

Policies and Criteria for the Ordering Of Ministry in the Great River Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Regional Committee on the Ministry (RCOM) of the Great River Region (GRR) of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) works with candidates for ministry and their sponsoring congregations or bodies to see that those who feel called into ministry are prepared and qualified to serve and have the skills, education and experience to equip them for relevant, fruitful ministry. RCOM works in accordance with the Policies and Criteria for the Order of Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). RCOM acts on behalf of the GRR in matters pertaining to the care and nurture of ministerial candidates and certification for ordination, commissioning, and ministerial standing. This process is the joint responsibility of the candidate, congregation, and region, and therefore requires a willingness of all three partners to invest in the process.

I. Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

A. The Order of Ministry

As Disciples, we affirm that all persons are called to ministry, whether Lay, Commissioned, or Ordained. All varieties of Lay Ministry offices within congregations play an enormously valuable role in the life of the local church. *Lay Ministry offices do not need to seek official certification through RCOM or the GRR.* The two categories of the Order of Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) which are officially certified by the Region are Commissioned Ministers and Ordained Ministers. While some ministries need denominational certification and recognition in order to execute certain functions (i.e. in order to perform weddings), as a tradition which affirms “the priesthood of all believers,” Disciples have always understood that we are all accountable to one another in our shared ministry with Christ, such that Lay Ministers are every bit as essential to the life and work of congregations as any Commissioned or Ordained Minister.

B. Personal Qualifications for the Order of Ministry

A Candidate for Commissioned or Ordained Ministry must be a participating member in a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation or body. In addition, the church expects the women and men who seek to pursue a call to ministry to demonstrate:

1. Faith in Christ and commitment to a life of Christian discipleship & nurturing spiritual practices
2. A sense of call to the ministry affirmed by the church
3. An understanding of pastoral identity
4. Capacity to engage in theological reflection
5. Strong moral character and personal integrity
6. Commitment to spiritual, physical and emotional wellness sufficient for healthy ministry
7. Care and compassion for all people with appropriate relational skills
8. Responsibility in personal financial management
9. Wise and generous stewardship in the use of God's gifts
10. Skills and abilities necessary for the rigorous, pastoral tasks of ministry

C. Process for being accepted as a Candidate for Ordained or Commissioned Ministry

Anyone who wishes to pursue candidacy for Ordained or Commissioned Ministry needs to follow the process outlined below. Once someone is accepted as a Candidate, they are considered under care and nurture for ministry by their sponsoring congregation or body and by the GRR (thru RCOM). A prospective candidate should:

1. Initially meet with the Regional Minister, either in person or electronically.
2. Submit a typed letter of support and sponsorship from a recognized Disciples congregation in the GRR, or from a ministry body where the prospective candidate is engaged in service. This letter should serve as a recommendation for candidacy based upon a call to ministry, and should refer to the potential candidate's moral qualifications, evidence of gifts and abilities for ministry, and activity in the life of the congregation or ministry body.

3. Submit a typed Application for Candidacy, including at least 3 typed letters of recommendation from people familiar with the prospective candidate. It is strongly preferred that prospective candidates include a letter from at least one Disciples minister and at least one Disciples layperson. The application shall also include the prospective candidate's Spiritual Biography, including their understanding of their call to ministry.
4. Complete a Readiness for Ministry Profile through the GRR office.
5. Once the preceding steps are complete, a meeting with RCOM should be scheduled.
6. At that meeting, RCOM will determine admission to candidacy, and together with the Candidate will determine the ensuing process toward Commissioning and/or Ordination.

II. The Commissioned Ministry

A commission is limited to the particular task and place for which it is granted. A commission is terminated when the person no longer performs that particular ministry. Upon movement to a different ministry or congregation, a new commission should be sought thru RCOM. Commissioned ministry may include: pastors, ministers of music, youth or children's ministers, parish nurses, chaplains, or others where Regional nurture and authorization are deemed appropriate.

A. Terms for Commissioned Ministers

1. Commissioned Ministers are commissioned for one year at a time.
2. Initial commissioning involves meeting with RCOM in person.
3. Subsequent commissioning may be renewed without meeting in person with RCOM if proper paperwork (Standing Form) is submitted on time. However, commissioning renewal should be in person with RCOM at least once every 3 years.
4. Persons who have been commissioned by the GRR for 10 years continuously may apply for Permanent Commissioned Minister status. This status, if granted by RCOM, would be effective so long as the person serves in the ministry position within the GRR for which it was granted. This would still require the annual Standing Form be filled out, as required of all Ordained and Commissioned Ministers.

