

# MANUAL ON MINISTRY



A Guide to Authorizing Ministry  
in the United Church of Christ



Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization  
Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry  
of the United Church of Christ

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I will stand at my watchpost to see what the LORD will say. Then the LORD answered and said, “Write the vision; make it plain so a runner may read it. For there is still a vision.”

— *Habakkuk 2:1-3*

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# 2 Ministerial Authorization

## ARTICLE 5: CALLS, COVENANTS, AND ENDORSEMENTS

### COVENANT

Covenant—the commitment of God to God’s people, of the people to God, and of the people to one another as the Body of Christ—is foundational to United Church of Christ identity and is at the heart of our governance. God’s covenant with creation and humankind inspires deep and binding commitment in relationships within and beyond the Church, “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). The covenantal relationships between parts of the Body of Christ are characterized by mutuality, transparency, accountability, and a desire to represent Christ together for the glory of God.

When a member of the United Church of Christ, in response to God’s call and with the affirmation of the wider Church’s discernment through a Committee on Ministry acting on behalf of an Association, is ordained and/or granted ministerial standing, the commitments of covenant are formalized among participating covenantal partners:

- the person who holds ministerial standing;
- the Local Church of which they are a member;
- the ministry setting to which the person is called;
- the Association through its Committee on Ministry.

These commitments are typically outlined as Three-Way Covenants and Four-Way Covenants (depending on a person’s employment and ministry setting); however, all persons who hold ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ—regardless of employment—bear responsibility to participate with mutuality,

*Three- and Four-Way Covenants are named according to the number of covenantal partners.*

*While “call” has many meanings in the processes of discernment and ministerial authorization, here the word “call” refers to a ministry setting and role for which a person is gifted and qualified and in which they are asked to serve on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The “call” includes a call agreement (or employment contract) that outlines scope of work and compensation, among other details. A Three- or Four-Way Covenant is written separately from the call agreement.*

transparency, and accountability in relationship to the above-mentioned covenantal partners.

The conditions and obligations of employment with a ministry setting are set by the employer, sometimes in the form of a call agreement.<sup>62</sup> A call is not required to maintain ministerial standing; however, a call is required for a person to initially receive ministerial standing after the appropriate process of discernment with a Committee on Ministry. In order to be ordained, for example, a Member in Discernment who is “approved for ordination pending call” must first receive a call to an approved ministry setting; this is referred to as an ordainable call. Similarly, in order to receive ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ through Dual Standing or following the discernment process for Privilege of Call, an ordained minister from another ecclesiastical body must first receive a call to a UCC ministry setting that is considered by a Committee on Ministry to warrant ministerial standing; this is referred to as an authorizable call.

At the heart of any ordainable or authorizable call is covenant: the sacred commitment among the person with ministerial standing, the ministry setting, the Local Church, and the Association, to one another and to Christ, in order to faithfully and effectively minister together for the glory of God.

### **ORDAINABLE CALL**

In ordination, the person makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic ministry, they continue the witness of Christ’s followers from New Testament times with responsibilities for the proclamation and continuation of the Christian faith and of the Church itself.

A Member in Discernment who is “approved for ordination pending call” must receive a call for representative, ministerial service before they are ordained to serve and to lead on behalf

<sup>62</sup> Local Churches, Conferences, and ministers may obtain a sample call agreement through [ucc.org/ministers](http://ucc.org/ministers). The Call Agreement Workbook, a resource for ministers and their ministry settings, can be purchased through [uccresources.com](http://uccresources.com).

of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal. The decision of whether a call is an ordainable call is empowered to Committees on Ministry on behalf of their Associations. When a Member in Discernment who is approved for ordination pending call has been invited to accept a position, the Committee on Ministry is charged with reviewing the position—including the setting and scope of work—to discern if the position serves God, Jesus Christ, the Church Universal, and the United Church of Christ in such a way that ordination is necessary. Not every call is an ordainable call, and not every employment setting necessitates the covenantal relationship and oversight of ministerial standing.

As ministry changes in the 21st century, the United Church of Christ and its Associations are coming to understand that the setting for an ordainable call may or may not be in the Local Church and may or may not include full-time compensation. Instead an ordainable call must demonstrate three essential qualities to the Committee on Ministry's satisfaction:

- **The call is covenantal.** In the United Church of Christ, no one does ministry alone. An ordainable call demonstrates clear connectedness with a Local Church (or in the case of a call beyond the Local Church, connectedness between the Local Church and the calling body), as the person being called to serve represents the commitments of the Local Church and the Association to a shared mission on behalf of the United Church of Christ. This commitment is illustrated in the creation of a Three- or Four-Way Covenant that documents the covenantal expectations of the person who will be ordained, the Local Church of membership, the ministry setting (if different from the Local Church of membership), and the Association.

Questions to ask while discerning the covenantal aspects of an ordainable call may include:

- ▼ Has the United Church of Christ through an Association demonstrated an ongoing commitment to this position

*To be recognized as a calling body, an organization/ ministry setting/faith community typically must have: an identifiable structure of leadership and governance; a willingness to recognize and provide appropriate oversight for a person's ministry; and a commitment to participate fully in a Three- or Four-Way Covenant with the person, the Local Church, and the United Church of Christ through an Association.*

and/or this ministry setting? If the commitment to this particular ministry is new, how have the Association and other potential covenantal partners demonstrated a plan to invest in the ministry over time? How does the Local Church show engagement with and support for the ministry and the position?

