, should they seek it.

### **Paths to Ordination for Licensed Ministers**

In all matters pertaining to the process of seeking and attaining ordination for licensed ministers we defer to the Manual on Ministry where there is ambiguity.

#### *A. Prerequisites*

1. The normal expectation is that a licensed minister will have had at least six years of experience as a licensed minister before seeking ordination. The Church and Ministry Committee will closely examine the nature and depth of the experience of the licensed minister. Accumulation of six years experience is not a guarantee that the Church and Ministry Committee and the Association will determine that the person is ready to begin the ordination process. In rare occasions, the Church and Ministry Committee **may** accept fewer years of experience or some years of experience in a capacity other than as a licensed minister.

2. The licensed minister **shall** provide a statement explaining why the minister has decided not to pursue a traditional seminary education. The Church and Ministry Committee **shall** determine the sufficiency of the explanation.

#### *B. Entering Into Discernment*

1. A currently licensed minister who desires to seek ordained ministerial standing **shall** enter into a period of discernment and during this period is known as a “Member in Discernment.” Typically the licensed minister will fit into one of three categories:
  - a. *The minister is called and prepared currently for ordination.* The Church and Ministry Committee **shall** examine the minister and decide whether to recommend the minister for ordination by the Association.
  - b. *The minister is still discerning call or further preparation is required.* The licensed minister enters into a period of preparation.
  - c. *The minister is called and gifted to remain and faithfully serve as a licensed minister.*
2. These guidelines assume that a Licensed Minister within the Living Waters Association is in full compliance with the guidelines and requirements for Licensed Ministry as approved by the Association and detailed in “Procedures for Licensed Ministry,” approved October 1, 2010.
3. The Church and Ministry Committee **shall** interview the licensed minister to decide whether to join with the minister and the local church in a covenant of discernment. The

discernment process determines what steps should be taken toward ordination. This process typically involves:

- Extended time;
  - Prayerful reflection;
  - Acquisition and refinement of relevant knowledge and skills (Preparation); and
  - Decision (including, for some, the decision not to continue).
4. For those who decide to remain as a licensed minister and who have served in that capacity for six years, the Church and Ministry Committee **may** consider extending the time of licensure beyond the standard annual review.

### *C. Preparation*

1. A path to ordination recognizes that preparation **must** be appropriate for:
  - The individual;
  - The particular faith community;
  - The United Church of Christ; and
  - The ministry for which authorization is requested.
2. The Church and Ministry Committee **shall** also:
  - a. Consult with our ecumenical partners to discern ways we can work together to prepare faithful and effective leaders based upon our differing modes of authorization;
  - b. Include members of the candidate's faith community in the decision-making;
  - c. Take time and effort to educate the Church and Ministry Committee concerning the faith community's traditions and needs;
  - d. Be aware of differing practices of discerning leadership based upon racial and ethnic difference;
  - e. Honor the gifts and needs of persons with disabilities, educating the Church and Ministry Committee, and adapting our requirements as necessary; and
  - f. Take into account life experience, ministerial experience, and academic or vocational training for non-ministry professions.
3. Preparation **must** serve unity and mission in the wider Church and **must** meet the needs in local settings. Preparation **may** include:
  - Intellectual and academic training;
  - Spiritual growth;
  - Emotional and psychological development;
  - Training and skills acquisition; and
  - Identity formation.
4. Methods of preparation **may** include:
  - Academic coursework;
  - Distance learning;
  - Seminars;
  - Education in a lay ministry program such as ELM;

- Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE); and
  - Mentoring.
5. The Church and Ministry Committee, the local church, and the Member in Discernment **shall** enter into a mutual covenant offering support, counsel, and direction during this time of decision-making and preparation.

#### *D. Examination*

1. The Church and Ministry Committee, in accordance with the Manual on Ministry, the existing policies of the Living Waters Association, and the path of discernment and preparation followed, **shall** examine the Member in Discernment with respect to:
  - Christian faith;
  - Character;
  - Ability to do the work expected;
  - Fulfillment of preparation process;
  - Knowledge of the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ; and
  - Candidate's "Marks of Ministry":
    - Spiritual Foundation for Ministry;
    - UCC Identity for Ministry;
    - Personal and Professional Formation for Ministry;
    - General Knowledge and Skills; and
    - Knowledge and Skills Specific to Authorized Ministry.<sup>3</sup>
2. Before the Examination, the Church and Ministry Committee **shall** review the contents of the candidate's ministerial file on record with the Association Registrar.
3. Before the Examination, the Member in Discernment **shall** provide the Church and Ministry Committee with **at least** the following:
  - a. Certification of educational attainment including, but not limited to:
    - Bachelor's degree or the equivalent;
    - Education and training for ministry as evidenced by:
      - Completion of an education for lay ministry program such as ELM;
      - Completion of a program similar to the ELM program that has been approved by the Church and Ministry Committee of the Living Waters Association;
      - Education equivalent to a Masters of Divinity degree; or
      - Documentation of regular continuing education received during the candidate's tenure as a Licensed Minister;<sup>4</sup>
  - b. Letters of reference as specified by the Church and Ministry Committee;<sup>5</sup> and

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<sup>3</sup> The UCC publishes detailed criteria for "The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ."

<sup>4</sup> This does not require a minimum educational requirement for ordination, but does require the disclosure of the education that the Member in Discernment has received.

- c. A brief statement (generally one page or fewer) from the candidate about the candidate's ministry in the local faith community to which he or she has been licensed
4. Before the Examination, the Church and Ministry Committee **may** also request the Member in Discernment to provide additional items, including but not limited to:
  - a. Documentation of ability, skills, knowledge, and training for ordained ministry such as:
    - Career assessment data;
    - Fieldwork;
    - Internships; and
    - Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) reports and evaluations
  - b. Psychological evaluation; and
  - c. A sermon.
5. Before the Examination, the Church and Ministry **shall** also obtain:
  - a. Evaluation by a local ministry setting (generally a local church) that to the extent possible includes:
    - Worship leadership;
    - Preaching;
    - Pastoral care; and
    - Church administration; and
  - b. Letter requesting ordination from the local faith community to which the Member in Discernment is licensed.
6. The Examination **shall** include:
  - a. Personal Ordination Interview;
  - b. Ordination paper, which at minimum describes the candidate's:
    - Theological perspective and grasp of the historic Christian faith;
    - Understanding of the history, theological roots, polity, and practice of the United Church of Christ;
    - Understanding of the sacraments of the United Church of Christ; and
    - Faith pilgrimage and understanding of ministry, especially the ministry to which the candidate feels called.
  - c. Verification of membership and participation in a local church of the United Church of Christ.

#### *E. Completing the Ordination*

1. Upon completion of the Examination, the Church and Ministry Committee **shall** recommend whether the Association should call an Ecclesiastical Council.

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<sup>5</sup> Typical references include: a UCC ordained minister *other* than the candidate's supervisor such as a former supervisor; the candidate's current supervisor; a person involved in the candidate's theological education; and a member of the church or constituency that the candidate serves.

2. After the Member in Discernment has been approved for ordination by an Ecclesiastical Council, the normal procedures for ordination **shall** be followed.