

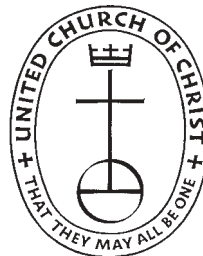
Commissioned Ministry

Section 6 of 10

United Church of Christ

MANUAL ON MINISTRY

Perspectives and Procedures for
Ecclesiastical Authorization of Ministry



Parish Life and Leadership Ministry
Local Church Ministries
A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ

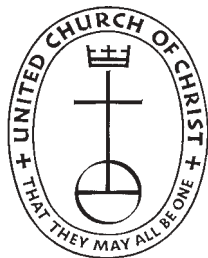
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Perspectives and Procedures for Ecclesiastical Authorization of Ministry

Manual on Ministry is published in ten separate sections or booklets. Each section is available separately or as part of the complete *Manual* that includes all ten sections in a single binder. The ten sections are:

1. Partners in Authorizing Ministry

An overview of the covenantal relationships and underlying assumptions about authorized ministry, including the ministerial codes.

2. Student in Care of Association

Commentary, processes, and procedures for those preparing to enter the Ordained Ministry of the United Church of Christ.

3. Ordained Ministry

Commentary, processes, and procedures for Ordained Ministry, including Ordained Ministerial Standing.

4. Dual Standing and Privilege of Call

Commentary, processes, and procedures for those ordained ministers of denominations other than the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who seek to serve in the United Church of Christ or who seek to enter the Ordained Ministry of the United Church of Christ. Ordained ministers of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) should see section 5, "Ordained Ministerial Partner."

5. Ordained Ministerial Partner

Commentary, processes, and procedures related to the reconciliation of ministries with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

6. Commissioned Ministry

Commentary, processes, and procedures for Commissioned Ministry, including Commissioned Ministerial Standing.

7. Licensed Ministry

Commentary, processes, and procedures for Licensed Ministry.

8. The Oversight of Ministries Authorized by the United Church of Christ

Commentary, processes, and procedures for the nurture and accountability of the ministries of the Church.

9. Ecclesiastical Endorsement

Commentary, processes, and procedures for those seeking to serve as chaplains in professional organizations and military or other U.S. government agencies.

10. Supplemental Materials

Commentary, appendices, and a glossary related to multiple sections of *Manual on Ministry*.

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CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISIONS

20. The United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls the whole church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the gospel in church and society. The United Church of Christ seeks to undergird the ministry of its members by nurturing faith, calling forth gifts, and equipping members for Christian service.

21. The United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls certain of its members to various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the church for which ecclesiastical authorization is required. Recognizing God's call, the ecclesiastical authorization is granted by an Association through the rite of ordination, through commissioning, licensing, granting either ordained ministerial standing or ordained ministerial partner standing and other acts of authorization.

27. Commissioning is the act whereby the United Church of Christ, through an Association, in cooperation with a person and a local church of the United Church of Christ, recognizes and authorizes that member whom God has called to a specific church-related ministry that is recognized by that Association, but not requiring ordination or licensing. By this act, the status of Commissioned Minister is conferred and authorization granted to perform duties necessary to and for the specific ministry, and voting membership in that Association is granted.

28. A Commissioned Minister in the United Church of Christ is one of its lay members who has been called by God and commissioned for a specific church-related ministry.

BYLAW PROVISIONS

144. A person seeking initial recognition and authorization as a commissioned minister applies through his or her local church to the Association of which that church is a member.

145. The Committees on the Ministry of the Conference and Association cooperate in examining the applicant with respect to Christian faith, character, ability to do the work expected, and as to education and training to meet the responsibilities of the office to be filled, and make their recommendation of fitness to the Association. If upon acceptance of the recommendation or upon further examination and decision by the Association itself, the applicant is found to be qualified, commissioning thereby is authorized.

146. A certificate designating the applicant as Commissioned Minister is issued bearing the signatures of proper officers of the Association and the General Minister and President.

147. A Commissioned Minister is listed separately from Ordained Ministers and from Licensed Ministers on the rolls of the Association that has commissioned him or her. A Commissioned Minister is eligible for service only in the category of laymen or laywomen for all positions referred to in the Bylaws.

148. A Commissioned Minister moving from the bounds of one Association to another and who continues in the same specific church-related ministry applies for a transfer of the commission to the new Association.

149. A Commissioned Minister seeking to be commissioned for a new or different church-related ministry applies to the Association for commissioning for the new ministry.

150. A Commissioned Minister who ceases to function in the specific church-related ministry to which he or she was commissioned resigns the commission or applies to the Association for leave of absence. Leave of absence is granted for one year at a time but not more than three consecutive years.

155. The discipline of Ordained Ministers, persons with ordained ministerial partner standing, Commissioned Ministers, and Licensed Ministers is the responsibility of the Association in which their current ecclesiastical authorization is held.

156. All authorizations for ordained ministerial standing, for ordained ministerial partner standing, and for commissioned and licensed ministry granted by an Association are subject to periodic review by that Association.

INTRODUCTION

Commissioned ministry is a form of ministry in the United Church of Christ created by the adoption of the 1983–1984 amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ. While replacing the category of commissioned worker, commissioned ministry continues this form of ministry but establishes a more comprehensive set of requirements and standards for it. Persons are commissioned “to a specific church-related ministry” and not to commissioned ministry in general.

Throughout this *Manual on Ministry*, the term, “form of ministry,” is used to designate one of the following: ordained, commissioned, or licensed ministry. The term, “type,” is used to make distinctions within a form of ministry. Thus, commissioned ministry is a form of ministry, and Christian education is a specific type of commissioned ministry.

With the provision for commissioned ministers in the United Church of Christ, it is necessary for each Association to develop its own policies and procedures for administering this form of ministry, taking into consideration the norms and practices prevailing throughout the United Church of Christ. It will take some time for these norms and practices to evolve, and there is a need, therefore, for Associations to share their experiences and learn from one another in establishing this form of ministry.

The Association will have several kinds of decisions to make in relation to commissioned ministry. What follows in this section of the *Manual* is intended to give guidance in identifying and making these decisions.

The first task of an Association is to determine the need for commissioned ministers in the Association and what specific church-related ministries fall within the category of commissioned ministry. The following principles or criteria will help Associations to make these determinations:

- The Constitution specifies that commissioned ministry is a ministry that does not require ordination or licensing.
- It is vocational ministry. Thus, there is a sense of call to the ministry and, in most cases, it is a position for which there is remuneration.
- It is a church-related ministry. In most cases, therefore, it will be a ministry carried out in and on behalf of a local church, an Association or Conference, or an agency or institution of the Church.
- It is a church-related ministry that is recognized by that Association. Thus, the Association makes the determination of whether or not the specific church-related ministry meets the criteria for commissioned ministry.
- It is a ministry in which the Church, represented by the Association, has an interest and investment. The Association has a stake in ensuring that the person who undertakes the ministry meets the Association's criteria or preparation and fitness for that particular ministry.
- It is a ministry that requires a special body of knowledge and skills that persons must acquire in order to qualify for the ministry.
- It is a ministry that the calling body desires a commissioned minister to carry out.

It is recommended that Associations develop a listing of the specific church-related ministries that qualify as commissioned ministries. This list may contain the following:

- Christian education.
- Church administration.
- Church music.
- Parish work.
- Missionary work related to the United Church of Christ.
- Conference and denominational staff work.
- Ecumenical staff work.
- Certain ministries of advocacy or community change (e.g., peace, justice, etc.) related to institutions, organizations, agencies, or communities that serve as calling bodies.

The second task of an Association is to develop the educational and ability qualifications required of commissioned ministers. This task has two parts.

First, there are the qualifications required of all commissioned ministers, regardless of the type of specific church-related ministry for which they seek to serve. The Committee may utilize the section on "knowledge and skills" in "The Church's Expectations of Its Candidates for Commissioned Ministry," found following the Commissioned Ministry Chart.

These qualifications will include:

- a bachelor's degree or its equivalent.
- basic knowledge about the Bible, theology, church history, and United Church of Christ history, polity, and practice.

This could be demonstrated through courses taken in a college or seminary. Or, an Association could develop a basic reading and study program in these areas with an examination given at the conclusion of the program.

- basic skills in working with persons and groups, in administration, planning, organizing, and so on. These could be documented through information provided by references who have observed the applicant in settings where these skills were demonstrated.

Second, for each type of specific church-related commissioned ministry, the Association will need to evolve a minimal set of educational qualifications and abilities that candidates must have for commissioning to these specific ministries. For example, Associations will develop distinct educational and ability requirements for those seeking to be commissioned in Christian education, church administration, church music, and so on.

Associations are encouraged to call on specialists in each particular type of ministry to help them determine the educational and ability requirements for that type of ministry. Many seminaries offer Master of Arts or similar programs for some types of commissioned ministries (e.g., Christian education) and could be consulted in the establishment of educational and ability requirements. Certain professional organizations have membership requirements that reflect careful attention to educational achievement and demonstrated ability within their members.

