A Handbook for Candidates

Seeking Standing
as
Ordained or Commissioned Ministers
in the
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
Central Rocky Mountain Region

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This Handbook is a condensed version of the *Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Central Rocky Mountain Region*. It addresses the most common actions undertaken by the Committee on Standing and outlines more specifically how the Committee on Standing functions in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Central Rocky Mountain Region (CRMR.)

Many thanks to those whose prayerful consideration helped shape this Handbook.

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Section 1: Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The ministry of Christ is entrusted to all the people of God. Through baptism they are called to servant ministry lived out in covenant community. Implicit in the confession of faith and the act of baptism is an acceptance of the vocation of the baptized – the special calling shared by all followers of Christ to witness to the love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Within the ministry of the whole people of God there is representative ministry called by God and set apart by the Church for distinctive functions. Authority and blessing to perform this ministry are celebrated in Ordination and Commissioning.

The Order of Ministry

The order of ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) comprises Ordained Ministers and Commissioned Ministers.

Personal Qualifications

The church expects to find within the women and men it receives into the order of ministry:

- Faith in Jesus Christ, commitment to a life of Christian discipleship and nurturing spiritual practices;
- A sense of call to the ministry affirmed by the church;
- An understanding of pastoral identity;
- Capacity to engage in theological reflection;
- Strong moral character and personal integrity;
- Commitment to spiritual, physical and emotional wellness sufficient for healthy ministry;
- Care and compassion for all people with appropriate relational skills;
- Responsible personal financial management;
- Wise and generous stewardship in the use of God’s gifts;
- Skills and abilities necessary for the rigorous, pastoral tasks of ministry.

Preparation for Service

The church expects the women and men it receives into the order of ministry to prepare for the work of the church in the following ways:

- Active participation in the life and work of a recognized congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ);
- Professional study necessary to gain ministerial competency;
- Ongoing personal growth and theological reflection.
Section 2: Ordained Ministry

Description

By Ordination, the church recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in calling men and women to life-long ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); covenants to undergird their ministry; and grants authority to perform that ministry as a representative of the church.

In accepting Ordination, the minister covenants to obey God by caring for the church, offering gifts of mind, body and spirit to that service, agreeing to fulfill the functions of a minister, and adhering to the Ministerial Code of Ethics of the Christian church (Disciples of Christ).

Educational Requirements

There are two educational tracks in preparation for Ordination: a Seminary Track and an Apprentice Track. Candidates for Ordination are expected to follow the Seminary Track. The Apprentice Track may be approved rarely when the Committee on Standing determines that the candidate’s life circumstances make the Apprentice Track appropriate. Regardless of the educational track, the church expects the women and men it ordains to demonstrate competency in the following 16 areas of ministerial practice, listed alphabetically:

- Biblical Knowledge: Be rooted and grounded in scripture and able to interpret and apply the scriptures in ways that are appropriate to original and contemporary contexts.
- Church Administration and Planning: Be able to practice the principles of good administration, planning, and implementing short- and long-range goals to enhance Congregational life in collaboration with teams and committees.
- Communication: Be an effective communicator and be able to facilitate effective communication within and on behalf of the church.
- Cross Cultural and Anti-Racism Experience: Be sensitive to the different manifestations of racism and prejudice in the culture and be committed to confronting and overcoming them.
- Ecumenism: Exhibit a commitment to working with other Christians and denominations and with other faiths in programs of common witness and service, and to articulating the vision of the ecumenical and global church as a starting place for mission.
- Education and Leader Development: Know the foundations of Christian education and the principles of leader development. Show competency in teaching children, youth, and adults, including lay leaders and staff.
- Ethics: Be able to help parishioners think critically about the relationship of their faith to issues of justice, ethics, and morality.
- Evangelism: Be able to motivate Congregational members to share their faith through word and action.
Mission of the Church in the World: Be able to understand and articulate the centrality of the call to mission given by Jesus Christ and the prophets. Be able to empower congregations to engage in mission from our doorsteps to the ends of the earth.

Pastoral Care: Be able to engage other persons with empathy and assess situations and relationships with the compassion of Christ, with sensitivity to culture and context. Be able to convey the healing power of God to those who suffer.

Proclamation of the Word: Know the practice and theory of Christian preaching. Be able to proclaim the Word of God, share the Good News of Jesus Christ, and help Congregational members apply their faith to daily life.

Spiritual Development: Establish and maintain spiritual disciples that lead to personal growth and help others develop a rich spiritual life.

Stewardship: Be able to develop and encourage healthy stewards who recognize and share generously God’s abundant gifts for all creation.

Theology: Be able to articulate a coherent view of God’s nature and activity in relation to the Christian tradition, to critically engage human situations from a perspective of faith, and to help persons recognize theological issues in their daily lives.

