

## MINISTERIAL AUTHORIZATION

### Procedures for Associations in the Northern California Nevada Conference

#### (1) INTRODUCTION

The three categories of authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ are : Ordained, Commissioned, and Licensed. The majority of persons who seek authorization in NCNC are pursuing ORDAINED MINISTRY. This document applies specifically to that group of candidates. The process is, however, almost identical for persons seeking COMMISSIONED MINISTRY. It is significantly different for those for whom LICENSED MINISTRY has been requested, and is under the oversight of the Committee on Ministry, not the Association.

#### (2) MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT

If an individual wishes to seek authorized ministry, they must first be a member of a Local Church in NCNC, and then be recognized by the church as a Member In Discernment. Only after these two actions does an individual seek recognition as a Member In Discernment with the Conference. A person must remain a Member In Discernment for a minimum of one year before an ordination interview and possible recommendation for an Association ecclesiastical council.

#### (3) ACTION OF COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY, SECTION A

For Members In Discernment for ordained ministry, a positive response from COM-A is to RECOMMEND a candidate to their Association for approval for ordination.<sup>1</sup> The Committee on Ministry, Section A **does not approve** people for ordination, although that is a common misconception and misstatement. Please correct that when you hear it, as it is incorrect in UCC polity. The Association is the body that must approve. The COM-A recommendation comes to the Association via communication from the Conference Minister.

#### (4) ACTION OF THE ASSOCIATION

The Association approval comes through a gathered ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL of laypersons and clergy. Technically, a member of COM-A should be present at every Ecclesiastical Council for ordination to indicate formally that the candidate was approved by the Committee on Ministry. This is not always possible. Alternatively, a letter may be sent to the Association. If there were concerns about this candidate, they would have been shared confidentially with the Association Board of Directors / Executive Committee by the ACM for Authorization for Ministry.

#### (5) THE CALL TO MINISTRY

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<sup>1</sup> As documented in the *UCC Manual on Ministry*, four possible responses from the Committee on Ministry are available. (1) If COM-A gives a candidate a “yes” response, that is an unconditional recommendation to the Association. (2) If COM-A gives a candidate a “yes-but” response that is positive, but with a requirement (or requirements) which *must be met prior to the Ecclesiastical Council*. COM-A will not pass the recommendation forward to the Association until the conditions are met, but also will not require the candidate to return to COM-A for another interview. (3) If COM-A gives a candidate a “no-but” response, there is no recommendation for ordination at this time, but given fulfillment of certain tasks or objectives, possibly requiring work with a Wisdom Circle, COM-A will review the individual in a subsequent ordination interview and reconsider recommendation to the Association. No recommendation is passed forward to the Association. (4) If COM-A gives a candidate a “no” response, the decision is that s/he is not suited for ministry in the United Church of Christ. No further review is offered.

It should be noted that the Association Ecclesiastical Council has the same four responses available to it as it meets with a candidate seeking approval. – “yes,” “yes-but,” “no-but,” and “no.”

Even with the approval of an Ecclesiastical Council, however, an individual cannot be ORDAINED in the United Church of Christ, without an approved call to ministry.

All of our Associations have provision in their by-laws to hold an Ecclesiastical Council for an ordination candidate whether or not the person actually has a call to ministry in hand at the time. (If they obtain approval of the Ecclesiastical Council prior to receiving a call, it is technically “approval for ordination pending receipt of an appropriate call.”)

A call to ministry is approved at a meeting of an ASSOCIATION CREDENTIALS COMMITTEE to review the Letter of Call the candidate has received. Each Association has its own way of constituting and calling together a Credentials Committee. The purpose is to ascertain that this is, in fact, an ordainable call. An ordainable call is a call to serve an appropriate calling body, being acknowledged as an authorized minister in the United Church of Christ. Tradition in this Conference has been that ¼ time with appropriate compensation is the minimum constituting an ordainable call. Conference compensation guidelines are strongly encouraged. An Association Credentials Committee may require more time at its discretion in each situation.

To be recognized as valid, calling bodies typically embody the following characteristics:

- (a) The organization is a legitimate body with an identifiable organizational structure, governance, and leadership. This organization may or may not be an ecclesiastical body (i.e. church, or denominational group) but it must meet the criteria listed below.
- (b) The organization must be willing to recognize and confirm the individual’s personal sense of call to ministry.
- (c) The organization must be willing and able to provide support and oversight for the particular individual’s call to ministry.
- (d) The organization must be willing and committed to participate as a full covenantal partner in the three- or four-way covenant (as appropriate) with the individual, the Association (and the Local Church where the individual is a member.)<sup>2</sup>

If a call to ministry is received prior to the candidate’s Ecclesiastical Council, then the Credentials Committee can meet and – as part of the Council – offer their report indicating the acceptability of the call. If a call to ministry has **not** been received prior to an Ecclesiastical Council, then there is obviously no Credentials Committee report to offer. A Credentials Committee meeting is called whenever a call to ministry **is** received, and the result reported to the Association Board of Directors, in lieu of an Ecclesiastical Council (which has already occurred).

A Letter of Call can take one of two forms.

- (a) It may be a **three-way covenant**, which is the form of calls to parish ministry. The parties to a three-way covenant are: the Minister, the Local Church as calling body, and the Association.
- (b) It may be a **four-way covenant**, which is the form of calls to non-parish ministry, such as work with hospitals, non-profit agencies, and educational institutions. The parties to a four-way covenant are: the Minister, the calling body, a Local Church where the minister holds membership, and the Association.

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<sup>2</sup> From “The Oversight of Ministries,” *UCC Manual on Ministry*, p. 27, footnote 7.

There are templates for both three- and four-way covenants available on the Conference website. The templates are to be modified as appropriate for each case. Signed original copies are to be provided to the minister, the Local Church, and the Conference office.

#### **(6) ORDINATION AND INSTALLATION**

The Association officiates at the rites of ordination and installation. While a candidate may choose the actual location for the ordination and the installation, the Association in which the candidate has been In Discernment officiates at the ordination and traditionally, it is at the candidate's home church. The Association to which the newly-ordained person has been called officiates at the installation. This may be the same Association, of course, and the two rites may occur in the same service of worship (or separate services). If two different Associations are involved, then the Letter of Call will also require review by a Credentials Committee in the calling/installing Association.

It is imperative that ordinations and installations be scheduled cooperatively among the candidate/minister, the local church involved, and the Association. Candidates should not presume in advance either the positive outcomes of COM-A or Ecclesiastical Council proceedings, or the availability of churches or Association personnel. This is considerate for all parties involved, and allows accord of honor and celebration, including the Association's task of ordering the appropriate certificates from the national setting of the church.

#### **(7) MINISTERIAL STANDING**

The newly-ordained person is granted the privilege of gaining ministerial standing in the Northern California Nevada Conference. If the person is called to a position within NCNC, ministerial standing will be held in this Conference upon installation by an Association. Support, nurture, and oversight for that minister pass to Section B of the Committee on Ministry (COM-B).

If the newly-ordained person is called to a position outside NCNC, standing is transferred to the Conference/Association of the calling body, effective with the new minister's service of installation by an Association.

Ministers moving *between* Associations in our Conference do not have to transfer their standing. Standing is held in the Conference. They will, however, have a Credentials Committee review for a new Letter of Call, and a service of installation conducted by the Association of the new calling body.