- ▼ How will the Ordained Minister show engagement with and support of the Local Church and the wider United Church of Christ?
- ▼ Does the United Church of Christ have a particular need for a representative on its behalf to this ministry setting? Is that need ongoing or temporary?

- **The call responds to the needs of the church.**<sup>63</sup> An ordainable call meets the needs of the Body of Christ for a representative of the United Church of Christ and of the Church Universal through priestly and pastoral servant leadership. The particular need that leads to an ordainable call relates to the whole and holy life of the Church, with responsibility for representing Christ and the Church and for equipping the Church's response to God's work in the world.

The call, whether to a Local Church or a setting beyond the Local Church, must be carefully reviewed for its intent, authenticity, and validity to serve the ongoing and expanding needs of the Church. A Committee on Ministry may be asked to consider calls to interim ministry, community organizing, or a wide variety of entrepreneurial ministry settings for ordination. The member in discernment who is approved for ordination pending call, and the Association should articulate a sense of commitment to meet the identified need of the Church faithfully and effectively through this call.

*Some calls, including active duty military chaplaincy, have additional requirements in order for a person to meet the needs of the Church in that particular setting, such as several years of post-ordination experience, and therefore cannot be considered an ordainable call.*

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<sup>63</sup> See Section 1 for "Needs of the Church."

Questions to ask while discerning the needs of the Church for an ordainable call may include:

- ▼ Do this position and ministry setting require a person who is ordained by the Body of Christ to serve in Jesus' name on behalf of the United Church of Christ? Do the position and ministry setting require the person to embody and proclaim the good news for all of God's children through preaching, teaching, and acts of loving-kindness?
  - ▼ Does this ministry setting ask the one who serves to nurture and empower a community through worship and sacraments, fellowship and mutual care, lifelong education and spiritual formation, pastoral presence and spiritual guidance? Does the position bear particular responsibilities to nurture and inform the Church itself?
  - ▼ Will the need of the Church for faithful and effective authorized ministers be met if this particular person accepts this particular call? Is the potential call considered to be within the Member in Discernment's capacities and capabilities?
- **The call involves mutuality in ministry between the minister and the community.** An ordainable call demonstrates tangible commitments to shared concerns and mutual accountability for the sake of sustained ministry. Whether a minister is serving in a Local Church or in a specialized setting, it is expected that there are ongoing structures of both support and accountability in place to encourage the long-term well-being of the minister and the ongoing viability of the ministry being undertaken.

Questions to ask while discerning the quality of mutuality of an ordainable call may include:

## Section 2:5 Calls, Covenants, and Endorsements

*Not every call is an ordainable call and not every employment setting needs the covenantal relationship and oversight of ministerial standing. There may be times when a position is employment but not a call. University instruction, for example, may be employment for which a Member in Discernment is qualified but for which ordination is not a professional requirement, and therefore it might not be an ordainable call. Seminary instruction, however, might be considered an ordainable call. Similarly, a position of Minister for Christian Education may be an ordainable call while the role of Sunday school teacher might not.*

- ▼ Does the United Church of Christ have a particular need for oversight of the person called to this position? Do all of the potential covenantal partners have a shared understanding about the processes for accountability in this potential call, and are those processes outlined in a call agreement and Three- or Four-Way Covenant?<sup>64</sup>
- ▼ Are the ministry setting and position structured to grow together mutually, informing, encouraging and challenging one another to the glory of God? (Internships, Clinical Pastoral Education residencies, and training positions, for example, are not considered ordainable calls due to the imbalances in mutuality; such ministry settings are intended to shape the person but are not structured to be shaped in return).
- ▼ How does the ministry setting attend to its own vitality over time and to the ongoing well-being of the person who is called to it? Regardless of whether the call is full-time or part-time, does the scope of work represent fair expectations of labor and clear commitments to time and compensation (for example, is a quarter-time pastor expected to be “on call” 24/7 for a congregation)?

Additional tools that can help a Committee on Ministry discern whether a call to ministry is authorizable include:

- prayer and discernment;<sup>65</sup>
- the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers;
- position description and scope of work;
- call agreement/employment contract;
- Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

<sup>64</sup> See Section 3 for sample Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

<sup>65</sup> See Section 3 for the Discernment Travelogue.



## AUTHORIZABLE CALL

An authorizable call is that call by which, following appropriate discernment processes, an ecumenically ordained minister is granted ministerial standing: Dual Standing, Ordained Ministerial Standing through Privilege of Call, or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing. An authorizable call refers to a call for which a person is tasked with representative, ministerial service on behalf of the United Church of Christ and through which a covenantal relationship of UCC ministerial standing is established.

The discernment of an authorizable call is a decision empowered to Committees on Ministry by their Associations. Such a decision considers both the local ministry context and the wider context of the United Church of Christ. Like ordainable calls, authorizable calls must demonstrate three essential qualities to the Committee on Ministry's satisfaction:

- **The call is covenantal.** An authorizable call demonstrates clear connectedness with the United Church of Christ (whether through a Local Church or a UCC-affiliated ministry setting), demonstrated in the creation of a Three- or Four-Way Covenant that outlines the covenantal expectations of the person who will hold ministerial standing, a Local Church, the ministry setting (if different from the Local Church), and the Association.
- **The call responds to the needs of the church.** An authorizable call meets the needs of the Church—the Body of Christ—for a priestly and pastoral servant to represent the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal, and to equip the Church's response to God's work in the world. Both the ministry setting and the ecumenically ordained minister seeking ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ articulate a sense of commitment to meet that Church's needs faithfully and effectively on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