Understanding of Heritage: have knowledge of and appreciation for the history and thought of Christianity and of the history, structure, practices, and ethos of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ.)

Worship: Know the purpose of elements of Christian worship. Have the ability to plan and lead meaningful worship by working with the worship team, musicians, and Congregational members.

Seminary Track

1. Seminary is the expected track for all candidates.

2. The candidate will demonstrate competency in all 16 areas of ministerial practice by securing a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a theological school accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada or its equivalent.

Apprentice Track

1. Apprentice Track may be approved rarely when the Committee on Standing determines that the candidate’s life circumstances make Apprentice Track appropriate. A high school diploma and some secondary educational experience is required.

2. The candidate will demonstrate competency in all 16 areas of ministerial practice by finishing a complete program of study approved by the Committee on Standing and the General Commission on Ministry and listed on the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) website. (Examples: MA in Ministry and Culture
3. Additional assignments to fulfill competency requirements may be met through a combination of assigned reading, written reflections, online or classroom coursework, and field experience.

4. The candidate will complete a portfolio that demonstrates his/her competency in all 16 areas of ministerial practice and defend it before the Committee on Standing.

5. A mentor will be assigned by the Committee on Standing to walk with the candidate during the Apprentice Track process.

Application for Ordination Candidacy

1. Upon admission to seminary, the candidate will complete an Application for Ordination, which is available through the Regional Office. The application will include the following:
   a. letter from the candidate stating his/her call to enter ordained ministry
   b. letter of recommendation from the governing body of a recognized congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the CRMR declaring their sponsorship of the candidate and affirming the candidate’s call and gifts for ministry

2. Upon receipt of the application, the Committee on Standing will assess the candidate’s capacity for ministry. Assessments will include the following:
   a. Psychological and Vocational Assessment for Ministry (oversight by a third party; the CRMR will contribute approximately one-third of the fee; the candidate and/or the sponsoring congregation will contribute the balance)
   b. personal interview
   c. other assessments as deemed appropriate

3. The Committee on Standing may consult with the National Pastor/Leader of Racial Ethnic communities as appropriate whenever considering a person of color.

Procedures While Under Care during Ordination Candidacy

Once the candidate has received initial approval, he/she will come under care of the Committee on Standing. During this time the candidate will prepare for the service of ministry in the following ways:
1. Meet annually with the Committee on Standing. The candidate is responsible for scheduling these meetings.

2. Follow through with opportunities for care, nurture, and education as recommended by the Committee on Standing.

3. In Year 2, undergo a Criminal Background Check (oversight by the Office of Search and Call; the fee will be paid by the candidate and/or the sponsoring congregation)

4. If desired, the candidate may receive standing as a Commissioned Theological Student following a positive outcome of the Psychological and Vocational Assessment for Ministry and the Criminal Background Check.

5. Complete educational requirements outlined above.

Conclusion of Ordination Candidacy

Receipt of a Master of Divinity degree (Seminary Track) or completion of a prescribed program of study (Apprentice Track) does not guarantee Ordination. Near the conclusion of educational requirements, the candidate will do the following:

1. Three months prior to the anticipated date of Ordination:
   a. complete the Ministerial Profile, including the Criminal Background Check if it has been more than three years since the first background check; the fee, if any, will be paid by the candidate.
   b. meet with the Committee on Standing for the Final Review of Candidacy.

2. One month prior to the Final Review, the candidate will provide the following:
   a. a written statement detailing religious background and personal commitment to ministry; concepts of the Church in its local, denominational, and ecumenical aspects; understanding of the history and polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); cooperative intent in both denominational and ecumenical contexts; and general theological position.
   b. a sermon written by the candidate.
   c. official and complete seminary transcripts. (If on Apprentice Track, the candidate provides transcripts from the approved Apprentice Track program of study and a competency-based portfolio.)
   d. letters of recommendation from the following:
      1) the governing bodies of two recognized congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the CRMR, including the Sponsoring congregation
      2) a faculty member of the seminary where the candidate Completed his/her degree or program of study.
3) two ordained ministers with standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), at least one being in the CRMR
4) two lay persons who are members in good standing of a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)


The Service of Ordination

1. The service ordinarily shall take place in the congregation of the candidate’s choice.

2. The service ordinarily shall be designed by the candidate in conjunction with the sponsoring or host congregation and the Regional Minister.

3. Representatives from the sponsoring congregation, the Committee on Standing, the Regional Minister, and, if possible, representatives from the seminary or program of study should participate.

