

Educational Program for the Commissioned Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest

In August, 2009, the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) approved **Theological Reflections and Policies & Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry**. This document updated the Policies and Criteria for the whole church from a 1993 version. In addition, it added the “Theological Foundations” portion of the document which added historical understanding to ministry in the life of the Christian Church. In the new “Policies and Criteria” section, there is an added a third track for the Order of Ministry. This “Apprentice Track” allows that a person can accomplish – with the support of a congregation and the Region – ordination without a Masters of Divinity degree. In addition, it added more specific and expanded qualifications to the Personal Qualifications for the Order of Ministry, as well as more clear accountability for those who have retired from ministry. Finally, this document changed the language of “Licensed” ministry to “Commissioned” ministry to use Biblical language. *Theological Foundations and Policies & Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry* became effective on August 1, 2011, and, thus, the authoritative document for the whole church regarding ministry.

CCSW History:

Prior to August 2011, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest had developed (according to the Policies and Criteria document was in place) a “Licensed Ministry Education Program” which entailed four years of intentional education of persons in the areas of a) Disciples History and Polity b) Pastoral Care c) Biblical Theology d) Practice of Ministry. Persons who wished to become “Licensed” would work through these requirements in their geographic area and would be granted a “License” for ministry. Licensing was based on the person’s 1) specific location and role for ministry and 2) it was issued for a specific time period. This prior program required 18 contact hours per year for each minister in the program. It was approved by the Regional Assembly in 1998 and became the curriculum for this program across the Region. Now that *Theological Foundations and Policies & Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry* has become effective, it is important for CCSW to revise its policies, as well. On August 1, 2011, all “Licensed ministers” who were in good standing with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Southwest were automatically converted to “Commissioned Ministers.”

Areas of Ministerial Practice

The Policies & Criteria document includes these sixteen Areas of Ministry Practice (AMP) in which a minister needs to have some level of competence. These areas, as described by the General Commission on Ministry, are:

1. Biblical Knowledge
2. Church Administration and Planning
3. Communication
4. Cross Cultural and Anti-Racism Experience
5. Ecumenism
6. Education and Leader Development
7. Ethics
8. Evangelism
9. Mission of the Church in the World
10. Pastoral Care
11. Proclamation of the Word
12. Spiritual Development
13. Stewardship
14. Theology
15. Understanding of Heritage
16. Worship

A more detailed description of each Area of Ministerial Practice, and of the desired outcomes of the study of each, is available in Appendix Two (which is located at www.disciples.org in the General Commission on Ministry section). CCSW will use multiple approaches to achieve the desired outcomes for the study of each Area of Ministerial Practice. Classroom study has been the most classic approach. Other methodologies might include: Individual study under an assigned mentor, written papers or sermon texts (especially where the desired outcome uses the words "articulate", "reflect", or "describe" to define the outcome sought), and assigned projects, developed jointly by the candidate and a mentor. Learning opportunities are also available outside the CCSW. The General Commission on Ministry has compiled the "Directory of Recommended and Approved Educational and Formational Opportunities Primarily for Apprentice Track Candidates for Ordination". This document is also available at www.disciples.org. Also, priority for development must be given to Areas of Ministerial Practice needed in the candidate's specific ministry and context. This may include special projects, one-on-one coaching and guidance, or various other ways of accelerating a ministry candidate's development in areas needed for his specific situation. In addition, other learning opportunities that may be available closeby or ecumenically can also be used to supplement the educational plan for candidates. Any outside educational opportunity should be reviewed (prior to enrolling) with the candidate's mentor, the Area Committee on Ministry (ACOM) or its designate, or the Regional Committee on Ministry (RCOM).

Scheduling

It is strongly encouraged that four educational opportunities be offered every year by each ACOM for their ministry candidates. As a general guideline, each Area of Ministerial Practice should be addressed within every 5-year rolling cycle. This 5-year cycle period allows each area to take advantage of special opportunities that will become available from time to time, or to address specific needs that may become apparent at a specific place and time.

Each ACOM should develop, and make available to all of their candidates for ministry, a schedule of the classroom participation events for the five-year rolling cycle. All of the ACOM offerings will be compiled on a Region-wide calendar so that all learners across the Region can participate. While dates, locations, and speakers may not be available for the later events in the schedule, topics should be scheduled and documented. As special opportunities become available, the schedule can of course evolve. And as previously mentioned the special needs of individual candidates can be addressed outside of the scheduled classroom events.