*When a Committee on Ministry is considering the appropriateness of an employment or ministry setting to provide an ordainable or authorizable call, it may be helpful for the potential ministry partners to draft a Three- or Four-Way Covenant as an exercise to review the scope of proposed ministry, mutual accountability and oversight, as well as the ways in which the call would require of the person an embodiment of Word and Spirit through preaching and teaching, rites and sacraments, justice and pastoral care.*

- **The call involves mutuality in ministry between the minister and the community.** Outlined in a Three- or Four-Way Covenant, an authorizable call demonstrates shared expectations of ecclesial accountability and relationship among the minister, the ministry setting, and the United Church of Christ through its Association and/or Local Church, for the sake of sustained ministry. A call agreement or job description may be used to demonstrate mechanisms of oversight in the employment setting.

Tools that can help a Committee on Ministry discern whether a call to ministry is authorizable include:

- prayer and discernment;<sup>66</sup>
- the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers;
- position description and scope of work.

Discernment of an authorizable call is also beneficial for a Committee on Ministry in conversation with an Ordained Minister who is considering Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing, in order to assess whether employment and/or entrepreneurial work indicate a ministry for which oversight is needed and in which the United Church of Christ understands itself to be represented.

### THREE- AND FOUR-WAY COVENANTS

**T**he sacred nature of shared ministry and relationship between a Local Church, an Association, the person who holds a form of UCC ministerial standing, and the ministry setting beyond the Local Church (if applicable) for the purpose of God’s mission is made explicit with a Three- or Four-Way Covenant.<sup>67</sup> Covenant—not only in writing but in all its forms—is meant to secure the well-being of God’s community and the Body of Christ. In the United Church of Christ, Three- and Four-Way Covenants are written to further the mutual ministry of all covenantal partners for the sake of God’s glory and on behalf of the United Church

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<sup>66</sup> See Section 3 for discernment tools such as the Discernment Travelogue.

<sup>67</sup> See Section 3 for sample Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

of Christ. Accountability for healthy ecclesial relationships, good communication, and mutual concern for all participants is built into the fabric of the Three- or Four-Way Covenant in order to strengthen and encourage the ministry of each covenantal partner on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The authority and power of the Three- or Four-Way Covenant rests in the understanding of commitment and accountability on the part of each participant, believing that “as God gives God’s self to humanity for the sake of all, so Christians are called into covenant for the sake of one another rather than for one’s self.”<sup>68</sup>

Three-Way Covenants outline ecclesial expectations, individually and in relationship to one another, of (1) the person with ministerial standing, (2) the Local Church of membership as the calling body, and (3) the Association.

Four-Way Covenants outline ecclesial expectations, individually and in relationship to one another, of (1) the person with ministerial standing, (2) the Local Church of membership, (3) the Association, and (4) the ministry setting as the calling body.

Three- and Four-Way Covenants are distinct from call agreements/employment contracts.

While the specific responsibilities in Three- and Four-Way Covenants can vary according to Association and ministry setting, some basic expectations are important to foster healthy relationships and communication among the covenantal partners and with God:

- Local Church responsibilities include participation in the Association and Conference (e.g. sending delegates to annual meetings and nurturing its own “culture of call” to identify members whose leadership gifts would bless the wider church); support of its members who are Ordained Ministers (pastors, ministers in specialized settings, and retired clergy alike) through pastoral relations and/or discernment committees; and appreciation for other

*Three-Way Covenants are also valuable in non-employment seasons of an Ordained Minister’s career, for example while searching for a call or following retirement, especially if the minister is active in short-term opportunities such as pulpit supply or in volunteer capacities with the wider church. Adaptations of the Three-Way Covenant in such seasons outline the ecclesial relationship and expectations among an Ordained Minister, the Local Church of membership, and the Association.*

<sup>68</sup> See Section 1.

*In a church landscape where specialized and entrepreneurial ministries are multiplying, Four-Way Covenants are valuable to clarify and document the ecclesial relationships that support ministry beyond the Local Church. Those specialized ministers who should hold Four-Way Covenants include (but are not limited to) ordained ministers serving as judicatory staff, military chaplains, hospital and hospice chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty, etc.*

settings beyond its own walls and programs as essential locations of ministry.

