

BOARD AND OFFICE OF VOCATION ACCOUNTABILITY REPORT

Origin: The Reverend Norm Seli, chair of the Board of Vocation, and the Reverend Marlene Britton, Director, Policy and Programs for Ministry Personnel

INTRODUCTION

“If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives.” 2Cor. 4:7 (Msg version)

For the past 100 years the United Church of Canada has been served by faithful, committed and responsive ministry personnel. Over that period of time, changes have occurred in terms of the numbers of theological schools offering training, the requirements for testamur, the terms of service, and compensation models for ministry personnel.

Working within this context, the Office of Vocation strives to ensure that the Church in this present age, is served by faithful, well-equipped, effective ministry personnel. This is the “precious message” that undergirds all that happens as standards are set, people are credentialed to varying expressions of ministry, candidates move along their path, and oversight situations are managed.

We are humbled and gratified when there are positive responses to the efforts of the Office, and share a few examples where thanks were returned, all quotes being used with permission.

1. One minister offered the following (excerpts) at the end of their Directed Program ordered by the Remedial Committee:
“I am eternally grateful to this committee that, at the end of my interview with you, you asked the question of my need. Was there anything I needed from the Committee and The Church moving forward. At that time I was able to share with you ... As a result ... I am living a healthier life, emotionally, spiritually and physically.”
2. This was received after a Boundaries webinar:
“This was a good webinar. Very informative. I appreciated hearing experiences similar to mine from my colleagues and learning together how to navigate the often messiness of boundaries in pastoral ministry.”
3. Received from a member of the public who interacted with the Response Committee:
“Thank you for this update, and for the important work you do – I know it isn’t easy, but so vital to the health of the church and its leadership.”

STAFF

“We’ve been surrounded and battered by troubles, but we’re not demoralized; we’re not sure what to do, but we know that God knows what to do; we’ve been spiritually

terrorized, but God hasn't left our side; we've been thrown down, but we haven't broken." 2Cor. 4:9-10 (Msg version).

The team was 'battered' and definitely 'thrown down' by the devastating news of the death of our beloved team member and friend, under horrific circumstances. Rev. Brenda Fawkes was appointed as the Vocational Minister for the Pacific Mountain and Chinook Winds Regional Councils in January 2019. She served her Regional Councils with diligence, and made invaluable contributions to the overall development of the Office of Vocation. Her passion for theological education, the vocation of ministry and the work of the church were undeniable. She was excited about the burgeoning work related to mentorship, a role she embraced as part of the strategic plan. Her sense of humour and deep compassion for others are part of the cherished memories we hold. May she rest in peace.

We are extremely grateful for the Revd. Lillian Roberts, who accepted the call to fill the role of interim Vocational Minister. She started her work in October and offered to continue through to the hiring of a new Vocational Minister, including assisting in the onboarding process.

In November there was a two day, in person, retreat for the Theology & Ministry Leadership Unit, in which the Office of Vocation is housed. That time offered opportunities for grieving together as a team, for renewing old connections, and forging new ones.

One of our program coordinators resigned early in the calendar year, and that led to a review of what was actually needed for the work. This resulted in the hiring of a lawyer, who will share responsibilities for policy development and management between the Office of Vocation and the GCO Human Resources Department.

BOARD OF VOCATION

Three meetings of the Board of Vocation were held during this year, and they were all 2-day, virtual events. The Board was excited to have our member who was ill return to active participation.

The Board was kept busy as there were two appeals to the Board, querying decisions of the Response Committee, with due process being followed and the appeals heard and managed.

A Formal Hearing Committee was also struck to consider placing a minister on the Discontinued Service List – Disciplinary. All three of these (appeals and Formal Hearing) have resulted in a heavy call on the time of the dedicated Board members.

In addition, one member of the Board was asked to sit on the Standards Committee, and one on the Nominations Committee, to ensure the concerns and direction of the Board were considered as various decisions were being made.

INDIGENOUS OFFICE OF VOCATION

Participants within the Indigenous Candidacy Pathway

Currently we have the majority (11) of our folks doing their theological training at Sandy Sauteaux Spiritual Centre, and a couple within the Indigenous MDiv. Program at Vancouver school of Theology. We anticipate 3 Candidates, possibly 4 to be approved for Ordination in 2025.

Promise stage- 4 people that are from Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta

Candidacy Stage- 6 people from Ontario, Manitoba, BC.

The Indigenous Vocational Minister currently is supporting 4 applicants from BC, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

In 2024, The Indigenous Candidacy Board approved 2 candidates for Ordination, one in Ontario and the other in Quebec.