B. Steps to be taken by the Candidate for Commissioning

1. In order to enter into the official commissioning process, a prospective candidate must follow the steps outlined in section I.C above, and must be willing to accept the supervision of RCOM for the duration of their commissioned ministry.
2. Candidates for commissioning should expect at least two interviews with RCOM before a Commission is granted: the Initial Interview to receive the applicant into candidacy, followed by a Commissioning Interview. In the intervening time, RCOM may assign specific books for study or instruction that needs to be completed prior to the Commissioning Interview. If that study or instruction will take much more than a year, RCOM may also suggest an intervening Nurturing Interview. However, if no further training or study is required, RCOM may also waive the Commissioning Interview and grant a commission after the Initial Interview.
3. Following commissioning, each year the Commissioned Minister must submit their annual Standing Form in order for the commission to be renewed. That Standing Form shall include an annual review of the previous year's goals and outcomes in ministry. Commissioned Ministers are not required to meet in person with RCOM annually, but they must meet with RCOM at least once every 3 years.
4. Candidates who are commissioned must also agree to actively pursue the continuing acquisition of ministerial skills through study and growth experiences. These expectations annually should include:
 - a. Maintaining a Mentor relationship with an ordained or commissioned Disciples colleague with whom there is at least semi-annual contact (quarterly contact preferred).
 - b. Reading and discussing with a Mentor at least 2 books from a recommended reading list, covering 2 different areas from the 16 competencies.
 - c. Pursuing continuing education via courses, seminars and other experiences as possible.
 - d. Participation in Regional and/or General Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) events.

III. The Ordained Ministry

Standing as an Ordained Minister authorizes one to perform ministry on behalf of the Christian Church (DOC) across Regions. In accepting Ordination, the minister covenants to care for the church by offering gifts of mind, body and spirit, agreeing to fulfill the functions of a minister, and adhering to the Ministerial Code of Ethics of the Christian Church (DOC). Ordained ministry may include pastors, educators, ecumenical leaders, congregationally-based or independent community ministers, chaplains, pastoral counselors, and ministers who serve in the General and Regional church.

A. Steps to be taken by the Candidate for Ordination

1. In order to enter into the official ordination process, a prospective candidate must follow the steps outlined in section I.C above, and must be willing to accept the supervision of RCOM for the duration of the ordination process.
2. Regardless of whether they are following the Seminary Track or the Apprentice Track, Candidates for Ordination should expect at least three interviews with RCOM before Ordination is granted: the Initial Interview to receive the applicant into candidacy; at least one Nurturing Interview (preferably a Nurturing Interview each year until studies and training are complete), followed by the actual Ordination Interview.
3. Candidates for Ordination shall be assigned a Mentor, with whom they should have contact at least semi-annually to check-in regarding progress toward their academic and experiential goals.

B. Educational Requirements

There are two educational tracks in preparation for Ordination: an **Apprentice Track** and a **Seminary Track**. Regardless of the educational track chosen, the church expects the women and men it ordains to demonstrate competency in the 16 areas of ministerial practice, listed below. *Candidates for Ordination are expected to follow the Seminary Track, unless in consultation with RCOM it is determined that the Candidate's economic, linguistic, vocational, or familial circumstances make the Apprentice Track more appropriate.* This is not intended to make entry into ministry more difficult; it is intended to better prepare the Candidate for fruitful, long-term service to the church, community and world.

1. 16 Areas of Competency

- a. **Biblical Knowledge:** Be rooted and grounded in scripture and able to interpret and apply the scriptures in ways that are appropriate to original and contemporary contexts.
- b. **Church Administration and Planning:** Be able to practice the principles of good administration, planning and implementing short and long-range goals to enhance congregational life in collaboration with teams and committees.
- c. **Communication:** Be an effective communicator and be able to facilitate effective communication within and on behalf of the church.
- d. **Cross Cultural & Anti-Racism Experience:** Be sensitive to the different manifestations of racism & prejudice in the culture and committed to confronting and overcoming them.
- e. **Ecumenism:** Exhibit a commitment to working with other Christians and denominations and with other faiths in programs of common witness and service, and to articulating the vision of the ecumenical and global church as a starting place for mission.
- f. **Education and Leader Development:** Know the foundations of Christian education and the principles of leader development. Show competency in teaching children, youth, and adults, including lay leaders and staff.
- g. **Ethics:** Be able to help parishioners think critically about the relationship of their faith to issues of justice, ethics and morality
- h. **Evangelism:** Be able to motivate Congregational members to share their faith through word and action.
- i. **Mission of the Church in the World:** Be able to understand and articulate the centrality of the call to mission given by Jesus Christ and the prophets. Be able to empower congregations to engage in mission from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.