As Associations within the United Church of Christ gain experience in evolving criteria and making judgments in the commissioning process, these experiences can be shared and denomination-wide norms developed.

The third task of an Association is to determine which specific positions within a specific type of church-related ministry to which persons may be called meet the Association's requirements for commissioned ministry. For example, a type of commissioned ministry recognized by the Association may be Christian education. A person may then receive a call to the position of "director of Christian education" at St. Paul United Church of Christ. The Association must decide whether the position at St. Paul's meets its requirements for commissioned ministry. Thus, there is always a two-fold decision: first, regarding the type of commissioned ministry (Christian education), and second, regarding the specific position within the specific church-related ministry (director of Christian education at St. Paul United Church of Christ).

The fourth task of the Association has to do with decisions about the preparedness and fitness of persons for commissioned ministry. The person is required to have the requisite education and training or its equivalent for the specific type of ministry being considered. For example, Christian educator and church musician have different educational and skill requirements.

“The Church’s Expectations of Its Candidates for Commissioned Ministry,” found at the conclusion of the Commissioned Ministry Chart, provides the basis for establishing the educational and personal qualifications for all types of commissioned ministries. It should be noted that it follows the same format as the comparable section in the Ordained Minister Chart and carries many of the same expectations for commissioned ministers as for ordained ministers, particularly in terms of faith affirmations, church loyalty, and personal qualities. The Church values these similarly in all of its persons authorized for ministry.

The major distinctions between the qualifications of ordained ministers and commissioned ministers are in the area of knowledge and skills. While ordained ministers are expected to have completed degree work and have considerable competence in the broad range of the study and skill areas identified, commissioned ministers are expected to have familiarity with and a working knowledge of these areas. However, commissioned ministers are to have completed degree work or in other ways give evidence of the mastery of the theory and practice of the specific type of commissioned ministry for which they are preparing.

Association Committees on the Ministry are cautioned against automatically commissioning persons because they are already in a position that qualifies as a commissioned ministry. To be commissioned, a person must meet the educational and ability requirements established by the Association, which may not necessarily be present simply because the person is presently carrying out some of the functions of commissioned ministry. In addition, the specific position needs to be evaluated to ensure that it qualifies as a valid position for commissioned ministry.

As an Association initially goes about establishing its policies and procedures for commissioned ministry, it will need to consult its own governing documents for guidance. In addition, since the recommended policies and procedures for commissioned ministry are parallel at many points with those for ordained ministry, an Association may want to consult its ordination policies and procedures for guidance in setting up its commissioning policies and procedures.

Following are recommended policies and procedures for commissioned ministry which each Association will need to adopt or modify to meet its own unique needs and situation.

PERSON AND LOCAL CHURCH

Behind these initial steps in the authorization process is the conviction that local churches are among the primary places where persons are nurtured in the Christian faith, hear the call of God to ministry, and make decisions about the specific forms their ministries will take. While some will hear the call to a ministry requiring commissioning, others will hear a call to a ministry requiring ordination or licensing.

Pastors and lay leaders of local churches play an important role in helping members identify and claim their gifts for and call to ministry and in help-

COMMENTARY

STEPS 1–5

ing members to make the decisions to prepare for and seek a specific church-related ministry. While supporting members as they grapple with decisions about ministry, pastors and lay leaders should educate members about the nature of the ministry of all Christians and about the ministry of some, including ordained and licensed ministry as well as commissioned ministry.

Pastors and lay leaders challenge, encourage, and support some persons toward commissioned ministry because these leaders discern the gifts and potential of the person for this form of ministry. But pastors and lay leaders also may discourage some other persons because they do not discern within these persons the necessary gifts and potential for commissioned ministry. Or, the ministry to which these persons feel called is not one requiring commissioning, as determined by the Association. These leaders also may decide that these persons should be encouraged to pursue other forms of ministry.

This *Manual* calls for a deliberative process in which a committee, consisting of the pastor and representatives of the local church, sits down with the member to explore the person's decision to seek commissioning. This committee then determines if the local church and pastor will recommend the person to the Association to become a candidate for commissioning. The local church will need to decide on the appropriate group to represent it in these conversations—governing board, deacons, consistory, church and ministry committee, or others.

It is recommended that the pastor or a lay leader of the local church notify the Association Committee on the Ministry that one of the members of this local church is considering applying to become a candidate for commissioning and request any guidance the Committee on the Ministry can give in preparing the application.

In preparation for the meeting with the local church committee, the person prepares and provides to the committee certain specified written materials. (See step 3 in the Commissioned Ministry Chart.) Included in this material will be a narrative account of the person's life-pilgrimage, with a description of the persons and experiences that have contributed to the person's sense of call to commissioned ministry, a description of how the call is understood at this time, and a description of the type of commissioned ministry in which the person is interested. Also, the person will provide documentation of her or his formal education or educational experience and the preliminary educational plans the person has made to further prepare for commissioned ministry.

During the interview, the local church committee will explore some or all of the following with the person:

- The person's history with the local church and level of participation. How has the person's experience in the local church, as well as in other settings of the Church, contributed to her or his sense of call to commissioned ministry? How has her or his participation in the local church given evidence that this person has the gifts and maturity necessary for commissioned ministry? If the person is a relatively new member or has had very minimal par-

ticipation in the life of the local church, the committee will want to explore carefully the factors that have contributed to the person's sense of call and the person's understanding of the Church and the responsibilities of church membership.

- The person's understanding of commissioned ministry. Does the person have a realistic view of commissioned ministry and the Church's expectations of persons in the particular type of commissioned ministry in which the person is interested? Is another form of ministry more suited to the person's gifts and interests?
- The requirements of persons in this type of commissioned ministry. Does the person have the educational qualifications and abilities necessary to function effectively in the type of commissioned ministry in which he or she is interested, or does he or she have realistic plans for acquiring the education and abilities?

The committee and pastor, on behalf of the local church, then decide whether or not to recommend the person to the Association to become a candidate for commissioning. If the church has reservations about the person's fitness for this form of ministry, it will be important to share these with both the person and the Association Committee on the Ministry at the time the recommendation is made.

If the recommendation is to be made, the local church accompanies its letter of recommendation to the Association Committee on the Ministry with the following documentation, some of which it secures from the person:

- a letter of application from the person to the Association to be received as a candidate for commissioning, including the specific type of church-related ministry for which the person desires to be commissioned.
- three letters of reference, including one from a pastor of that local church.
- the background material the person provided to the local church committee, revised if necessary, including the person's life-pilgrimage, understanding of call, and formal education.
- a description of the process used by the local church to interview and recommend the person.

INITIAL PROCESSING BY THE ASSOCIATION COMMITTEE ON THE MINISTRY

The first decision of the Committee on the Ministry is whether or not the church-related ministry for which the applicant desires to prepare (e.g., Christian education) is one that the Association has recognized or can recognize as one requiring commissioning. Using its overall criteria and considering the specifics of the church-related ministry being proposed by the person, it makes its decision.

If it has recognized the church-related ministry, the Committee then needs to develop a clear understanding of the educational and ability require-

STEPS 6-7

ments it expects of commissioned ministers in this type of ministry. If these requirements have previously been determined, it can proceed to the next step. If these requirements have not yet been determined, it will need to set in motion the steps to accomplish this before moving to the next step. (See the introduction to this section for suggestions on developing the educational and ability requirements for specific types of commissioned ministries.)

If the Association Committee on the Ministry recognizes the specific church-related ministry and has determined its educational and ability requirements for the ministry, it then considers the person for this ministry. Using the documentation provided by the person and the local church to inform its decision, it determines whether or not to proceed with the request. In most cases, the decision to proceed is made if the documentation provided is complete and provides a basis for an interview with the person.

If the Committee decides to proceed, it notifies the person and his or her local church and sets a date to interview the person and shares with him or her a description of how the interview will be conducted. It is recommended that the person be accompanied at the interview by his or her pastor or a lay leader from the local church.

Throughout the interview, the Committee on the Ministry is seeking to determine the person's fitness, aptitudes, Christian experience, and commitment as a basis for preparing for commissioning. The Committee on the Ministry may wish to utilize "The Church's Expectations of Its Candidates for Commissioned Ministry," found following the Commissioned Ministry Chart.

A sample interview agenda follows:

- Introduction of the person, representatives of the local church, members of the Committee on the Ministry, and any others who may be present.
- A time of prayer or worship.
- A statement about the purpose of the meeting and preview of the agenda.
- A statement by the pastor or lay leader about the person, including information about the person's history with and involvement in the local church, the process the local church went through to recommend the person to the Association, and the rationale for the local church's recommendation.
- A statement by the person that includes sharing of his or her life-pilgrimage, those factors that have led to the decision to seek commissioning, and plans for preparing for commissioned ministry.
- Discussion by the Committee with the person about questions or issues raised by the person's statement or by any of the written materials provided by the person.
- Description and interpretation by the Committee of its requirements for commissioned ministry and its expectations of candi-

dates for commissioning. The Committee will explore with the person the additional education and training it will require if he or she is accepted as a candidate for commissioning.