Indigenous Candidacy Pathway

This year, the Indigenous Candidacy board met at least once a month to work over several months to develop and review the Indigenous Candidacy Pathway document with the support of both Janet Gear and Tim Hackborn. While it is understood what the Indigenous Pathway is, it should be noted that results of the many hours of discussion focused on addressing the cultural complexity and multiple approaches to how to support the Churches commitments to self-determination and Indigenous spirituality.

In addition to the conversations with the Indigenous Candidacy Board, the IOV also consulted with members of the Grandmothers circle in order to determine appropriate consultation key documents which include the following:

- a. **Parallel Path** has been a known principle within the Indigenous Church that describes our spiritual relationships to the United Church since the 1970's when the Very Rev. Stan McKay introduced it as part of the curriculum at Dr. Jesse Sauteaux Theological School. Over the last 50 years, it has been a principle that has included the Two-Row Wampum of the Haudenosaunee teachings, that were determined as been only relevant to Eastern Canada First nations. This past year, consultation was held at Five Oaks with members from Haudenosaunee and Anishnabwe nations with the support of Grandmother Eileen Antone. A similar consultation held at Cape Mudge, near Vancouver Island with the Pacific Mountain Indigenous Ministries members with the support of Grandmother Doreen Angus. A final draft is attached.
- b. **Identity Wheel** is a form of the Medicine wheel that is based on Haudenosaunee pedagogy of learning with teachings that speak to the movement of growth that is

expected for candidates to include in their spiritual formation. This wheel also is tool for assessment:

- a. For Candidates to help articulate their story of discernment and growth.
- b. For the Board, a tool that helps focus their assessment on the areas of critical growth and identify the weaknesses and strengths in all aspects of Mind, body, and Spirit.

This wheel was also included in the consultation process.

Learning of the relationships within the Candidacy Pathway

In this past year, one of the Candidates that Ordained is a person who joined the Indigenous Candidacy Pathway based upon their sense of calling to reconciliation and the fact that they were joined to an Indigenous family. After 4 years in the process, the Indigenous Candidacy Board approved their readiness for Ministry to the non-Indigenous church and the Motion was accepted by a Regional Council as opposed to being sent to the National Indigenous Council. From this experience, the following learnings were understood.

- a. Indigenous Pathway is not meant to train non-Indigenous people to be our voice
- b. Participants must be called to the healing Ministry and leadership of the Indigenous Church. While reconciliation is important, it is in fact the work of the non-Indigenous Church.
- c. The work of personal healing is critical to Indigenous Leadership, as the legacy of trauma remains part of our collective. Our pathways of healing are informed by our stories and teachings.
- d. Affirmation of the role of community being critical to spiritual formation. To explain, while this experience included a hybrid-approach between the two pathways, there was only a non-Indigenous community voice present in the experience that did deepen the values of the overall Church within the candidate as part of their core identity, but there was a clear absence of Indigenous pathways of learning and understanding.

The implications of these learnings are quite significant in their complexities as they represent the collective challenges that exist between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationship of how we are able co-exist within our shared faith. It was also expressed by the members of the candidacy board that there may not necessarily be answers for these challenges, but we must be committed to always a process that is about doing things in a good way. As our relationships with each other, our communities and with Creator continues to change, so will our processes.

The Appendix to this report contains other details related to the Indigenous Pathway.

CANDIDACY PATHWAY

Ministry Formation

The work in support of ministry formation within the Office of Vocation falls into three main areas:

1. support to candidacy boards and their mandate,
2. relationship with Theological Schools, and
3. supervised ministry

1. Candidacy Boards: resourcing a denominational team

Members of Candidacy Boards are responsible for:

- a) approving an individual for candidacy for ministry in the United Church;
- b) terminating candidacy if necessary;
- c) determining an individual's readiness for accreditation for ordination, for commissioning, and for recognition as a designated lay minister; and
- d) overseeing the Candidacy Pathway process. (Candidacy Pathway Policy, 2024, p 5)

Board members are resourced in this work through the Office of Vocation by the Coordinator of Ministry Vocations, administrative staff, and the Vocational Ministers.