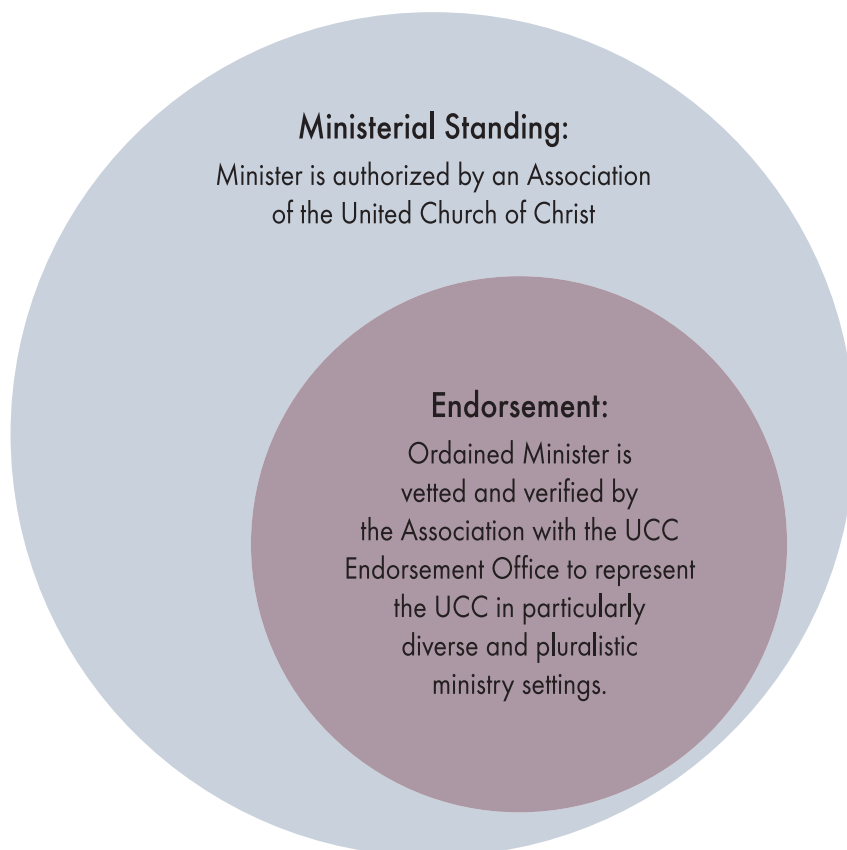
- Ordained Minister responsibilities include maintenance of ministerial standing, participation in the life of a Local Church and of the wider United Church of Christ, including financial support; and faithfulness to the UCC Ministerial Code and to the terms of a call agreement. Those ministers called to specialized settings are encouraged to engage and support their Local Church of membership through newsletter articles, annual reports, stewardship of their resources, and pastoral assistance if and when there is an appropriate opportunity.
- Association responsibilities include communication of expectations for ministerial standing; faithful exercise of oversight responsibilities, such as annual Information Reviews and opportunities for clergy renewal; the hosting of installation services; and participation in the wider United Church of Christ, including timely communication with other Associations' Committees on Ministry in matters of ministerial standing.
- Ministry setting responsibilities include fair terms of call/employment, written in proportion to the position's scope of work; affirmation of the Local Church as the locus of ministry and mission in the United Church of Christ; and communication with the Association as needed for support and oversight.

Occasionally, some ministry settings are unable to sign a Four-Way Covenant. In those situations, a Four-Way Covenant can be created using the minister's job description as a reference to outline support and accountability for all covenantal partners.

## ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSEMENT

While ordination and the granting of ministerial standing are the responsibility of Associations, the ecclesiastical endorsement of an Ordained Minister is the work of Associations through their Committees on Ministry in collaboration with the UCC Endorsement Office. Ecclesiastical endorsement is the assessment and verification of an Ordained Minister's standing, qualifying experience, and capacity to represent the United Church of Christ faithfully and sensitively in diverse and pluralistic settings. A person cannot be endorsed without ordination and Ordained Ministerial Standing. Ecclesiastical endorsement is sought by an Ordained Minister when required by an agency for ministry in that setting.

*Many federal and professional agencies require a Master of Divinity degree in order to be considered for endorsement. If a Member in Discernment is considering ministry in a setting that requires endorsement, attention should be paid to endorsement requirements when establishing the preparation and formation plan.*



Professional and governmental agencies that require endorsement set unique standards that are maintained and updated by those agencies. The ecclesiastical endorsement process of the United Church of Christ is wholly separate from the agencies' processes. At stake for the United Church of Christ in ecclesiastical endorsement is the faithful representation of the United Church of Christ in ministry settings where the community is diverse and pluralistic. It is therefore critical for the Ordained Ministers seeking endorsement to work closely with the Committee on Ministry, the Endorsement Office, and the Ecclesiastical Endorser of the United Church of Christ, from the beginning of their discernment.

There are two types of organizations that may require ecclesiastical endorsement of an Ordained Minister. The requirements for and processes of ecclesiastical endorsement to these organizations can be broadly outlined as follows:<sup>69</sup>

*Governmental endorsement regulations stipulate specifically which types of post-ordination experiences are required and the duration of those experiences. Because post-ordination experience is required by the government prior to endorsement, chaplaincy positions with the military, Veterans Affairs, or Federal Bureau of Prisons cannot qualify as ordainable calls. They may, however, be considered as authorizable calls to ecumenically-ordained ministers who seek ministerial standing through the process of Privilege of Call.*

- **Governmental:** For military chaplaincy, chaplaincy in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or chaplaincy in the Veterans Affairs health care system, Ordained Ministers work with their Committees on Ministry and the Ecclesiastical Endorser to complete the required documentation. Once the application materials are approved to be complete, the Committee on Ministry interviews the Ordained Minister and decides whether to recommend endorsement to the Ecclesiastical Endorser for the United Church of Christ. The final determination of endorsement is made by the Ecclesiastical Endorser, confirming that the person is specifically qualified to serve in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ in a governmental agency. Ecclesiastical endorsement may be removed at the discretion of the Endorser.
- **Professional:** In cases where persons are seeking ecclesiastical endorsement to pursue certification as a

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<sup>69</sup> See Section 3 for specific endorsement requirements and procedures for various professional and governmental agencies.

chaplain or educator<sup>70</sup> through a professional agency, the person and their Committee on Ministry work with the UCC Endorsement Office to ensure that their documentation satisfies the endorsement requirements of the United Church of Christ. The Committee on Ministry grants the endorsement and sends the Letter of Endorsement to the UCC Endorsement Office. The Endorsement Office reviews and approves the application materials for completeness, stamps the seal of the United Church of Christ on the Letter of Endorsement, and sends it to the appropriate agency. Endorsement to a professional organization may be removed by the UCC Endorsement Office following the resignation of membership in the organization by the Ordained Minister, the termination of the minister's membership by the organization, the loss of ministerial standing as the result of an oversight proceeding, or the resignation of standing by the Ordained Minister.