If the person has some educational background or work experience in an area related to the specific type of church-related ministry or if the person is presently functioning in a church-related position, the Committee may outline a process by which the person's education, experience, and ability can be evaluated before it prescribes the specifics of the additional requirements it will expect the person to meet. For example, the Committee could appoint a person or a team of persons to design a comprehensive examination for the candidate to take or observe the candidate's work for a period of time and then recommend to the Committee what additional preparation should be prescribed.

If this additional assessment step is taken, the interview will need to be delayed until this step is complete.

- Closure, including a statement by the Committee to the person about next steps.

Following the interview, the Committee on the Ministry deliberates and makes its decision. At this point, it is making a decision about the person's potential fitness for commissioned ministry. Is there a reasonable expectation that with the proper preparation the person can meet the requirements for commissioning and can function as a commissioned minister in the United Church of Christ?

The decision may take one of several forms:

- "Yes." The Committee senses that this is a person with gifts for commissioned ministry, an authentic call to ministry, and the ability and determination to meet the requirements for commissioning.
- "Yes, but . . ." The Committee senses that the applicant may have potential for commissioned ministry, but it has certain reservations or concerns that must be addressed. These may have to do with a perceived lack of maturity in the person, a deficient understanding of ministry, questions about the person's ability to secure the necessary educational credentials, and so on. In this case, the Committee will need to share its reservations with the applicant and determine together steps to be taken to address these reservations and checkpoints along the way to reassess them. The decision to accept the applicant as a candidate for commissioning is postponed until these steps are complete.
- "No, but . . ." The Committee may feel that, at this time, it is not able to make a positive decision to approve the applicant as a candidate for commissioning. However, it could indicate its openness to consider the request at a later time if the person is able to address the identified deficiencies and wishes to make application again.

- “No.” In some cases, a Committee may need to say no to a person. This is not a decision that can be made lightly or without considerable deliberation. But in cases where it is clear that the applicant does not have the gifts for commissioned ministry, is not authentic in his or her intentions, exhibits obvious immaturity or emotional problems, or does not give evidence of openness to the Committee’s requirements, the Committee can express its caring for the person and for the Church by denying the request.

In making its decision, the Committee on the Ministry needs to keep in mind that it is making a decision about entering into a preparation process with the person. It is not deciding at this point to commission the person. On the one hand, this means that its concern is not the present fitness and preparation of the person but the potential fitness of the person and his or her prospect for completing the preparation for commissioned ministry. On the other hand, this means it is committing itself to provide responsible guidance and support during the period of preparation so that the person has every opportunity to develop the potential that is there. The Committee on the Ministry communicates its decision to the applicant and the applicant’s local church. When the decision is not to proceed with the person, the Committee on the Ministry should ensure that there is pastoral follow-up with and concern expressed for the person and his or her local church. When the decision is to proceed, the Committee outlines the program of preparation it expects the person to undertake, the procedures to be followed during the preparation period, and the materials to be provided to the Committee at the conclusion of the preparation period. These could vary widely from candidate to candidate; depending on the different qualifications each has at the beginning of the process. Associations may want to pattern this period of preparation for some candidates after the in care process used with students preparing for ordained ministry.

STEP 8

THE ROLE OF THE ADVISOR

The Committee on the Ministry appoints an advisor for the candidate to assist him or her through the program of preparation. Advisors to candidates for commissioning may be clergy or lay members of the Association. In some cases, the advisor will be a member of the Committee on the Ministry who has familiarity with the Committee’s policies and procedures. Or, the advisor could be a commissioned minister in the Association. The advisor should have a working knowledge of the requirements and procedures for commissioning and of the particular type of ministry for which the person is preparing.

The advisor assists the candidate in completing the program of education and training and in preparing the materials for the Committee. This may involve some tutoring of the person, recommending study and resource materials, and interpreting the Association’s commissioning process. Through this process, the advisor is getting to know the candidate so that the advisor can also provide relevant data to the Committee on the Ministry when it subsequently considers the candidate’s request for commissioning.

Following is a checklist of functions and activities of the advisor:

- Hold an initial meeting with the candidate soon after he or she is assigned. Review the expectations, requirements, and procedures of the preparation period and develop an understanding of how the advisor and candidate will relate and work together.
- Ensure that the candidate maintains active participation in the life of a local church of the United Church of Christ.
- See that the candidate is acquainted and provided with appropriate publications of the Conference, Association, and national agencies of the United Church of Christ.
- Encourage the candidate to take an active part in Association and Conference activities.
- Keep in close contact with the candidate through regular telephone calls and meetings.
- Hold an annual assessment meeting with the candidate to review educational progress, growth, goals, and needs.
- Submit an annual written report to the Association Committee on the Ministry, keeping it informed about the progress and growth of the candidate.
- Accompany the candidate each time she or he meets with the Committee on the Ministry.
- Provide an opportunity for the candidate to raise and explore questions about faith, the Church, ministry, and so on.
- Assist the candidate to find or develop the necessary educational experiences to meet the educational requirements of the Association.
- Advise the candidate regarding the preparation of the required materials to be provided to the Association Committee on the Ministry, particularly those to be provided for use during the commissioning examination.
- Provide written references on behalf of the candidate when requested.
- Assist the candidate and the Committee on the Ministry in preparation for the ecclesiastical council—an official meeting of an Association to authorize a person for a specific form of ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.
- Provide assistance to the Association and the candidate in planning the commissioning service.

PREPARATION AND DOCUMENTATION

The candidate engages in the prescribed program of education and training to meet the requirements of the Association Committee on the Ministry. This is an educational program that may require a considerable period of time to complete. Toward the conclusion of this preparation, the candi-

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date begins the preparation and gathering of the prescribed materials to be submitted to the Committee for background and use in the commissioning examination.

Materials to be developed and provided to the Committee are outlined in step 10 of the Commissioned Ministry Chart. They include:

- A commissioning paper that will be developed in three parts. Part one is the candidate's theological perspective. This paper is to be seen as a setting forth of one's own theological perspective, not as an academic term paper. There are many ways in which a candidate could go about writing this paper. One way would be to state what one believes in the context of or in relation to the United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, or in the context of, or in relation to, paragraph 2 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ. The purpose of part one of the commissioning paper is to provide a way for the candidate to share her or his present grasp and understanding of the teachings and traditions of the Christian Church and relate this to her or his own theological perspective.

Part two of the commissioning paper is intended to provide an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate his or her knowledge and understanding of the history, theological roots, polity, and practice of the United Church of Christ. The student could write an interpretation of the history and theological roots of the United Church of Christ, referring to and commenting on key dates, persons, events, and documents that illustrate his or her interpretation. In addressing the polity and practice issues, the candidate could identify and define some key words and use them to characterize the polity and practice of the United Church of Christ (e.g., covenant, unity, autonomy, congregational, etc.). The candidate then could illustrate how these understandings make claims on the way he or she will practice ministry as a commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ. Another approach would be to write an interpretation of paragraphs 6, 9, 16, 17, and 18 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

Part three of the commissioning paper is intended to be an integrating statement that invites the candidate to relate the faith and practice of the Church to her or his own pilgrimage of faith and understandings of and intention for her or his ministry as a person commissioned by the United Church of Christ. Following are suggestions for subject matter for part three of the commissioning paper:

- a. The person as a person of faith. What has been your faith pilgrimage? How has your understanding of yourself as a person of faith changed and grown during the time of preparation for ministry?
- b. The person as one called to commissioned ministry. How has your understanding of call changed or grown during the period of preparation? What is your understanding of

commissioning? church? mission? ministry? What is the challenge and vision you have for your ministry?

- c. The person as one called to a particular type of commissioned ministry. Describe how you see yourself functioning in the type of ministry and setting for ministry for which you have been preparing.
 - d. The person as one called to commissioned ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. How do you understand yourself as a commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ? What are your commitments to the United Church of Christ and the Church Ecumenical? What are those aspects of the history, tradition, polity, and practice of the United Church of Christ that are most valued by you, and how will these shape the way you engage in the tasks of commissioned ministry?
- Certification of educational attainment, including the education and training program specified previously by the Association Committee on the Ministry and completed by the candidate. It is recommended that all candidates for commissioning have minimally a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. In terms of certification of the person's educational attainments, it is important for the Committee to have the candidate secure and provide transcripts of the candidate's courses and grades and for the Committee to see diplomas. Subsequent to this certification, the United Church of Christ ecclesiastical system will assume that the information about the person's education is accurate and has been documented by the Association. This information will not necessarily be verified again.
 - Documentation of ability, skills, knowledge, and training required for the specific type of church-related ministry. This will include both formal education and training experiences, as well as the skills and knowledge gained through life experiences and any volunteer work done by the candidate.

If a candidate presents credentials from a professional association in the field in which the candidate has been preparing, it will be necessary for the Committee on the Ministry to secure information about what the credentials from an organization or agency indicate about the person's preparedness for the particular type of commissioned ministry.