Support and resourcing in 2024 included:

1. Continuation of online denominational gatherings of Vocational Ministers and Candidacy Board Chairs and members continued into spring 2024, building a **denominational team** across Regionally-oriented Boards.
2. A workshop on EQi assessments served as orientation to the revision of the Candidacy Pathway policy on vocational assessments, passed by the Board of Vocation in February 2024. The change in practice from mandatory vocational assessments to required engagement in **development of self-knowledge for practice of leadership** allows Candidacy Boards and Vocational Ministers to guide applicants and candidates in the professional standards of lifelong leadership development.
3. A virtual gathering of Vocational Ministers and Candidacy Board Chairs and their members to which United Church formation faculty were invited led to the revision of means of **communication between schools and the candidacy boards**, including interview schedules and style and content of school reports. School reports were updated and successfully and appreciatively utilized this spring. The relationship between the schools and the OV continues to be constructive and collaborative.
4. **Handbooks** to support Candidacy Boards were reviewed, edited, and updated based on five years of reflective practice since 2019's launch of the new candidacy process. Communications published all ten handbooks and three French translations by July 31, 2024. All texts are in the queue for translation.

- Candidacy Board Resources Vol 1 Orientation
- Candidacy Board Resources Vol 2 Interviews
- Candidacy Pathway Policy (2024)
- Candidacy Pathway Roadmap (2024)

A major revision was made to the resources prepared for Supervised Ministry Education lay teams. Post-pandemic capacity for lay people to support SME is significantly diminished and expectations for both role and reporting needed adjusting. Lay teams now focus on offering feedback about how they experience the candidate's ministry (based on Standards of Practice for Ministry), while SME Supervisors focus on the candidate's capacity to learn and reflect on practice while in ministry (based on Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership).

- SME Community of Faith Connection Handbook
 - SME Feedback and Communication
 - SME Learning Covenant and Learning Goals
 - SME Roles, Responsibilities and Reporting
 - SME Supervisor Handbook (2024)
 - SME Theological Reflection Resource
5. Our program assistant's skills and scope of practice in data collection and translation means that information provided by applicants and candidates in the candidacy pathway is appropriately tagged for data collection which will provide the Office of Vocation with the capacity for analysis of long and short-term **trends in ministry vocations**.

2. Theological Schools: formation for ministry leadership

Schools continue to work with us to create programs and communicate opportunities for United Church of Canada students to complete the testamur in various residential and on-line modes of delivery. Additionally, the schools work with us to meet emerging needs of church leaders in practice of ministry, including mentorship.

United Church Theological schools are working with us through Executive Minister for Theology and Ministry Leadership, Rev. Dr. Jennifer Janzen-Ball, to collaborate on a major grant application to fund new approaches to theological education in cooperation with the church and its ministry formation and program delivery needs.

3. Supervised Ministry:

1. Cooperative ministry pilot

In 2024, three salary grants were continued. In addition, **six cooperative ministry SME** sites were approved, and five were funded with the appointment of candidates. These pilot cooperative SMEs are located in Vancouver, Calgary, Saskatoon, Sackville/Moncton, and Scarborough. Cooperative models look different from place to

place; for example, partnering with chaplaincies, camps, justice ministries, and other ecumenical, social agencies, and arts communities, or sharing a single ministry leader among several communities of faith, including ecumenical partnerships.

Equipping and encouraging various models of cooperative ministry is a priority of the church in a time of changing patterns of leadership, partnerships and configurations within and across communities of faith. In a cooperative model of ministry, the clergy and lay people of one or more communities of faith work together, as Christian ministers, each in their own right, being mutually supportive and accountable and committed to God's purposes and activity in the world.

In order to learn from the cooperative ministry pilot, these SME candidates meet with a mentor from the Office of Vocation, Rev. Dr. Andrew Richardson, as well as their supervisor.

2. Educational Supervisors: Community of Practice

Vocational Ministers host monthly denomination-wide community of practice sessions for Educational Supervisors currently offering supervision to candidates (approximately 20-25). These sessions meet two objectives: to offer supervisors opportunity for reflective practice and practical support/sharing, and for Office of Vocation staff to learn what issues, concerns and challenges supervised ministry education presents for candidates, supervisors and communities of faith in order that these might be addressed.

3. SME and Pastoral Relations

The split episcopate divides the SME into two parts (formation in the OV, and pastoral relations in the Region), calling both bodies to high levels of communication and cooperation in oversight and assignment of the various roles and responsibilities. This relationship is facilitated regionally through the Vocational Ministers and their Regional Pastoral Relations colleagues, and denominationally through the Pastoral Relations Circle and OV Staff.

Several challenges to on-site learning continue in the post-COVID period, including fewer communities of faith meeting the criteria for optimal learning sites, fewer candidates able to move to serve an approved SME site, educational supervision taking place virtually, and (mentioned above) less capacity for lay support and feedback.

