

The in care relationship is one that exists between a student preparing for ordination, his or her local church, and association. The in care relationship provides support, counsel, assistance and supervision during the person's preparation for ordained ministry. This relationship is directed by the association committee on the ministry. The pastor and local church leaders are responsible for insuring that this is a healthy, sustaining relationship of genuine interest and concern.

## History and Background

All Christians are called to carry out God's work in the world. All those who are baptized are ministers, in whatever form of work they do. From the earliest times of the church, however, through the "laying on of hands," some were set apart to administer the sacraments, preach and perform other church-related functions. The United Church of Christ comes from a tradition that values educated clergy. As those who feel they have a call prepare for ordained ministry, the church has recognized that it is important to express its concern and to help them prepare well. The in care relationship does that.

To be in care is to be in a covenantal relationship with God and the church, including the local church, the association, the conference, the national bodies of the

church, a seminary and peers. A local church that has a member in care of an association needs to show appreciation and support for that person.

## Common Practices

Most persons become in care of an association during college or seminary. It is expected that they will be in care from the time they make their decision to prepare for ordained ministry. Minimally, they are expected to be in care at least one year before ordination. Most students are in care for several years, with an annual review of their progress and development each year by the association committee on the ministry.

Associations relate to their in care students in a variety of ways. In some associations the relationship may be a formality, especially if the student does not consult the advisor. In others the students relate closely to an advisor who guides them as they make course decisions and career plans. Often associations provide some way for students in care to get together during school vacations. Some associations provide scholarship aid to students in care.

While the in care relationship was designed for students, in some associations, in care is required for ordained ministers of other denominations who want to become pastors in the United Church of Christ. In care relationships are also

appropriate for those seeking commissioned ministry, and for those who may not have decided to pursue ordination until after their student years

The Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ define students in care and outline requirements for the in care relationship.

## Responsibilities

In care procedures and perspectives for association committees on the ministry are outlined in **Manual on Ministry: Perspectives and Procedures for Ecclesiastical Authorization of Ministry**. (Order from United Church of Christ Resources. Telephone, toll-free, 800-537-3394.) The manual describes responsibilities of the student (or other candidate), the student's local church and the association or conference.

A person desiring to prepare for authorized ministry asks the official board of his or her church to recommend to the association committee on the ministry that the person be accepted for in care status. If the board decides to proceed—following review of documentation and interview with the person, the local church sends a letter of recommendation to the association with the following documentation, some of which it secures from the candidate:

- A letter of application from the person.
- Verification of the person's membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ,
- Three letters of reference, including one from the pastor of the local church.
- Background material, including the person's life pilgrimage, biography, understanding of call, documentation of formal education and educational plans.
- A description of the process used by the local church to interview and recommend the person.
- If the application is accepted by the association committee on the ministry, the candidate is interviewed by the association committee on the ministry to determine fitness, aptitude, Christian experience and commitment.
- If the candidate is accepted in care, the committee appoints an advisor from a group of advisors. The committee is responsible for the training and oversight of the advisor.
- The student is presented to the association and, in some cases, voted upon by the association.
- The student communicates with the advisor on a regular basis.
- The advisor offers advice about the way to meet ordination

requirements. Supplemental studies may be planned to develop competencies and skills not addressed elsewhere.

- The association committee on the ministry arranges for regular communication; gatherings with the committee, advisors and students in -care; and the student's participation in the life of the association and a local church of the United Church of Christ.
- The association committee on the ministry checks with the advisor and may check with the student's academic advisor as well.
- The association committee on the ministry conducts an annual review of the student's progress and development at which time a decision is made to terminate or renew the in care relationship, based on the student's progress, church participation and the advisor's recommendation.

## Skills and Attributes Needed

Among the skills, faith affirmations and personal qualities required for a student in care are:

- Sense of responsibility.
- Commitment to service in and on behalf of the United Church

of Christ, including active membership in a local church.

- Commitment to the mission of the church.
- Open, affirming style.
- A sense of having been called by God and the church to ordained ministry.
- Adaptability.
- A Christian lifestyle.
- Empathy.
- Integrity.
- Capability for growth and development.

## Strengthening the In Care Relationship

The primary responsibility for the student in care rests with the association committee on the ministry. However, to strengthen the relationship that a student experiences with the association, the local church can:

- Appoint a committee of three or four whose responsibility it will be to keep in close, supportive contact with the person who has been granted in care status by the association. This local group coordinates with, and is in contact with, the association committee on the ministry.
- Whenever possible, provide opportunities for the in care student to participate in the worship services and total life of his or her home church.
- Show understanding and

affirmation of the candidate and her or his plans for ministry.

- Provide scholarship assistance to defray the costs of college and seminary.
- Invite a member of the association committee on the ministry to meet with the leaders and youth of your church to share the procedures for and possibilities of a vocation within the United Church of Christ.

## Issues Facing the Church

- What is the role of a committee on the ministry in an area where students are in seminary, if they are not in care there?
- How can an association committee on the ministry maintain contact when the student is in seminary outside the area?
- How can a local church express concern for a student in care without infringing on the role of the association committee on the ministry?

## Questions

- What is the purpose of the in care relationship?
- What is the role of the association committee on the ministry with in care students?
- What are the responsibilities of a student in care?
- What has your church done when it has a member in care? What might you do?