- Four letters of reference. One is to be from the advisor appointed by the Committee and one from a person knowledgeable about the candidate's educational preparation. If possible, one should be from a commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ. The references should be asked to speak directly to the question of the candidate's preparedness and fitness for commissioned ministry.
- A Ministerial Profile. This is the resource used in the United Church of Christ for persons seeking a ministry position. The profile is

kept on file and circulated by the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team. It is another source of information for the Committee on the Ministry. The presence of an active profile underscores that the person seeking to be commissioned is seriously seeking a position as a commissioned minister in the United Church of Christ.

STEP 11

CONSIDERATION OF THE DOCUMENTATION

When all of the requested materials are prepared, they are forwarded to the Association Committee on the Ministry. The Committee meets with the candidate's advisor to review the materials and hear the advisor's report. The Committee then decides whether or not to continue the process by examining the candidate. In most cases, the decision to proceed is made if the documentation provided is complete and provides a basis for an examination of the candidate. If the necessary materials are not complete or are unsatisfactory, the Committee may request further documentation from the candidate before proceeding.

As the Committee reviews the material, it will decide the key issues to be explored and the questions to be raised with the candidate. Next, it will develop a procedure for examining the candidate. The Committee will then notify the candidate and the candidate's local church of its decision to examine the candidate. It sets a date to meet with the candidate and shares with the candidate a description of how the examination will be conducted. It is recommended that the candidate's advisor be present for the examination. A representative of the candidate's local church also may be present.

STEP 12

COMMISSIONING EXAMINATION

The purpose of the commissioning examination is to determine the preparedness and fitness of the candidate for commissioning in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Throughout the examination and the decision-making process, the Committee on the Ministry is aware that it is making a decision for the entire United Church of Christ.

A sample outline of the commissioning examination follows:

- Introduction of the candidate, the advisor, each member of the Committee on the Ministry, and any others who may be present.
- A time of prayer or worship.
- Preview of the agenda and procedure to be used in the examination.
- A statement by the advisor reviewing the period of preparation and his or her perceptions of the candidate based on that experience.
- A statement by the candidate about his or her pilgrimage during the period of preparation and his or her present sense of call to commissioned ministry.
- A statement by the candidate about the type of call being sought (e.g., Christian education, church administration, church music,

etc.) or information about the terms of call if one is being considered or has been extended.

- Discussion by the Committee with the candidate about questions or issues raised by the candidate's statement or by any of the documentation provided by the candidate.
- Closure, including a statement by the Committee to the candidate about next steps.

The Committee's task in the examination is to satisfy itself that the candidate is prepared for and can faithfully and effectively carry out the responsibilities of commissioned ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

The items on which the candidate is to be examined outlined in step 12 on the Commissioned Ministry Chart represent the provisions of Bylaw 145 of the United Church of Christ. "The Church's Expectations of Its Candidates for Commissioned Ministry," found at the conclusion of the chart represent in a concise manner the expectations that the United Church of Christ has of its commissioned ministers.

In conducting its examination, the Committee on the Ministry will be alert to both tangible and intangible evidences of the candidate's fitness for commissioned ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. It will recognize that fitness is more than having attained the educational qualifications. Below are samples of questions that may enable the Committee to inquire into the substance of the candidate's fitness for commissioned ministry.

- Faith and Calling. Is this a person of mature Christian faith? Does this person have a personal spiritual life and practice that can sustain her or him in the rigors of commissioned ministry? Does this person understand the meaning of call to ministry and does the person give evidence of an authentic call to commissioned ministry? Can this person clearly articulate her or his theological perspective?
- Church Loyalty and Commitment. How does this person understand the polity and practice of the United Church of Christ and the role and expectations of a commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ? Is this person committed to the United Church of Christ? Will this person be a respected representative of the United Church of Christ, and what are his or her ecumenical understandings and commitments?
- Knowledge and Skills. Does this person have a general liberal arts education and give evidence of being an educated person? Does this person have an adequate understanding of the Bible, theology, Church history, and United Church of Christ history? Does this person have mastery of the theory and practice of the field in which commissioning is being sought? (If the person is seeking commissioning for a specific type of church-related ministry about which there is only limited familiarity within the Committee on the Ministry, the Committee could invite a specialist from the field

to join it for the interview to pursue the person's knowledge and skill in the specific ministry.) Can this person do the work of a commissioned minister?

- **Character and Personal Qualities.** Is this a mature person with a sense of integrity? Is this a person that others will be able to trust and rely on? Will this person be dependable? Will he or she continue to grow?
- **Type of Ministry.** Does this person have a realistic understanding of the expectations, requirements, and demands of the type of commissioned ministry being sought? For what type or types of commissioned ministry is this person to be approved?

An effective way to inquire into these matters is to pose situations or present case studies for the candidate to analyze. Then the candidate could describe how she or he would approach or respond to the situations or cases.

It may be helpful during the examination to have the candidate reflect on and comment on the commissioning vows to be made during the commissioning service.

After the candidate and any guests have been dismissed, the Committee deliberates and makes its decision. In considering its decision, the Committee reflects on all of the data that it has gathered during step 10 and from the examination in step 12. This decision by the Committee is one of its most significant and has direct bearing on the quality of commissioned ministry of the United Church of Christ.

Options before the Committee include:

- **"Yes."** The Committee believes that the candidate meets the requirements for commissioning within the United Church of Christ and for the specific type of church-related ministry for which she or he is to be commissioned and, in the Committee's judgment, will be an effective and faithful commissioned minister. This decision is contingent on the candidate's securing a call to an approved commissioned ministry position and successful completion of steps 13–17 in the Commissioned Ministry Chart.

If the candidate already has received a call contingent on commissioning, the Committee will review the terms of the call with the candidate. (See step 16 for details of this procedure.) If the call is to a body other than a local church, the Committee will explore with the candidate plans for the four-way covenant-making meeting. (See step 17 for details of this procedure.)

- **"Yes, but . . ."** The Committee believes that the candidate has the potential for commissioned ministry, but it has certain reservations or concerns that must be addressed. The Committee may want to stipulate additional requirements of the candidate before making its final decision. It will be clear with the candidate what additionally needs to be done in preparation for a subsequent examination and decision.

- “No, but . . .” The Committee believes that, at this time, significant qualifications for commission in the United Church of Christ are lacking. It may indicate under what terms and conditions it would consider the person’s application again.
- “No.” In some cases the Committee may have to say no to a candidate if, in its judgment, the candidate has not fulfilled and cannot fulfill in the foreseeable future the requirements for commissioning or will not be an effective and faithful commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ. It may specify the conditions under which it would consider an application from the person to become a candidate for commissioning at some time in the future.

The Committee informs the candidate and the candidate’s local church of its decision. If the Committee’s decision is to approve the candidate, it consults with the candidate to decide together when to convene an ecclesiastical council. The ecclesiastical council may be scheduled as soon as possible, or it may not be scheduled until the candidate has received a call to a commissioned ministry position recognized by the Association.

Each Association must determine its policy regarding whether a person is a “candidate approved for commissioning pending an approved call” upon the decision by the Association Committee on the Ministry or upon the decision by the Association ecclesiastical council. It may want to keep this policy consistent with the policy regarding candidates for ordination. When a candidate has been approved for commissioning, this information should be forwarded to the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team so that this qualification can be noted on the candidate’s Ministerial Profile.

In either event, authorization for the commissioning service is withheld until the candidate has an approved call to a commissioned ministry position recognized by the Association.

ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL

When a candidate has successfully completed the commissioning examination by the Association Committee on the Ministry, the next step in the approval process is an Association ecclesiastical council. Depending on the Association’s policy, the ecclesiastical council could be held before or following the point at which the candidate has received a call to a commissioned ministry position recognized by the Association.

The Association Committee on the Ministry arranges for an official meeting of an ecclesiastical council and decides with the candidate what type of presentation the candidate will make to the ecclesiastical council and how all or a portion of the candidate’s commissioning paper will be made available to the delegates to the ecclesiastical council.

Ideally, distribution of the candidate’s commissioning paper to the delegates in time for their reading before the ecclesiastical council is encouraged. If this is not feasible, perhaps certain sections of the paper or a summary of the paper could be made available. In any case, the complete

STEPS 13-14

paper should be available to the delegates at the time of the ecclesiastical council.

There are a variety of options available for the candidate's presentation to the ecclesiastical council. Among these are for the candidate to read all or portions of the commissioning paper, to present a summary of the commissioning paper, or to comment on the commissioning paper.