Endorsement verifies that an Ordained Minister maintains their Ordained Ministerial Standing and has accrued the needed credentials and experience to minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ in diverse professional settings.

## **GOVERNMENTAL ENDORSEMENT**

### **Overview:**

Ecclesiastical endorsement for governmental agencies is primarily for those chaplains who serve in the military, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or Veterans Affairs health centers, or for seminarians applying to a Chaplain Candidacy Program. For ecclesiastical endorsement to a governmental agency, the Committee on Ministry on behalf of its Association serves to recommend endorsement to the Ecclesiastical Endorser. The Endorser has

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<sup>70</sup> Board Certified Chaplains are assessed and determined by the Association of Professional Chaplains. Certified Educators are assessed and determined by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education.

the final and sole authority to grant (or remove) government endorsements on behalf of the United Church of Christ. An Ordained Minister seeking endorsement for a government agency, or a seminarian considering chaplain candidacy, should initially contact the Ecclesiastical Endorser to confirm if ecclesiastical endorsement is needed for a particular governmental position and to review qualifications. The application process for ecclesiastical endorsement begins with an Ordained Minister and their Local Church of membership. The Ordained Minister requests the support and consideration of their Local Church regarding their gifts and graces for a specialized ministry with a governmental agency. The Local Church governing body recommends the Ordained Minister to the Committee on Ministry for the ecclesiastical endorsement application process. With the Local Church's recommendation, the Committee on Ministry notifies the Ecclesiastical Endorser of the application it has received; the Ordained Minister, Committee on Ministry, and Ecclesiastical Endorser work closely together to achieve the timely and satisfactory submission of all application materials.

When the application materials are completed, they are submitted to the Committee on Ministry, which then votes to recommend (or not) the Ordained Minister to the Ecclesiastical Endorser for the final consideration of endorsement on behalf of the United Church of Christ. With its recommendation, the Committee on Ministry vouches that the Ordained Minister can minister faithfully and effectively in culturally diverse, theologically pluralistic, challenging ministry settings while representing the United Church of Christ to the wider Body of Christ and the world.

Ecclesiastical endorsement is a prerequisite for application to the government agencies noted above, and it is a necessary authorization for continuing to serve as a chaplain in these settings. Once endorsed, an Ordained Minister continues to be subject to all of the requirements of ministerial standing (such as boundary awareness training and continuing education) and oversight



processes with the Committee on Ministry in the Association where their standing is held.

### **1. Initiating the Endorsement Process:**

After initially contacting the UCC Ecclesiastical Endorser, the Ordained Minister requests the support and consideration of their Local Church of membership regarding their gifts and graces for a specialized ministry with a governmental agency. After prayerful reflection, the Local Church governing body writes a recommendation to the Committee on Ministry in support of its member's request to apply for ecclesiastical endorsement. The Committee on Ministry, with the Local Church recommendation, notifies the Ecclesiastical Endorser of the applicant. The Ordained Minister, the Committee on Ministry, and the Ecclesiastical Endorser work closely together to achieve the timely and satisfactory submission of all application materials.

### **2. Application Documentation:**

The Ordained Minister prepares the following materials for the Committee on Ministry and the Ecclesiastical Endorser in order to be considered for ecclesiastical endorsement:

- ecclesiastical endorsement application form,<sup>71</sup> including the signed self-disclosure statement;
- letter from the governing board of the Local Church of membership, verifying participation in a Local Church life; this letter is to be no more than one year old;
- verification from the Committee on Ministry of the applicant's Ordained Ministerial Standing, with the date when ministerial standing was granted (shown by a copy of the ordination certificate and of the most recent Ordained Ministerial Standing certificate); for governmental chaplaincy positions, the applicant cannot be a Member in Discernment; in cases of an applicant who wishes to transfer endorsement from another denomination, the

*When an ecumenically-ordained minister approaches a Committee on Ministry for Privilege of Call, including the transfer of their ecclesiastical endorsement from another denomination; the Endorsement Office should be notified immediately.*

<sup>71</sup> See Section 3 for ecclesiastical endorsement application form.

Ordained Minister must have completed the Privilege of Call process and be granted Ordained Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ; current ministerial standing must be accurately recorded in the UCC Data Hub;

- Summary of Interest paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, detailing the Ordained Minister’s motivation and call to the specific governmental chaplaincy setting, including:
  1. identification of the specific chaplaincy in which the minister hopes to serve;
  2. applicant’s interest and understanding of the ministry of the specific chaplaincy;
  3. applicant’s understanding of being representative of the ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ in their ministry setting;
- Faith Journey paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, reflecting on the Ordained Minister’s Christian commitment and conviction for ministry; the Faith Journey paper may excerpt the ordination paper at the discretion of the Ecclesiastical Endorser;
- three – four letters of reference, including one from a clinical ministry setting (such as a CPE educator), one from the applicant’s current ministry setting, and one or two from persons who have observed the Ordained Minister and are qualified to assess the applicant’s capacity for ministry in a government setting; letters should not be more than one year old;<sup>72</sup>
- a current photograph of the applicant;
- copy of Three- or Four-Way Covenant from current ministry setting (if applicable);
- verification of Bachelor’s degree;

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<sup>72</sup> Signatures on all letters submitted with the application must be written in blue ink, so that original signatures are easily verified.