Tracking Progress

As with any academic endeavor, the measurement of the ministry candidate's progress is an important part of the educational process. However, it is not the intent of this document to provide for the assignment of grades, nor to develop a grading system. Measurement of progress is simply a tool to show each ministry candidate's progress toward the outcomes desired within each Area of Ministerial Practice, and should be used by each candidate to indicate where work is needed.

Various tools have been developed for use by the candidate to measure progress. The first is called, "Appendix 1: Assessment of Candidates Growth in Personal Qualifications for Ministry". It is a spreadsheet designed to be used as an assessment tool to measure the Personal Qualifications for Ministry as defined in TFPCOM 2009: II.A.2, and of the Areas of Ministerial Practice already discussed. It should be noted that this assessment will provide a "snapshot in time" of the candidate's progress. It is not to be construed as a test, but rather as an indicator of where the ministry candidate stands at a specific point in time. The second tool that is available is "Appendix 2: Candidate's Educational and Experiential History". This document is also a spreadsheet. It provides a cumulative listing of the experiences and formalized training which the ministry candidate has benefited from over the course of their preparation for ministry. Much like a resume, it records the candidate's preparation activities and other points of qualification. It is based upon the Areas of Ministerial Practice. A third tool that is available is the document, "Building a Portfolio". This is an exercise that the ministry candidate can use to pull together all of the experiences that they have had which contribute to their call to ministry. It needs to be used by all candidates for Ordination, but can also be used by Commissioned Ministry candidates as well. All of these tools are available at www.disciples.org.

Use of Mentors

The use of a mentor by ministry candidates is highly encouraged. Having the ready counsel of one that has already faced many of the situations that the candidate will face can provide a valuable support structure. A mentor can help show the candidate that they are not the first person that has ever had to deal with the problems they are facing. A mentor can serve as an advocate for the ministry candidate in any number of situations. And a mentor can provide a safe place for the candidate to vent their frustrations, express their emotions, and ask questions.

However, there is no single best way to assign a mentor. Of course the RCOM and ACOM should be involved in the process. But the candidate themselves must have significant input into the selection of her or his mentor, or the relationship will certainly fail. It is most helpful if the mentor is NOT a minister currently serving with them, or supervising them, nor in their current congregation.

Non-Compliance

It is not the intent of this document to give hard requirements for each Area of Ministerial Practice, but rather to emphasize that each Area be addressed in a manner appropriate for each candidate. Also, while it is not necessary to have a level of competence in each Area of Ministerial Practice at the start of one's ministry, it must be agreed that the goal is continued growth and development throughout a person's ministry.

It is the intent of this process that all ministry candidates participate in three classroom participation events each year. The candidate can substitute one alternative study method for one of those three events. This substitution must be approved by the ACOM, or its designate, prior to completion of the substituted activity. The ruling of the ACOM will be final.

If there are special situations in the life of a ministry candidate that make it impossible or ill-advised for the candidate to regularly attend the classroom participation events, that candidate can submit a written appeal to the ACOM or its designate, describing the circumstances that prevent the candidate's participation, along with a proposed plan to continue their development in the Areas of Ministerial Practice. Again, the ruling of the ACOM will be final. Failure to comply with the intent of this process will result in a one year probationary period. Continued non-compliance will result in forfeiture of commission. The decision of the ACOM will be final. However, the ministry candidate's level of effort to comply with these requirements must be considered by the ACOM prior to issuing its final ruling.

Closing Statements

Preparation for ministry is not an easy task; nor should it be. The call to ministry is a life-changing event, and it should be handled with great care. Ministry, whether Commissioned or Ordained, has the capacity to affect not just the life of the person being called, but also the lives of the people to whom he/she will minister. Great care should be taken to assure that the ministry candidate receives the best preparation possible.

It is not the intent of this document to outline a program that will produce a specific model of minister. Just as no two calls to ministry are the same, the preparation necessary to answer each call must be specific to the call. Much flexibility has been allowed within this guideline to provide for specialized training where necessary. Whether a ministry candidate elects to enter the Apprentice Track toward Ordination or not, this document should serve as a guide to their preparation for their ministry.

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