The purpose of the ecclesiastical council is to authorize the commissioning of the candidate. Following is a sample agenda with commentary for the ecclesiastical council:

- The Association Committee on the Ministry introduces the candidate and makes its recommendation that the candidate be authorized for commissioning. In making its recommendation, the Committee will provide a detailed rationale supporting its recommendation. This rationale will include the Committee's experience with the person through the period of preparation, the process used by the Committee to reach its recommendation, notation of major commendations from references, something about the candidate's theological and polity understandings, an evaluation of the candidate by the candidate's advisor, and so on.
- The candidate makes a presentation based on her or his commissioning paper. The presentation should demonstrate the person's theological, polity, and functional understandings of commissioned ministry and relate these to the commitment and preparation of the person for the particular type of commissioned ministry to which she or he has been called or to which she or he is seeking a call.
- The ecclesiastical council engages in an examination of the candidate in order to satisfy itself as to the preparedness and fitness of the candidate for commissioned ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The examination is not limited to the presentation or the commissioning paper of the candidate.
- Upon completion of the examination, the ecclesiastical council votes whether or not to authorize commissioning. The decision the Association makes is a decision made for the entire United Church of Christ and will be binding on and honored by the other Associations of the United Church of Christ. Once commissioned, the person becomes a voting member of the Association and Conference.

STEP 15

SEEKING A CALL

It is essential in approving a candidate for commissioning to instruct the candidate about the requirements of the Association in regard to an approved call. The critical issue here is that the call must be a call to a specific church-related ministry position requiring commissioning and be recognized as such by the Association.

Most commissioned ministries are carried out in local churches and the major issue is whether the type of commissioned ministry is one recognized by the Association.

However, there are other ministries outside the local church to which persons are called that the Association will need to review closely in order to determine whether they are ministries “requiring commissioning.” Each Association of the United Church of Christ needs to develop its own procedures for making decisions about ministries that it will recognize as requiring commissioning. There are some principles or criteria that are recommended for use in these decisions:

- Does the United Church of Christ want this ministry to be a ministry on its behalf? That is, does the United Church of Christ, represented by the Association, see the value of having a commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ in the position?
- Is there a calling body? Does the employer or calling body recognize the position as a ministry and require or desire a commissioned minister in this position? Will the calling body hold the person accountable for his or her performance of ministry? Will the calling body enter into a covenantal relationship with the person and the Church on behalf of this ministry?

In exceptional cases, where the Church wants the ministry but the employer does not recognize the position as a ministry or will not participate with the person and the Church in a covenantal relationship, then it is necessary for a community of the Church to fulfill the requirements and functions of the calling body. (For example, this could be the Association itself, a local church, the Conference, or a special board set up specifically for the purpose of calling a person to minister on behalf of the United Church of Christ in this circumstance.)

Since all ministry is ministry of the Church, it is required that a community of the Church give direction to the ministry of persons, control their entrance to and exit from commissioned ministry positions, and hold persons accountable for their ministries. Ways need to be available to this Church community, approved by the Association, to observe firsthand the functioning of the person in the ministry so that it can make its judgments about both the person and the ministry position.

If a candidate begins negotiating a call to a position that does not have recognition or approval of the Association as a commissioned ministry position, then a process needs to be put in motion to secure a decision about the ministry position.

If a candidate approved for commissioning receives a call from a calling body located in another Association, the commissioning Association will consult with the Association in which the ministry is located to determine if it is a ministry requiring commissioning and if it is one acceptable to the commissioning Association. In some cases, the commissioning may take place in the Association in which the call is located. In this case, close cooperation between the two Associations is vital.

If considerable time has elapsed from the time the candidate was approved for commissioning and the time a call is received, the Committee on the Ministry reserves the right to meet with the person to explore his or her experience, growth, and present fitness for commissioned ministry before scheduling the commissioning service.

STEP 16

THE CALL AND ITS TERMS

When a commissioned minister is called to a commissioned ministry position, a written document, called the “letter of call” or “terms of the call,” is developed. This document spells out the expectations and commitments of both the local church or other calling body and the commissioned minister. Step 16 in the Commissioned Ministry Chart provides some details on the specific items to be considered in the terms of the call. While provision for all of the items may not be included in the terms of the call, each should be considered and explored.

Many Associations have their own recommendations about compensation that need to be considered when the terms of the call are being developed. Many Associations have developed a standard format for the terms of the call to a local church that is used to provide a structured way to consider and describe the specifics to be agreed on by the candidate and the local church.

In most cases, when the call is to a local church, the placement procedures of the United Church of Christ will be utilized in which a Conference or Association placement officer will be involved in the search and call process. It is assumed that the placement officer will represent the Association guidelines and expectations about the terms of the call and the covenantal relationship among the candidate, the local church, and the Association.

In those instances where the call is from a local church or other calling body, but a Conference or Association placement officer has not been present to represent the Association, the Association will need to participate as indicated in step 17 in the Commissioned Ministry Chart.

STEP 17

CALL AND COVENANT

Before a person can be commissioned, he or she must have an approved call to a specific church-related ministry recognized by the Association as a commissioned ministry. When that call is extended, several requirements must be met before commissioning is authorized.

First, the Association must determine that the specific church-related ministry to which the person is being called is one that requires the person to be commissioned. If the Association has not previously made this determination, it must undertake the steps necessary to make a judgment about the ministry at this time.

Second, a covenantal relationship needs to be developed. In those instances where the person is being called to a ministry within a local church, the person, the local church, and the Association enter into a three-way covenant.

In those instances where the call is to a ministry within a local church other than where the candidate is a member, agreements will need to be reached about the nature and degree of involvement and participation by the commissioned minister in the local church where he or she is a member. In some cases, it may be advisable for the commissioned minister to transfer his or her local church membership to the local church being served.

In those instances where the person is being called by a body other than a local church, the person, the calling body, the Association, and the local church where the person is a member enter into a four-way covenant. The provision for this four-way covenant is motivated by the church's conviction that commissioned ministers in other than local church ministries need to be active and participating members of a local church of the United Church of Christ and that calling bodies have a responsibility to the ecclesiastical system when they employ a commissioned minister.

In order to satisfy these requirements, the Association Committee on the Ministry convenes a meeting of the partners identified above. The purpose of this meeting is to determine the basis for a covenantal relationship among these three or four partners. (See the section on covenant in "Partners in Authorizing Ministry" in this *Manual*). Some issues for consideration during this meeting include:

- Are the terms of the call within the guidelines of the Association and satisfactory to the Committee on the Ministry? Is the commissioned minister being treated fairly and justly? Step 16 in the Commissioned Ministry Chart provides a comprehensive listing of items to be considered in the terms of the call.
- Is this a ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ? Is this a ministry requiring commissioning? Do the calling body and the Association value having a commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ in the position?
- What will be the nature of the installation service for the commissioned minister into this position? Where and when will it be held? In what way will each of the covenantal partners participate and what vows will each make?
- What will be the nature of the degree of involvement and participation by the commissioned minister in the local church where she or he is a member?
- What will be the nature and degree of involvement and participation by the commissioned minister in the life of the United Church of Christ beyond the local church (Association, Conference, national, ecumenical, etc.) and provision by the calling body for the time and encouragement for this?
- Is it clear how the person is accountable to both the calling body and to the United Church of Christ in distinct and interdependent ways?
- What procedures will be used to provide for periodic review of the agreements made among the covenantal partners? What will be the timeline for this review?

As a result of this, there should be a basis for a covenantal relationship among the partners. All partners should be able to acknowledge that a covenantal relationship implies that there is a sacred character to the relationship and its stipulations and that God is at work in and through their relationship.

In some cases, because the call to a commissioned ministry position involves a move by the commissioned minister, the local church where the commissioned minister will establish membership is not yet determined. Thus, the local church of membership cannot be involved at this stage in the covenant-making process. When this is the case, plans should be made for involving the local church of membership as soon as feasible after the commissioned minister has established that membership. An appropriate time for this might be in connection with the installation service of the commissioned minister. The Association always will be clear that membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ is a requirement of all commissioned ministers.

The procedures specified in step 17 in the chart usually take place in the Association in which the calling body is located. In those instances where this is not the Association that has approved the candidate for commissioning, there will need to be cooperation and communication between the two Associations. The commissioning Association may request documentation from the candidate or the Association participating in the call and covenanting process regarding both the ministry and the terms of the call. In some cases, the Association in which the ministry is located may need to provide the commissioning Association with its documentation and rationale for recognizing the ministry as one requiring commissioning.

STEPS 18–19

THE COMMISSIONING SERVICE

Once the commissioning is authorized and a call has been finalized, it is the responsibility of the Association, through its Committee on the Ministry, to plan the commissioning service. The Committee should work in cooperation with the candidate, the local church where the candidate is a member, the local church where the commissioning service is to be held if other than where the candidate is a member, and the calling body, if the call is not to a local church.

It should be emphasized that commissioning is an act of the Church and is the responsibility of the Association. The Association should establish guidelines to guide the planning of the commissioning service that clearly identify the role of the person, the local church, the calling body, and the Association in the planning process.

A commissioning service for use in the United Church of Christ is found in the *Book of Worship*. (See Appendix E of the supplemental material section of *Manual on Ministry*.)

The commissioning service is to be held no sooner than one month after the date of the vote to authorize commissioning.

In most cases, the commissioning service will be held in the local church where the candidate is a member. Under certain circumstances, however,

the Association may approve holding the commissioning service in the local church to which the candidate has been called.