- verification of Master of Divinity degree;
- verification of at least one Clinical Pastoral Education unit;
- verification of ordained ministry experience, demonstrated through a resume; note that applicants must meet the post-ordination ministry experience requirements of both the United Church of Christ and the governmental agency to which they are applying:
  1. for the U.S. Armed Forces Active Duty, applicants for endorsement must have three years of post-ordination ministry experience;
  2. for Veterans Affairs and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, applicants must have two years of post-ordination ministry experience;
  3. for National Guard and Reserves, applicants must be ordained before they are endorsed;
- UCC Ministerial Profile, at the discretion of the Ecclesiastical Endorser.

### **3. Interview and Decision:**

The Committee on Ministry receives and studies the materials provided by the Ordained Minister before setting an interview date. For the interview, the Committee may want to invite a chaplain from the respective government agency to be present, both to sharpen the questions being explored and to provide relevant information to the Committee and Ordained Minister. The purpose of the interview is to help the Committee consider and examine the following:

- Does the person faithfully meet the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing as established by the Association? How does the person demonstrate continuing growth related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers and specific growth in their field of ministry?

- Does the person meet the requirements set forth by the agency in which they wish to seek a call?
- Does the person have a realistic understanding of the specialized ministry field they seek to enter?
- Is the person adequately grounded in their spiritual habits, theological formation, and commitment to the values of the United Church of Christ?
- Can the person function in a ministry setting that is theologically and denominationally diverse? Has the person demonstrated capacity to work collegially in a team ministry?
- Will the person be an effective, faithful, and respected representative of the United Church of Christ as they serve in a government chaplaincy?
- Has the person explored with their family the implications of this ministry and its impact on family life, such as mobility and long periods of separation?

Additional questions that the Committee may explore with the Ordained Minister include:

- What is your understanding of the particular goals of this ministry, and why are those goals important to you?
- How do you understand this type of ministry in terms of your career in ministry?
- How will you continue to be a part of the United Church of Christ and participate in its ongoing life? How do you understand yourself as a representative of the United Church of Christ in this ministry setting?
- What is the distinctiveness of your ministry in this field?

Following the interview, the Committee on Ministry prayerfully makes its decision whether to recommend the ecclesiastical endorsement of the Ordained Minister. The Committee communicates its decision to the applicant and to the Endorser. If the

decision is affirmative, the Committee sends its recommendation letter along with all original application documentation to the Ecclesiastical Endorser, who holds the authority and responsibility to grant ecclesiastical endorsement to government chaplaincy.

#### **4. Endorsement:**

The Ecclesiastical Endorser reviews the recommendation letter and all application materials before determining whether to endorse the Ordained Minister on behalf of the United Church of Christ to chaplaincy with a government agency. The Endorser relays their decision to the Committee on Ministry and the candidate. If the decision is affirmative, the Endorser reports the endorsement to the UCC Endorsement Office and to the governmental agency; the Committee on Ministry or Association administrator updates the UCC Data Hub. In addition to the Committee on Ministry, the Endorser maintains records of all endorsed chaplains.

An endorsed Ordained Minister is responsible for completing any requirements as set forth by the governmental agency. Likewise an endorsed minister continues to be subject to all of the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing (such as boundary awareness training and continuing education) and oversight processes with the Committee on Ministry in the Association where their standing is held.

Endorsements for branches of the military and other governmental agencies are not transferable between agencies. Ordained Ministerial Standing may transfer across Associations as appropriate. An Ordained Minister must initiate the endorsement process for each new endorsement they want to secure.

#### **5. Continuation of Endorsement:**

Those Ordained Ministers who have been granted ecclesiastical endorsement to and are continuously employed by governmental agencies are required to renew their endorsement only if requested by their supervisor or Commanding Officer in order to update or validate their existing file.

Those Ordained Ministers who have been granted endorsement to governmental agencies and are currently seeking employment must communicate with the Ecclesiastical Endorser annually for an interview, so that the endorsement might be renewed.

Once endorsed, an Ordained Minister and their Committee on Ministry maintain the appropriate ecclesial relationship of oversight and support, which can be clarified using a Four-Way Covenant. Likewise the Ordained Minister and the Local Church of their membership remain intentional in their relationship, especially when the Ordained Minister's chaplaincy takes them beyond the geographic boundaries of the Association. The Ordained Minister also keeps the Endorser informed of pertinent information about their duty assignments, including such information as change of mailing address.

If at any time an endorsed chaplain is subject to a Fitness Review, the Endorser is notified immediately; if an endorsed chaplain's ministerial standing is terminated or resigned, their ecclesiastical endorsement is terminated concurrently. Upon termination of military service, an Ordained Minister's ecclesiastical endorsement is withdrawn.

**Request for Active Duty Endorsement:**

An Ordained Minister who is endorsed for the Reserves or National Guard may request to have a new endorsement granted for Active Duty once they have accrued three years of post-ordination experience. The process to apply for Active Duty endorsement is identical to the governmental endorsement process. The Ecclesiastical Endorser determines whether to grant Active Duty endorsement based on the submitted application, new letters of reference (no more than one year old), and officer evaluation reports from the chaplain's commander.