- j. **Pastoral Care:** Be able to engage other persons 737 with empathy and assess situations and relationships with the compassion of Christ, with sensitivity to culture and context. Be able to convey the healing power of God to those who suffer.
 - k. **Proclamation of the Word:** Know the practice and theory of Christian preaching. Be able to proclaim the Word of God, share the Good News of Jesus Christ, and help Congregational members apply their faith to daily life.
 - l. **Spiritual Development:** Establish and maintain spiritual disciplines that lead to personal growth and help others develop a rich spiritual life.
 - m. **Stewardship:** Be able to develop and encourage healthy stewards who recognize and share generously God's abundant gifts for all creation.
 - n. **Theology:** Be able to articulate a coherent view of God's nature and activity in relation to the Christian tradition, to critically engage human situations from a perspective of faith, and to help persons recognize theological issues in their daily lives.
 - o. **Understanding of Heritage:** Have knowledge of and appreciation for the history and thought of Christianity and of the history, structure, practices, and ethos of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
 - p. **Worship:** Know the purpose and elements of Christian worship. Have the ability to plan and lead meaningful worship by working with the worship team, musicians, and congregational members.
4. Candidates pursuing ordination via either track will be asked to submit an annual self-assessment regarding the 16 areas of competency, and should meet with RCOM annually to review their progress. It is not the intention that Candidates should have to prove complete mastery over any of those 16 areas, as everyone has room to grow in all of those areas. The self-assessment process is simply intended to help the Candidate and RCOM determine where further work might be done in order to best prepare the Candidate for fruitful ministry. Candidates should complete the worksheet on pages 7-10 and submit it to RCOM prior to each meeting, and should submit a paper each year with details about the Candidate's current engagement in ministry, goals and outcomes from the previous year, goals for the forthcoming year, and theological reflections on the Candidate's current spiritual journey.
 5. Those in the **Apprentice Track** will demonstrate competency in the 16 areas of ministerial practice by completing a program of study of at least 250 contact hours approved by RCOM, and meeting any other requirements determined by RCOM in order to be adequately prepared for ministry; those in the **Seminary Track** will demonstrate competency in the 16 areas of ministerial practice by securing a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a theological school accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada (which usually consists of roughly 1250 contact hours).
 6. Those in the **Apprentice Track** should expect the process to take longer than the process of the Seminary Track. The Seminary Track, if pursued full time, takes a minimum of 3 years; part-time, it often takes at least 6 years. Those in the Apprentice Track, who will take a much lighter academic load (at least 250 contact hours as opposed to roughly 1250 contact hours required in the Seminary Track), will be expected to make progress toward completing work in at least 2 of the 16 areas of competency each year, which would result in completing the process over the course of 8 years. Candidates may complete requirements in as many as 4 areas of competency in any given year, thus making it possible to complete the Apprentice Track in as few as 4 years. However, unlike the Seminary Track, once courses are completed for each area of competency, it will be up to RCOM to determine if the Candidate is prepared for that area or if they need further study or experience. It is also possible that RCOM, upon the completion of education preparation for the Apprentice Track, may require that the Candidate serve for some additional period of time in their ministry setting under the supervision of an ordained Disciples Minister as a Mentor before ordination is granted.

V. MINISTERIAL STANDING

The GRR requires an annual written or electronic report on ministry in order to renew standing for all Ordained and Commissioned Ministers. Those reports will be reviewed by the Regional Minister prior to standing being reaffirmed, and may be referred to RCOM for review if deemed necessary.

Suspension or termination of standing may result for failure to submit the annual Standing Form.

A. Requirements for active ministers seeking annual renewal of Standing

1. Submission of Standing Form in a timely manner annually.
2. Annual participation in continuing education, seminars and workshops, or formal training.
3. Completion of a workshop in clergy boundaries including prevention of clergy sexual misconduct at least once every 5 years.