In scheduling the commissioning service, the Association needs to consider the importance of having present representatives of the churches in the Association. Associations are discouraged from scheduling Sunday morning commissioning services and are encouraged to consider afternoon or evening services to ensure maximum opportunity for attendance by members of the churches in the Association.

The Association presents to the newly commissioned minister a certificate of commissioning attesting to the actions taken. The Association needs to ensure ample time—three weeks—to secure the certificate of commissioning from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team.

REPORTING AND RECORD KEEPING

It is important that complete and accurate records of authorizations by the Association Committee on the Ministry and the Association ecclesiastical council be kept. Often, the record keeping and reporting responsibilities are done by the Conference office.

It is recommended that a file for each person processed for commissioning be kept in the Association or Conference office. The file should contain all documentation provided by the person, copies of transcripts and diplomas, letters of reference, reports by the advisor, and copies of those portions of the minutes of meetings of the Committee on the Ministry and the Association at which the person's authorization for commissioning was considered.

The action to commission a person should be reported to the Office of General Ministries and the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team.

The Office of General Ministries keeps the official listing of all commissioned ministers of the United Church of Christ and publishes this listing annually in the *United Church of Christ Yearbook*.

The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team uses the information provided by the Association in the circulation of Ministerial Profiles and in the compilation of denominational statistics about its persons authorized for ministry.

STEP 20

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY STEPS 1–5

Procedures for the CANDIDATE	Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH
<p>1 A local church member who is interested in commissioned ministry talks with his or her pastor, other commissioned ministers, and persons in the Association about the requirements and procedures for commissioning.</p>	
<p>2 If the person decides to proceed, application is made to the governing board of the local church (or other designated committee) for an interview and its recommendation to the Association that the person become a candidate for commissioning.</p>	
<p>3 The person provides the governing board of the local church where he or she is a member with information about the desire and plans to prepare for commissioned ministry in the United Church of Christ. Included are statements about his or her Christian pilgrimage, biography, how call is understood at this time, type of commissioned ministry in which the person is interested, documentation of formal education, and educational plans.</p>	
<p>The person is interviewed by the governing board and pastor.</p>	<p>4 The pastor and governing board (or other designated committee) review the material and interview the person. They determine whether or not to recommend to the Association that the person become a candidate for commissioning.</p>
	<p>5 If application is made to the Association Committee on the Ministry, the local church provides the following documentation about the person in support of the application:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The person's letter of application to be received as a candidate for commissioning, including the specific type of church-related ministry for which the person desires to be commissioned. b. Verification of membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ. c. Three letters of reference, including one from a pastor of that local church. <p style="text-align: right;">(cont.)</p>

	Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY STEPS 5–9

Procedures for the CANDIDATE	Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> d. The material provided to the governing board and pastor, revised if necessary. e. A description of the process used by the local church to interview and recommend the person.
<p>The person meets with the Association Committee on the Ministry to be interviewed.</p>	<p>The pastor or local church representatives may be present for the interview.</p>
<p>9 The candidate engages in the prescribed program of preparation with the assistance of the advisor.</p>	<p>The local church relates to the candidate in supportive ways during the period of preparation.</p>

Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION
	<p>6 The Association Committee on the Ministry receives the application and recommendation and reviews the material received from the pastor and governing board of the local church. It first reviews the description of the type of commissioned ministry to make initial determination about whether or not the type of ministry fits the Association’s policies of church-related ministries requiring commissioning. If it decides to proceed, it notifies the person and local church and sets a date to meet with and interview the person.</p>
	<p>7 The Association Committee on the Ministry interviews the candidate to determine (a) fitness; (b) aptitudes; (c) Christian experience, and (d) commitment as a basis for preparing for commissioning utilizing “The Church’s Expectations of the Candidates for Commissioning,” following this chart. If the Committee is satisfied, it works with the person to outline a preparation program of education and training necessary to meet the educational and ability requirements for the type of commissioned ministry being sought.</p>
	<p>8 The Committee on the Ministry appoints an advisor to give counsel and assistance to the candidate during the period of preparation.</p>
	<p>The advisor maintains regular contact with the candidate and assists the candidate in completing the program of preparation and preparing for the commissioning examination.</p>

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY STEPS 10–11

Procedures for the CANDIDATE	Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH
<p>10 When the candidate has completed the program of education and training required by the Association Committee on the Ministry, he or she prepares and submits the following materials to the Committee:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. A report on the education and training completed. b. Commissioning Paper (Part 1). The candidate's theological perspective and grasp of the historic Christian faith. c. Commissioning Paper (Part 2). The candidate's understanding of the history, theological roots, polity and practice of the United Church of Christ. d. Commissioning Paper (Part 3). The person's faith pilgrimage and understanding of ministry. e. Verification of membership and participation in a local church of the United Church of Christ. f. Certification of educational attainment including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a bachelor's degree or its equivalent. 2. documentation of specialized education and training. 3. documentation of ability, skills, and knowledge for specific type of church-related ministry for which the candidate is preparing. g. At least four letters of reference, including one from someone closely involved with the candidate's education and one from the candidate's advisor. h. A Ministerial Profile prepared by the candidate and provided by the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team. i. A statement of where the candidate is in the process of seeking a call. 	<p>The Local Church provides a statement verifying the person's membership and participation in the Local Church.</p>

Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION
	<p>11 The Association Committee on the Ministry receives the material provided by the candidate, reviews it with the advisor, and decides whether or not to examine the candidate. It informs the candidate and the candidate's local church of its decision. If it decides to proceed, it sets a date to meet with and examine the candidate.</p>

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY STEPS 12–14

<p style="text-align: center;">Procedures for the CANDIDATE</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH</p>
<p>The person meets with the Association Committee on the Ministry to be examined.</p>	<p>A representative of the local church where the candidate is a member may be present for the commissioning examination.</p>
<p>The candidate makes a presentation to the ecclesiastical council describing her or his commitment to and preparation for the commissioned ministry to which she or he has been called or is seeking a call.</p>	<p>Representatives of the local church where the candidate is a member attend the ecclesiastical council.</p>

Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION
	<p>12 The Association Committee on the Ministry examines the candidate to determine his or her:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Christian faith. b. Character. c. Ability to do the work expected. d. Education and training to meet the responsibilities of the specific type of commission ministry. e. Knowledge of the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ. f. Personal qualities. g. Preparation and fitness for the call the person is considering or the type of ministry the person is seeking. <p>If the Committee is satisfied that the person meets the requirements for commissioning, it recommends the person to the Association for approval and authorization for commissioning.</p>
	<p>13 The Association Committee on the Ministry arranges for an Association ecclesiastical council and promotes attendance at it. It plans with the candidate how the candidate's commissioning paper will be shared with the delegates to the ecclesiastical council.</p>
	<p>14 The Association ecclesiastical council receives the recommendation of the Committee on the Ministry, hears the candidate's presentation describing his or her commitment to and preparation for commissioned ministry, and learns of the terms of call if one has been received. It then further examines the candidate and the Committee's recommendation. The delegates to the ecclesiastical council vote on whether or not to authorize commissioning for the candidate, pending acceptance of a call approved by the Association. In this, the ecclesiastical council acts for the entire United Church of</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(cont.)</p>

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY STEPS 14–16

Procedures for the CANDIDATE	Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH
15 The candidate seeks a call.	
The candidate works out and agrees to the terms of the call with the local church or other calling body.	

Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION
	Christ. The Association instructs its Committee on the Ministry to proceed with plans for the commissioning. The commissioning service is to be held no sooner than one month after the date of the vote to authorize the commissioning.
	If the candidate is considering a call from a calling body that has not been recognized by the Association as a valid setting for commissioned ministry, procedures are instituted to secure a decision about this recognition.
<p>16 The calling body, which usually will be a local church, extends a call to the candidate and sends a copy of the letter of call to the Association Committee on the Ministry. The letter of call should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Description of the ministry position including the nature of the team relationship, if appropriate. b. Description of the time requirements. c. Description of provision for participation in the life of the wider United Church of Christ. d. Description of why a commissioned minister is valued in the position. e. Provisions for the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Remuneration. 2. Pension program. 3. Health insurance. 4. Life insurance. 5. Social Security. 6. Unemployment compensation. 7. Disability insurance. 8. Travel allowance. 9. Reimbursement for professional expenses. 10. Vacation. <p style="text-align: right;">(cont.)</p>	The Association may consult with the candidate or calling body or local church during the development of the terms of the call.

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY STEPS 16–19

Procedures for the CANDIDATE	Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH
The candidate participates in the covenant-making meeting.	Representatives of the local church where the candidate is a member participate in the covenant-making meeting.
The candidate cooperates with the Association in planning the commissioning service.	Representatives of the candidate's local church participate in planning the commissioning service.
The candidate is commissioned.	Representatives of the local church where the candidate is a member participate in the commissioning service.

Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION
11. Continuing education time and funds. 12. Sabbatical leave. 13. Evaluation procedures and timeline. 14. Conflict resolution procedures to be used if needed. 15. Termination procedures.	
Representatives of the calling body participate in the covenant-making meeting.	17 If the call is from a calling body other than a local church, the Association Committee on the Ministry convenes a covenant-making meeting of the following: (a) the candidate; (b) representatives of the local church where the candidate is a member, unless the candidate has not yet established membership in the new location; (c) representatives of the calling body; and (d) the Association Committee on the Ministry. They review the letter of call and its provisions and explore the nature of the covenantal relationship among the partners. All need to agree that there is a basis for a covenantal relationship among them.
Representatives of the calling body participate in planning the commissioning service.	18 The Association Committee on the Ministry has the responsibility for planning the commissioning service in cooperation with the candidate, the local church where the candidate is a member, the local church where the commissioning service is to be held, if other than where the candidate is a member, and the calling body, if other than a local church. It invites members of churches in the Association to attend the service.
Representatives of the calling body participate in the commissioning service.	19 The Association, on behalf of the United Church of Christ and in cooperation with the person and the local church, commissions the candidate during a worship service held at a time representatives of the churches of the Association can attend. All those who are partners in the covenantal relationship participate in this service. By this act, the status of commissioned minister is conferred, authorization is granted to perform duties necessary for the specific ministry, and voting membership in (cont.)

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY STEPS 19–20

Procedures for the
CANDIDATE

Procedures for the
LOCAL CHURCH

Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION
	<p>that Association is granted. The covenantal relationship is liturgically celebrated.</p> <p>The Association presents to the newly commissioned minister a certificate of commissioning, attesting to the actions taken and specifying the type of ministry for which the person is commissioned. Requests for this certificate must be received by the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team at least three weeks prior to the date needed.</p>
	<p>20 An accurate record of the proceedings and actions of the Association Committee on the Ministry and the Association ecclesiastical council should be kept. The Association informs the Conference office of the actions taken. The Association or Conference informs the Office of General Ministries and the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of the actions taken.</p>

THE CHURCH'S EXPECTATIONS OF ITS CANDIDATES FOR COMMISSIONED MINISTRY

FAITH AFFIRMATIONS

- Is compelled by the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Has a sense of having been called by God and the Church to commissioned ministry
- Has a sense of vocational direction
- Is committed to the mission of the Church
- Can clearly articulate a personal theological position
- Can clearly articulate a theological understanding of commissioning
- Can relate his or her understanding of commissioned ministry to the ministry to which he or she has received a call or is seeking a call

CHURCH LOYALTY

- Is an active member of a local church of the United Church of Christ
- Is committed to service in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ
- Is committed to active participation in the United Church of Christ beyond the local church (Association, Conference, national, etc.)
- Keeps informed about the issues and concerns facing the United Church of Christ and its various parts
- Is familiar with the publications and resources of the United Church of Christ
- Is committed to the up building of the whole people of God

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

- Has attained a general liberal arts education (bachelor's degree or its equivalent)
- Has considerable knowledge of United Church of Christ history, polity, and practice
- Has engaged in some disciplined study of:
 - The Bible
 - Church history
 - Theology
- Has achieved mastery over the theory and practice in the specific church-related field in which commissioning is sought
- Is familiar with the resources available in the specific church-related field in which commissioning is sought
- Has acquired some skill in:
 - Listening and communicating
 - Interpersonal relationships

Group dynamics

Administration

Planning and goal setting

Organizing

Is prepared to lead the church as a community in mission

PERSONAL QUALITIES

Is able to acknowledge own limitations

Is accepting of diversity

Is adaptable

Has capacity for growth and development

Lives a Christian life-style

Is courageous

Has empathy

Has integrity

Is mature

Has an open and affirming style of relating to persons and ideas

Is resourceful

Has a sense of her or his identity

Has a sense of proportion

Has a sense of responsibility

Has vision

THE TRANSFER OF A COMMISSION

BYLAW PROVISION

148. A Commissioned Minister moving from the bounds of one Association to another and who continues in the same specific church-related ministry, applies for a transfer of the commission to the new Association.

COMMENTARY

In order to request a transfer of a commission, one must currently be an active and authorized commissioned minister or a commissioned minister on leave-of-absence in an Association.

When commissioned ministers move from the bounds of one Association to another in order to engage in a commissioned ministry in the new Association, they are required to transfer their commission or to seek commissioning in the new Association.

The transfer of a commission is possible only if the specific church-related ministry to which the person is being called is the same for which the person is presently commissioned. (For example, if the person is commissioned as a church educator and is moving to a new position as a church educator, it is possible to transfer the commission.)

If the person is moving to a different type of specific church-related ministry, then he or she must go through the full commissioning procedures in the new Association. (See “Application for a Different Commission.”)

If a person has been commissioned in the past but currently is not commissioned, the person is required to go through the commissioning procedures in the new Association of residence. At the discretion of the new Association, some of the person’s documentation may be used in this process if it is relatively current.

STEP 1

APPLICATION FOR TRANSFER

The commissioned minister who has received a call within another Association applies to the new Association for his or her commission to be recognized, accepted, and transferred.

The request should be accompanied by the following documentation:

- Verification of membership in the United Church of Christ. This should include a statement about membership and participation from the local church where the person is a member.
- A written statement indicating the reasons for seeking transfer of a commission to the new Association. This should include details about the specific church-related ministry and position to which the person has been called in the new Association.

STEPS 2–3

CONSIDERATION OF THE APPLICATION

The new Association receives and reviews the request and the documentation. It may handle the application in one of several ways:

- a. If the commissioned minister is moving to accept a call to the same specific church-related ministry, the new Association requests verification of and comment on the commissioning from the Association in which the person is currently recognized as a commissioned minister. Based on this verification and comment, the new Association may grant commissioning to the person. It then notifies the other Association of its action, and the person's commission is considered transferred.
- b. In the case of a person preparing for commissioning who receives a call within an Association other than the one where the person holds local church membership, the two Associations have to work out a mutually agreeable procedure for transferring the person's commission once it is granted.
- c. In the case of a person moving to accept a call to a specific church-related ministry or from a calling body not yet recognized by the new Association, the Association must first determine that both the specific church-related ministry and calling body are acceptable to it. In making this determination, it may be necessary to meet with representatives of the calling body. The Association will then need to follow one of the above options in order to receive the transfer of the commission.

While an Association accepts the action of the commissioning Association and receives the person's commission, an Association always retains the right to examine any person applying to it for the transfer of commissioning. That Association may choose to make an independent judgment about the person's qualifications and fitness for commissioned ministry within its bounds.

An Association may request specific information from another Association about a commissioned minister moving into its bounds. The new Association may ask any of the following:

- Is the person currently recognized as a commissioned minister in that Association? For what specific commissioned ministry is the person commissioned?
- Are there any official actions related to this person that have been taken by an Association ecclesiastical council or Association Committee on the Ministry about which the new Association should know?
- How has this person served in the life of the Association or Conference? What experience and skill does the person have that may be called on in the new Association?
- Are there any concerns about this person that the Association would like to share with the new Committee on the Ministry?

It is recommended that when considering the transfer of a commission, the Committee on the Ministry interviews the person for the following purposes:

- to become acquainted with the person and her or his pilgrimage in ministry.
- to review the request and documentation with the person.
- to determine the person’s fitness and qualifications for commissioned ministry in that Association.
- to interpret that Association’s requirements for and expectations of those holding a commission in that Association.
- to review the terms of the call to the new commissioned ministry position.

Recognizing the transfer of a person’s commission into its bounds is a decision of the Association. In some cases, the recognition of transfer will require a vote of the Association to ratify the action of the Committee on the Ministry. Most Associations delegate this authority to their Committees on the Ministry.

STEP 4

COVENANTING

If the person’s call is to a ministry in other than a local church, the Association Committee on the Ministry convenes a covenant-making meeting of the commissioned minister, representatives of the local church where the commissioned minister is a member, representatives of the calling body, and the Association Committee on the Ministry. (See step 17 in the Commissioned Ministry Chart and the commentary on “Commissioned Ministry” described previously.)

STEP 5

REPORTING

When the person’s commission is recognized and accepted, the new Association notifies the Conference office and the Association from which the person has transferred. The new Association or Conference notifies the Office of General Ministries and the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of the action taken.

A certificate attesting to commissioning is available from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team and may be ordered by registrars or other persons on behalf of the Association.

STEPS 6–7

INSTALLATION

Once a commissioned minister has had his or her commission recognized and accepted, he or she is eligible to be installed in his or her new ministry. Installation is the responsibility of the Association, which should take the lead in planning the service. If the call is to a local church, the person and local church cooperate in planning the installation service. If the call is to a ministry position in other than a local church, it is expected that the calling body and the local church where the person is a member be included in the installation service and the planning for it.

APPLICATION FOR A DIFFERENT COMMISSION

A commissioned minister who desires to be commissioned for a different type of church-related ministry must proceed through all of the steps in the

Commissioned Ministry Chart. For example, a person who has been commissioned for a ministry in church administration and now desires to be commissioned for a ministry in church music must go through the commissioning process anew. However, in going through this process, some of the materials prepared for the former commissioning may be used in the new process if the materials are relatively current and approved by the Committee on the Ministry. The Committee on the Ministry may use its discretion, based on how well it knows the person and the person's work, in modifying the process.