**Chaplain Candidate Program:**

Chaplain Candidate Programs—specific programs for seminary students and sponsored by the Army, Navy, or Air Force—require

that a student be ecclesiastically endorsed for the Chaplain Candidate Program, even before their ordination. To become a Chaplain Candidate, a seminary student must be a Member in Discernment and complete the entire endorsement process satisfactorily, in addition to any requirements for program completion specific to the respective military branch.

The required documentation for a Chaplain Candidate applicant is the same as other applications for ecclesiastical endorsement to governmental agencies, excluding the Master of Divinity degree, the certification of CPE units, the ordination certificate, and the certificate of Ordained Ministerial Standing. Letters of reference should address the applicant's ability to perform ministry in diverse and pluralistic settings.

The UCC Endorsement Office must be notified immediately if a Committee on Ministry discontinues the Member in Discernment status of a Chaplain Candidate. Endorsement for Chaplain Candidates can be removed at any time by the UCC Ecclesiastical Endorser.

## **PROFESSIONAL ENDORSEMENT**

### **Overview:**

Ecclesiastical endorsement for certification in professional agencies is primarily for professional chaplains or educators, related to such agencies as the Association of Professional Chaplains and the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. Ordained Ministers seeking ecclesiastical endorsement in order to pursue professional certification are expected to have three years of ministry experience, at least one of which is post-ordination. Ecclesiastical endorsement is granted by a Committee on Ministry based on its assessment of the Ordained Minister's capacity and capability to minister faithfully and effectively in culturally diverse settings of pastoral care, counseling, and education.

### **1. Initiating the Endorsement Process:**

The Ordained Minister requests to meet with their Local Church of membership to discuss their sense of call to pursue professional certification through ecclesiastical endorsement. After prayerful reflection, the Local Church governing body decides whether to recommend the Ordained Minister to the Committee on Ministry for the ecclesiastical endorsement application process.

The letter of recommendation from the Local Church governing body is shared by the Ordained Minister with their Committee on Ministry and with the Endorsement Office of the National Setting, as the applicant informs both parties simultaneously of their intent to seek a specific level of membership or certification in a professional organization. The Endorsement Office and Committee on Ministry provide the Ordained Minister with the necessary application materials, guidelines, and related documentation for the endorsement process.

### **2. Application Documentation:**

The Ordained Minister prepares the following materials for the Committee on Ministry in order to be considered for ecclesiastical endorsement:

- ecclesiastical endorsement application form,<sup>73</sup> including the signed self-disclosure statement;
- letter from the governing board of the Local Church of membership, indicating date of membership, verifying participation in the life of a Local Church, and recommending the Ordained Minister for professional endorsement; this letter is to be no more than one year old;
- verification from Committee on Ministry of the person's Ordained Ministerial Standing, with the date when ministerial standing was granted (shown by copies of the ordination certificate or of the most recent Ordained Ministerial Standing certificate); the applicant cannot be

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<sup>73</sup> See Section 3 for ecclesiastical endorsement application form.



a Member in Discernment or an ecumenically ordained minister in the Privilege of Call process; current ministerial standing must be accurately recorded in the UCC Data Hub;

- Summary of Interest paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, detailing an Ordained Minister’s motivation and call to the specific professional chaplaincy setting, including:
  1. identification of the specific chaplaincy in which the minister seeks to serve;
  2. applicant’s interest and understanding of the ministry of the specific chaplaincy;
  3. Applicant’s understanding of being a representative of the ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ in their ministry setting;
- Faith Journey paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, reflecting on the Ordained Minister’s Christian commitment and conviction for ministry; at the Committee on Ministry’s discretion, the Faith Journey paper may excerpt the ordination paper or the faith paper for their certification application to the agency;
- three – four letters of reference, including one from a clinical ministry setting (such as a CPE supervisor), one from the Ordained Minister’s current ministry setting, and one or two additional letters; letters should not be more than one year old;<sup>74</sup>
- copy of Three- or Four-Way Covenant from current ministry setting (if applicable);
- verification of Bachelor’s degree;
- verification of Master of Divinity degree;
- verification of at least one CPE unit;

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<sup>74</sup> Signatures on all letters submitted with the application must be written in blue ink, so that original signatures are easily verified.

- verification of three years of ministry experience, including at least one year of post-ordination ministry experience.

### **3. Interview and Decision:**

The Committee on Ministry receives and studies the materials provided by the Ordained Minister. Materials not completed in accordance with the endorsement guidelines and to the Committee's satisfaction should be returned for further improvement. The final and satisfactory application packet must be received by the Committee before setting an interview date. The Committee interviews the Ordained Minister, using the criteria for ecclesiastical endorsement and the provided application materials as the basis for discussion. The Committee may also invite a person who already has ecclesiastical endorsement in the same field to be present for the interview, both to sharpen the questions being asked and to provide relevant information to the Committee and the Ordained Minister.

The purpose of the interview is to help the Committee consider and examine the following:

- Does the person faithfully meet all of the current requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing as established by the Association? How does the person demonstrate continuing growth related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers?
- Does the person have a realistic understanding of the specialized ministry field they seek to enter?
- Is the person adequately grounded in their spiritual habits, theological formation, and commitment to the values of the United Church of Christ?
- Can the person function in a ministry setting that is culturally, theologically, and denominationally diverse? Has the person demonstrated capacity to work collegially in a team ministry?