Work is on-going to address this changed landscape for on-site learning, supervision and pastoral relations.

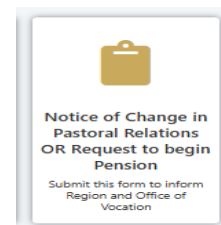
The reports which follow in the appendix give a numerical synopsis of the work of the Vocational Ministers and their Candidacy Boards, as well as a brief commentary summarizing trends which they have noticed over the last year.

CHURCHHUB

ChurchHub.ca is now 7 years old and it continues to evolve and improve. In 2024 there was a significant change to the login process for all ChurchHub users. The change was necessary to deal with limits to Microsoft (non-profit) licenses and to improve security. The new login process took effect May 21 2024 following several months of analysis, planning, programming and communications. The main difference for ChurchHub users is that they now receive a one-time passcode (sent to their email inbox) each time they log into ChurchHub. There is no longer a need to remember passwords.

Additional changes to ChurchHub (and its related entities Dynamics and Sharepoint) in 2024 include:

1. An update to the “Notice of Change of Pastoral Relations” tile – incorporating aspects of the previous PR443 (Request to begin pension) form. This update was suggested from Pensions & Benefits. The PR443 is no longer used – ministers now can make this request through ChurchHub and when requests to begin pension are received, the information is forwarded to Pensions unit and to the minister’s Regional Council.



2. A “DLM Testamur” tile was added to ChurchHub for all Designated Lay Ministers. This tile opened a page that displayed their assignment history, and invited them to make a request for assessment for Testamur. These requests were available to OVPR staff who then scheduled interviews in Feb/March 2024.

Designated Lay Ministers - Testamur

Full Name: Deb Kigar
 Minister Entry Date: 2011-05-28
 Regional Council Membership: Horseshoe Falls Regional Council

Assignment Name	Start Date	End Date	Type	Hours per W...
General Council Office	2023-01-01		Covenant to ...	21
General Council	2022-01-01	2022-12-31	Covenant to ...	21
General Council	2021-01-01	2021-12-31	Covenant to ...	21
General Council	2020-01-01	2020-12-31	Covenant to ...	21
General Council	2019-07-01	2019-12-31	Covenant to ...	28
General Council Office	2019-01-01	2019-06-30	Covenant to ...	18
Hamilton Presbytery	2016-10-01	2018-12-31	Retained on t...	
Quebec Presbytery	2016-07-01	2016-09-30	Retained on t...	

I certify that I have a certificate/diploma/letter signifying completion of a program of study or prior learning assessment that led to recognition as a DLM

Submit Request for Assessment

3. Prior to the new login process, many Treasurers would use the

Admin username for ChurchHub to complete the Record of Call/Appointment form for their ministers. But once the “verification code” method was required, Treasurers could only access the Record of

Call/Appointment form if they also had access to the Community of Faith email inbox. Therefore, this tile is now available on Treasurer’s ChurchHub pages so that they can access the form using their email address (rather than Admin username).



Record of Call/Appointment
Review/Approve covenant between ministry personnel and a community of faith in your regional council.

4. Additional steps have been added to the automated processes that occur when a minister (or layperson) is marked as deceased in Dynamics. One of the new steps includes adding an end date to their committee appointments automatically (previously this had to be done manually by Member Engagement staff).

In 2024 additional users were invited to ChurchHub – these included Administrators for several of the UCC Incorporated Ministries (Camps, Financial Institutions). More Incorporated Ministries will be added in the coming year.

Ministers who accessed ChurchHub at least once in 2024	2372
Ministers requested to be approved for search	551
Ministers on the Available Ministers list as of December	222
Total number of ministers in Calls	974
Number of ministers in appointments as of December	431
Communities of Faith Submitted Positions new in 2024	244
Available Positions list as of December	240
Record of Call/Appointment Approved by Regional Councils	761
Annual Declarations completed by June 30th deadline	1982
Annual Declarations completed after June 30th deadline	142
Number of ChurchHub users (ministers, candidates, applicants, treasurers, search teams, administrators)	10109
Number of visits to ChurchHub by all users (many users visit multiple times)	49406

CONCLUSION

The Board of Vocation is grateful to the staff of the Office of Vocation, and to all the elected members across the country who have enabled this work to continue in this way. The Board appreciates that this work is holy, and hard, and commits, along with the Holy Spirit, to being partners in the journey.