B. Transfer of Standing from another Region

Transfer of Standing from another Region in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is handled initially by the Regional Ministers of the two involved regions. When an Ordained Minister transfers into the GRR, RCOM will be notified by the Regional Minister, but no action or meeting with RCOM is necessary. When a Commissioned Minister transfers into the GRR, the steps in Section II above will need to be followed in order to be commissioned for that new position.

C. Revocation of Standing

Standing may be revoked by the Regional Minister, in consultation with RCOM, at any time for misconduct or for violation of the Ministerial Code of Ethics.

D. Restoration of Lost Standing

1. Written application must be made to the GRR via RCOM.
2. A recommendation from the Region which removed standing. In the case of standing which has lapsed, there must be a recommendation from the Region where standing was last held.
3. RCOM will make a decision regarding standing. A personal interview may be required.
4. In the case of standing removed due to a finding of Clergy Sexual Misconduct, additional information must be submitted according to the following process:
 - a. Letter from a licensed pastoral counselor to RCOM indicating the number of sessions of therapy, and dealing with the applicant's response to the incident leading to the termination of standing, the applicant's progression in dealing with the incident, and an opinion regarding the applicant's fitness to return to ministry.
 - b. Psychological assessment for ministry conducted by an RCOM-approved testing agency.
 - c. Completion of an approved workshop on clergy boundaries and sexual ethics. This should have been done within the year leading up to the application for reinstatement of standing.
 - d. Letter from pastor of a congregation where the applicant has been worshipping, indicating the applicant's level of activity and participation.
 - e. A paper by the applicant discussing their motivation for a return to certified ministry and the applicant's sense of healing and sense of call.
 - f. An opportunity shall be given for a written statement by the victim of the misconduct related to restoring the standing of the minister.
 - g. The applicant must meet in person for an interview with RCOM.

E. Appeals Process

Decisions rendered by RCOM may be appealed by the following process:

1. There shall be a written appeal to the Regional Board.
2. A sub-committee of the Board shall be appointed by the Moderator.
3. This sub-committee shall meet with the Appellant, along with representatives of RCOM.
4. A decision shall be recommended to and acted upon by the Regional Board at its next regularly scheduled meeting
5. An appeal will not be considered if legal action has been initiated or threatened.

VI. Transfer of Standing from another Denomination

A. Transfer of Standing from all denominations other than the United Church of Christ

1. Apply to GRR with supporting materials, including education preparation for ministry, evidence of previous ordination, and evidence of good standing in the previous denomination.
2. Submit a recommendation from a Disciples congregation.
3. Submit a paper describing the reason for the desire to become a Disciples minister.
4. Interview with the Regional Minister.
5. Interview with RCOM.
6. Complete of an approved course in Disciple History and Polity.
7. Psychological assessment by a body approved by RCOM, if requested.
8. Complete any educational work recommended by RCOM. Educational equivalency of a seminary degree or the Apprentice Track in Section III above is required.
9. Complete an approved workshop on Clergy Boundaries and Prevention of Clergy Sexual Misconduct, or show proof of completion of such a workshop in the last 5 years.

B. Transfer of Standing from the United Church of Christ

1. Apply to GRR with the most recent UCC ministerial profile and evidence of good standing from the previous Conference.
2. Submit a letter of recommendation from a Disciples congregation.
3. Interview with the Regional Minister.
4. Interview with RCOM.
5. Complete an approved course in Disciple History and Polity.
6. Psychological assessment by a body approved by RCOM, if requested.
7. Complete approved workshop on Clergy Boundaries and Prevention of Clergy Sexual Misconduct, or show proof of completion of such a workshop in the last 5 years.

Documenting Your Ministry Education & Experience

Candidates should use the following to document their education and/or experience in the 16 areas of competency for ministerial practice. *Feel free to use additional pages as necessary.*

a) Biblical Knowledge

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

b) Church Administration & Planning

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

c) Communication

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

d) Cross-Cultural & Anti-Racism Experience

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course
 college-level course
 workshop or seminar
 ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

e) Ecumenism

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

f) Education & Leader Development

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

g) Ethics

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

h) Evangelism

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

i) Mission of the Church in the World

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

j) Pastoral Care

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

k) Proclamation of the Word

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

l) Spiritual Development

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

m) Stewardship

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

n) Theology

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

o) Understanding of Heritage

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

p) Worship

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

- seminary/grad-level course college-level course workshop or seminar ministry experience

Activity: _____ Date(s): _____ Place/School: _____

Content: _____

CANDIDATE SIGNATURE: _____