4. A Certificate of Ordination shall be issued and signed by the Regional Office.

5. A “Statement of My Ministerial Code of Ethics” will be presented to the Ordained during the service.

Section 3: Commissioned Ministry

Description

By Commissioning, the church recognizes the work of the Holy Spirit in calling men and women to ministry in a specific context for a specific period of time. Change of ministry or ministry context requires re-Commissioning by the Committee on Standing.

In accepting Commissioning, the minister covenants to obey God by caring for the church, offering gifts of mind, body and spirit to that service, agreeing to fulfill the functions of a minister, and adhering to the Ministerial Code of Ethics of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Educational Requirements

Candidates for Commissioned Ministry will complete a program of professional study necessary to gain competency for their specific area of ministry. The Committee on Standing will evaluate the candidate’s transcripts and make additional coursework assignments as appropriate. Coursework will include the following:

1. Christian History: to the Reformation
Application for Commissioned Candidacy

1. Upon employment, the candidate will complete an Application for Commissioning, which is available through the Regional Office. The application will include the following:
   a. a letter from the governing body of a recognized congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) affirming the candidate’s call and gifts for ministry and requesting Commissioning on the Candidate’s behalf
   b. a job description from the sponsoring congregation stating the specific ministry for which the candidate is being commissioned
   c. a letter from the candidate stating his/her desire to enter commissioned ministry
   d. college transcripts documenting coursework, if appropriate

2. Upon receipt of the application, the Committee on Standing will assess the applicant’s capacity for ministry. Assessments may include the following:
   a. personal interviews
   b. other assessments as deemed appropriate

Responsibilities of the Commissioned Minister

1. Complete the Ministerial Profile (including the Criminal Background Check if it has been more than three years since the last background check.)

2. Complete the program of study assigned by the Committee on Standing.

3. Follow through with opportunities for care, nurture, and education as recommended by the Committee on Standing.

Responsibilities of the Committee on Standing

1. The Committee on Standing may Commission the candidate at any time during the process.

2. Completion of a prescribed program of study does not guarantee Commissioning.
Section 4: Ministerial Standing

Definition

Standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is credentialing for ministry within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a call to accountability to the church, and collegiality with other ministers both denominationally and ecumenically. Standing may be granted to active ministers, active retired ministers, and fully retired ministers.

Active Ministers

Ordained or Commissioned ministers working on a full-time, part-time, or occasional, contracted basis who do not receive distributions from the Pension Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and/or Social Security

1. To maintain standing the minister will:
   a. be employed in an occupation recognized by the church as ministerial in purpose or perform a service recognized by the church as ministerial in purpose
   b. participate regularly in programs of study, growth, and renewal including boundary training, which will be completed every five years
   c. hold participating membership in a recognized Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation where feasible
   d. adhere to the Ministerial Code of Ethics
   e. continue to meet personal qualifications for the Order of Ministry
   f. seek standing annually as requested by the Region

2. Ordained ministers who relocate to the Central Rocky Mountain Region must notify both the former and new regional ministers. The former regional minister will verify that the minister was in good standing. Those who are not actively seeking a ministry position may be granted provisional standing for up to one year.

Active Retired Ministers (Retired – Active)

Ordained or Commissioned ministers working on a full-time or part-time basis (more than occasional pulpit supply) who receive distributions from the Pension Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and/or Social Security

To maintain standing, the minister will comply with all requirements for active ministers outlined above.
Fully Retired Ministers (Retired – Inactive)

Ordained ministers or Commissioned ministers who are no longer in active service and receive distributions from the Pension Fund of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or Social Security

Commissioned ministers must have retired while serving the same recognized Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in the CRMR for at least ten years.

1. To maintain standing the minister will:
   a. hold participating membership in a recognized Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation where feasible
   b. adhere to the Ministerial Code of Ethics
   c. seek standing annually as requested by the CRMR

2. If a fully retired minister decides to once again take up the practice of ministry, that minister must seek status as an active retired minister.

Suspension or Termination of Ministerial Standing

1. Standing may be suspended or terminated in the following situations:
   a. the minister is no longer employed in an occupation recognized by the church as ministerial in purpose or no longer performs a service recognized by the church as ministerial in purpose
   b. the minister fails to a request annual standing
   c. the minister no longer meets the personal qualifications for the Order of Ministry or fails to adhere to the Ministerial Code of Ethics
   d. the minister requests transfer of credentials to another denomination

2. Written notice will be given to the minister that his/her standing is in jeopardy.

3. Standing may be granted to a minister whose standing has been suspended or terminated by another Region or the General Commission on Ministry only upon the recommendation of the suspending or terminating body.

Section 5: Transfer of Credentials for Ordained Ministers

Partnership with the United Church of Christ

1. Ordained ministers with standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ may function as Ordained ministers in either denomination.