BYLAW PROVISION

150. A Commissioned Minister who ceases to function in the specific church-related ministry to which he or she was commissioned resigns the commission or applies to the Association for leave of absence. Leave of absence is granted for one year at a time but not for more than three consecutive years.

Leave of absence may be granted to a commissioned minister by an Association. When granting leave of absence, the Committee on the Ministry should ensure that the reasons for granting it are clearly specified, and the Committee should establish a timeline and procedure for regularly reviewing this status. Normally, leave of absence is granted for one of the following reasons:

- a. The person has withdrawn from or is no longer performing the functions of commissioned ministry but is actively seeking a commissioned ministry position.
- b. The person has withdrawn from or is no longer performing the functions of commissioned ministry and is in a process of evaluating her or his future as a commissioned minister.
- c. The person has withdrawn from or is no longer performing the functions of commissioned ministry because of family considerations, such as the rearing of a child, because of prolonged illness, in order to take a temporary work position not requiring commissioning, to engage in an extended period of study, and so forth. In any event, the expectation is that the person will perform the functions of commissioned ministry in the near future and certainly within three years.

Persons on leave of absence continue to hold their commission with all of its rights and responsibilities in the Association.

Leave of absence is granted for one year at a time and is not granted for more than three years in succession for a commissioned minister.

The terms and responsibilities of a leave of absence must be worked out between the person and the Association Committee on the Ministry at the

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

COMMENTARY

beginning of the agreement to grant leave of absence. Subsequently, the Committee minimally will hold an annual review meeting with the person who is on leave of absence. It is important for the Committee on the Ministry to keep careful records of its actions related to leave of absence.

If a person resigns his or her commission while on leave of absence, the records of the Committee on the Ministry about the leave of absence should be maintained carefully so that they will be available if the person applies for reinstatement of the commission at some future time.

If a person transfers her or his commission while on leave of absence, the new Association reviews the terms of the leave of absence in order to determine whether to continue to grant the leave of absence.

TERMINATION OF A COMMISSION

There are a number of circumstances that may lead to the termination of a person's standing as a commissioned minister in the United Church of Christ. These circumstances and the processes and procedures to be followed by the Association Committee on the Ministry are described in "The Oversight of Ministries" section of this *Manual*.

REINSTATEMENT OF A COMMISSION

Reinstatement of a commission is an action by an Association or Association Committee on the Ministry that restores a commission to a person who had been commissioned at one time but subsequently had the commission terminated by an Association.

Reinstatement results from an examination of a commissioned minister to determine if she or he still has all of the qualifications for commissioned ministry of the United Church of Christ. The nature and thoroughness of the examination will depend on a number of factors including:

- The reasons for the termination of the person's commission when this action was taken. For example, if the person resigned his or her commission because he or she had withdrawn from the functions of commissioned ministry, the examination will be of a different nature than if the person's commission was terminated because of disciplinary reasons.
- The length of time that has elapsed since the person's commission was terminated. In general, the longer the elapsed time, the more thorough the examination needs to be.
- The familiarity of the Committee on the Ministry with the circumstances surrounding the termination. If members of the Committee are available who were present when the person's commission was terminated and who, therefore, are familiar with the circumstances, then the Committee will not have to gather as much data than if this were not the case.

When the Committee on the Ministry receives a request from a commissioned minister of the United Church of Christ for reinstatement of his or her commission, its first task is to familiarize itself with the details of the reasons that resulted in the termination of the commission. If the commission was terminated by the Committee on the Ministry to which the present request for reinstatement is directed, the Committee will thoroughly study minutes of its meetings in which the termination action was taken and any files created at the time relative to the termination.

If the request for reinstatement comes to an Association that was not the Association that took the termination action, then the Association should request a thorough report from the Association that took the termination action regarding the circumstances that led to its action.

After reviewing all of the data surrounding the termination of the person's commission, the Committee on the Ministry schedules an interview with the person. The purpose of the interview is to determine the following:

- a. Have the circumstances that led to the termination of the commission changed so that the person may be considered for reinstatement?
- b. Does the person meet all of the present requirements for commissioning established by the Committee on the Ministry? Does the person satisfactorily meet "The Church's Expectations of Its Candidates for Commissioned Ministry," contained on the Commissioned Ministry Chart? How has the passage of time affected the person's skills, knowledge, and personal qualities?

The Committee may decide to request that the person write a paper in preparation for the interview (e.g., present understandings of commissioned ministry, theological perspective, etc.).

The Committee has a variety of decisions available to it after it interviews the person and deliberates on what it finds. The Committee may:

- approve the request for reinstatement, subject to the person receiving a call to a recognized commissioned ministry.
- require the person to provide additional information or to fulfill prescribed requests from the Committee before it will make its decision.
- deny the request for reinstatement and provide the person with the reasons for the denial.

INSTALLATION OF A COMMISSIONED MINISTER

Installation is the liturgical celebration of the covenantal relationship among a commissioned minister; the local church or calling body where the person is engaged in ministry; the local church where the person is a member, if different from the one being served; and the Association.

Installation is an act of the Association. It is the responsibility of the Association to ensure that all partners to the covenant are satisfied that there is a basis for covenant among them. Upon request from the local church and the commissioned minister, the Association takes leadership in planning the installation service in cooperation with the other partners to the covenantal relationship.

It is recommended that an installation service be held when a commissioned minister begins any ministry recognized by the Association. When the ministry is in a local church, the installation service normally will be held in that church. When the ministry is in other than a local church, the installation service normally will be held in the local church where the commissioned minister is a member.

In those cases where a person is commissioned in the local church where he or she will serve, the installation service may be held at the same time as the commissioning. Normally, an installation service will include a charge to the commissioned minister; to the congregation or calling body; to the local church where the commissioned minister is a member, if other than where he or she is serving; and to the Association.

TRANSFER OF A COMMISSION STEPS 1–3

Procedures for the CANDIDATE	Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH
<p>1 A commissioned minister in an Association receives a call to the same kind of specific church-related ministry in another Association and applies to that Association for recognition of, acceptance of, and transfer of her or his commission. She or he provides the following documentation to that Association:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Verification of membership in the United Church of Christ. This should include a statement about membership and participation from the local church where the person is a member. b. A statement indicating the reasons for seeking commissioning in the new Association. This should include details about the specific position to which the person has been called in the new Association. 	
<p>The commissioned minister is interviewed by the Committee on the Ministry.</p>	

Procedures for the CALLING BODY	Procedures for the ASSOCIATION
	<p>2 The Association Committee on the Ministry receives and reviews the application and documentation. It requests additional information from the Association where the person's commission is held. It determines that the ministry to which the person is being called is one the Association recognizes as a valid setting for commissioned ministry.</p>
	<p>3 The Committee on the Ministry interviews the commissioned minister to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Get to know the person and his or her pilgrimage in ministry. b. Review the request and documentation. c. Determine the person's fitness and qualifications for commissioned ministry in that Association. d. Interpret the Association's expectations of its commissioned ministers. e. Review the terms of the call. <p>The Committee decides whether or not to recognize and accept the person's commission.</p>

TRANSFER OF A COMMISSION STEPS 4–7

Procedures for the CANDIDATE	Procedures for the LOCAL CHURCH
<p>The commissioned minister participates in the covenant-making meeting.</p>	<p>Representatives of the commissioned minister’s local church participate in the covenant-making meeting.</p>
<p>The commissioned minister cooperates with the local church in requesting installation.</p>	<p>6 The local church and commissioned minister request the Association to install the commissioned minister in the new ministry.</p>
<p>The commissioned minister cooperates with the Association in planning and holding an installation service.</p> <p>The commissioned minister is installed.</p>	<p>Representatives of the local church participate in planning and holding an installation service.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">Procedures for the CALLING BODY</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Procedures for the ASSOCIATION</p>
<p>Representatives of the calling body participate in the covenant-making meeting.</p>	<p>4 If the person’s call is to a ministry in other than a local church, the Committee on the Ministry convenes a covenant-making meeting of the following: (a) the commissioned minister; (b) representatives of the local church where the commissioned minister is a member, unless membership in a new location has not yet been established; (c) representatives of the calling body; and (d) the Association Committee on the Ministry. They review the letter of call and its provisions and explore the nature of the covenantal relationship among the covenantal partners. All need to agree that there is a basis for a covenantal relationship among them.</p>
	<p>5 If the commission is recognized and accepted, the Association notifies the Association where the person’s commission has been held of its action, and the commission is considered transferred. The Association notifies the Conference office of the action taken. The Association or Conference notifies the Office of General Ministries and the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of the action taken. A certificate of commissioning is available from the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team.</p>
<p>Representatives of the calling body participate in planning and holding an installation service.</p>	<p>7 The Association Committee on the Ministry cooperates with the local church, calling body if other than a local church, and the commissioned minister in planning and holding a service of installation to recognize and celebrate the ministry and the covenantal relationship among the partners.</p>