- Will the person be an effective, faithful, and respected representative of the United Church of Christ in their particular ministry field?

Additional questions that the Committee may explore with the Ordained Minister include:

- What is your understanding of the particular goals of this ministry, and why are those goals important to you?
- How do you understand this type of ministry in terms of your career in ministry?
- How will you continue to be a part of the United Church of Christ and participate in its ongoing life? How do you understand yourself as a representative of the United Church of Christ in this ministry setting?
- What is the distinctiveness of your ministry in this field?

Following the interview, the Committee on Ministry prayerfully makes its decision whether to endorse the Ordained Minister, and communicates its decision to the minister and to the Endorsement Office. Granting ecclesiastical endorsement is an act of the Committee on Ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

#### **4. Endorsement:**

If the decision to endorse is affirmative, the Committee sends all original application documentation along with its Letter of Endorsement<sup>75</sup> to the Endorsement Office. Once the documentation and Letter of Endorsement are reviewed for completion, the Endorsement Office stamps the denominational seal on the Letter of Endorsement and the Letter is forwarded to the proper professional organization.

The Ordained Minister's original documents and a copy of the stamped Letter of Endorsement are returned to the Committee on Ministry to be maintained in the ministerial file. Some materials from the application may be appropriate to return to the

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<sup>75</sup> See Section 3 for Letter of Endorsement templates.

Ordained Minister, as determined by the Committee on Ministry. At a minimum, the Committee on Ministry retains a copy of the stamped Letter of Endorsement for the ministerial file. The Endorsement Office also retains a copy of the stamped Letter of Endorsement for its records.

UCC professional endorsement is required to apply for, but does not guarantee, certification by a professional agency. An endorsed Ordained Minister is responsible for completing any continued requirements as set forth by the professional agency.

Those Ordained Ministers who have been granted endorsement to professional agencies and are seeking certification should be mindful that the stamped Letter of Endorsement has a one-year lifespan from the date of its stamp. If the certification process continues beyond one year, the Ordained Minister may request an extension from the Committee on Ministry for the lifespan of the Letter of Endorsement. Recently expired Letters of Endorsement may be reissued with the updated date and updated signatures, again with a lifespan of one year. The UCC Endorsement Office recommends no more than two reissues of expired Letters of Endorsement (for a total of three years), after which time the Committee should require the Ordained Minister to meet with the Committee on Ministry to discern appropriate next steps, which may include the discontinuation of support for professional endorsement or the re-initiation of the professional endorsement process.

An endorsed Ordained Minister and their Committee on Ministry maintain an ongoing ecclesial relationship of oversight and support, which can be clarified using a Four-Way Covenant. An endorsed Ordained Minister continues to be subject to all of the requirements of ministerial standing (such as boundary awareness training and continuing education) and oversight processes with the Committee on Ministry in the Association where their standing is held. Likewise the Ordained Minister and the Local Church of their membership remain intentional in their relationship. The Ordained Minister keeps both the Committee on Ministry and the

Endorsement Office informed of any pertinent updates about their ministries and of changes to their contact information; the annual Information Review can be completed to serve this purpose.

If at any time an endorsed chaplain is subject to a fitness review, the Endorsement Office is notified immediately; if an endorsed chaplain's ministerial standing is terminated or resigned, their ecclesiastical endorsement is terminated concurrently. The Endorsement Office notifies the affected professional agency.

### **5. Continuation of Endorsement:**

The United Church of Christ requires that Ordained Ministers who have been granted ecclesiastical endorsement and are certified by professional agencies must apply to their Committees on Ministry every five years for a Letter of Continued Endorsement.<sup>76</sup> Professional agencies may require a Letter of Continued Endorsement more frequently. To apply for a Letter of Continued Endorsement, the Continuing Endorsement Application Form must be submitted to the Committee on Ministry along with the following materials:

- letter from the governing board of the Local Church of membership, verifying the Ordained Minister's ongoing participation in a Local Church life; this letter is to be no more than one year old;
- at least one letter of reference, preferably from a peer or supervisor in their ministry setting),<sup>77</sup>
- copy of Three- or Four-Way Covenant from current ministry setting (if applicable).

The application is submitted to the Committee on Ministry, which reflects on the documentation and meets with the endorsed Ordained Minister.<sup>78</sup> Updated contact information is also shared

<sup>76</sup> See Section 3 for Letter of Continued Endorsement templates and Continued Endorsement Application Form.

<sup>77</sup> Signatures on all letters submitted with the application must be written in blue ink, so that original signatures are easily verified.

<sup>78</sup> When geographic distance and/or employment prohibits an endorsed Ordained Minister from meeting in person with the Committee on Ministry, flexibility and the use of technology are encouraged to arrange a meeting.

during the application process, and the UCC Data Hub is updated accordingly. If the Committee on Ministry grants the continuation of ecclesiastical endorsement, the Letter of Continued Endorsement is sent to the Endorsement Office of the National Setting for review and stamping.

### **LOCAL ENDORSEMENT**

**E**cclesiastical endorsement may be requested or required by a local organization—such as a hospital, state prison, city fire department, etc.—to verify an Ordained Minister’s capacity and capability to serve faithfully and effectively in that particular setting on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Endorsement to a local organization that does not require certification by a professional agency follows the same application process for professional endorsement, minus the relationship with and reporting to the UCC Endorsement Office. The Committee on Ministry considers the application for endorsement on behalf of its Association only, and only to that specific local organization. A copy of the endorsement letter is added to the ministerial file.