2. When an Ordained minister in the United Church of Christ is called to serve a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation, the minister applies to the
Region for Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing. Once granted, standing is reviewed annually in the same way that standing is reviewed for active, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ministers.

3. When an Ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is called to serve a United Church of Christ congregation, the minister APPLY for Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing. Once granted, standing is reviewed annually by the United Church of Christ Association.

4. A Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Ordained minister who holds Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing in the United Church of Christ will remain accountable to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and by doing so, will maintain standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Persons Ordained in Other Denominations

Ordained ministers from another denomination seeking recognition of Ordination and Standing must meet the same standards of preparation and fitness as ministers who are members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and seek Ordination and Standing through the same process.

1. Educational Requirements

   a. The candidate will hold a Master of Divinity degree or its equivalent from a theological school accredited by the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada or its equivalent.
   
   b. The candidate will demonstrate competency in all 16 areas of ministerial practice.

2. Application for Candidacy

   a. The candidate will meet with the Regional Minister to explore motive, realistic opportunities of placement with a Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation, relationships with the judicatory official of the present denomination, differences of theology, ecclesiology, and/or methodologies in ministry, and any other questions or concerns considered appropriate by the Regional Minister.
   
   b. Upon approval of the Regional Minister, the candidate will complete an Application for Transfer of Credentials, which is available through the Regional Office. The application will include the following:

      1) statement from the candidate outlining his/her pilgrimage of faith that has resulted in the request for standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
      2) letter of recommendation from the governing body of a recognized congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) declaring their sponsorship of the candidate and affirming the candidate’s call and gifts for ministry
      3) letter of recommendation from the judicatory official of the
denomination from which the candidate is transferring stating that the candidate is in good standing.

4) complete transcripts showing confirmation of a Master of Divinity degree

c. Upon receipt of the application, the Committee on Standing will assess the candidate’s capacity for ministry. Assessments will include the following:

1) Psychological and Vocational Assessment for Ministry (oversight by a third party; the CRMR will contribute approximately one-third of the cost; the candidate and/or the sponsoring congregation will contribute the balance)

2) Criminal Background Check (oversight by the Office of Search and Call); the fee will be paid by the candidate and/or the sponsoring congregation.

2) personal interview

3) other assessments as deemed appropriate

3. Procedures While Under Care during Candidacy

Once the candidate has received initial approval, he/she will come under care of the Committee on Standing. During this time, the candidate will prepare for the service of ministry in the following ways:

a. actively participate in the life and work of a recognized congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

b. complete a graduate level course on the History and Polity of the Disciples of Christ

c. follow through with opportunities for care, nurture, and education as recommended by the Committee on Standing.

d. work with a mentor to receive support and guidance during this time of transition. Mentors will be assigned by the Committee on Standing.

e. meet regularly with the Committee on Standing. The candidate is responsible for scheduling these meetings.

4. Conclusion of Candidacy

Completing the process for recognition of Ordination and Standing does not guarantee Transfer of Credentials. Transfer of Credentials does not assure a position in ministry within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); nor does a call by a congregation assure recognition of standing, as this function is delegated to the Region.

a. When all requirements have been met, the candidate will do the following:

1) complete the Ministerial Profile (including the Criminal Background Check); the fee, if any, will be paid by the candidate.

2) meet with the Committee on Standing for the Final Review of Candidacy.
b. One month prior to the Final Review, the candidate will provide the following:

1) a written statement detailing religious background and personal commitment to ministry; concepts of the Church in its local, denominational, and ecumenical aspects; understanding of the history and polity of the Christian Church (DOC); cooperative intent in both denominational and ecumenical contexts; and general theological position.

2) letters of recommendation from the following:
   a) the governing body of the sponsoring congregation
   b) two ordained ministers with standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), including the candidate’s mentor
   c) two lay persons who are members in good standing of a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
   d) one ordained minister with standing in the denomination from which the candidate is transferring

   c. Sign the Ministerial Code of Ethics.

5. Final Review
The Committee on Standing will respond to the candidate in one of the following ways:

   a. decline the Transfer of Credentials.
   b. approve the Transfer of Credentials with any understanding or conditions the Committee on Standing may consider appropriate

Section 6: Right of Appeal

The Right of Appeal regarding decisions of the Committee on Standing is limited to the candidate’s perceived violation of the Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry. Appeals shall be made in writing to the Committee on the Order of Ministry and the Regional Minister within thirty (30) days. The Committee on the Order of Ministry will not consider any appeal if legal proceedings are pending or in process. Further appeal may be made to the General Commission on the Order of Ministry.

Section 7: Misconduct

Complaints of ethical impropriety brought against Ordained and Commissioned ministers holding standing in the CRMR shall be received and acted upon by the Standing Committee on Ethics.