



# let it shine

## Forming Leaders From and For the Church

Each Sunday, men and women don special clothing—perhaps the gown of 16th century teachers, perhaps the much older tradition of a cloth draped over the neck which was once a house servant’s towel—to lead the assembled Christian community in worship. Others who do not lead parishes comfort the sick in hospitals, strive to meet the spiritual needs of those serving in the military, educate young people in the faith, or perform other services to support the ministries of the Church in a variety of settings.

Each one of them emerged from a local church, which nurtured them and prepared them for service. Each felt something they recognized as a call from God. Each demonstrated that they were capable of the ministry to which they aspired. Each received a call from a body of the United Church of Christ that required authorization for ministry.

The United Church of Christ recognizes three types of authorized ministry. Commissioned Ministers offer specialized skills in a variety of settings ranging from Christian Education through counseling to advocacy work. Ordained Ministers provide the familiar teaching, preaching, and sacramental ministries, not only in local churches but also in institutional chaplaincy and denominational leadership. Licensed Ministers perform the same duties as their ordained colleagues for a limited amount of time and subject to re-authorization.

The process begins when individuals understand that God has called them to exercise leadership in the Church. Their congregation recommends them to their local UCC association for consideration. Those seeking ordination will be taken “In Care of the Association” and assigned a mentor as they complete the educational requirements, usually a Master of Divinity degree. Candidates for licensure and commissioning complete an appropriate course of study or demonstrate their abilities as well. Their local churches continue to support them with guidance, prayer, and encouragement throughout this stage of the process.

When the requirements are complete, the candidate’s church reviews him or her, and recommends that the Association confer the appropriate authorization.

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*Our UCC Polity—How Our Church Works*

The candidate typically prepares a document demonstrating their understanding of Christian theology, UCC governance, and ability to describe their spiritual life and journey: the “ordination paper.” The Association’s review concludes with an Ecclesiastical Council, a gathering of delegates and ministers from those churches to hear the candidate present and defend their call to ministry. Before authorization is finally conferred, however, the Association must receive evidence that a UCC church will enter into a covenant with the candidate: that a congregation will call him or her in a pastoral position, or support the call of another body as chaplain, counselor, educator, or leader.

The process concludes with a worship service that celebrates all that has gone before: the candidate’s talents and passions; the efforts to build skills for ministry; the support of the local church, teachers, and Association leaders; the confidence of the calling body; and the summons to service from God. The candidate kneels to receive the ancient symbol of the laying on of hands. Newly ordained, licensed, or commissioned, the person rises to meet the joys and challenges of leadership in the United Church of Christ.

The formation of leaders for and from the church reveals the interdependence of individuals, congregations, and wider settings of the UCC. No one person, and no one entity, produces new leaders. Local church members and clergy, Association mentors and leaders, professional and informal educators, and the individual whom God has called all make their contributions, and shape the future Church.

Reflection:

- How have the authorized ministers you have known contributed to the shaping of your faith?
- What questions would you ask a candidate for authorization?
- Have you wondered if God might be calling you to Authorized Ministry in the United Church of Christ?

Resources:

- The *Manual on Ministry* is the guide for authorizing and reviewing ministry in the UCC: [www.ucc.org/ministers/manual/](http://www.ucc.org/ministers/manual/)
- The UCC *Book of Worship* contains worship materials for authorization services.

*“Forming Leaders From and For the Church” was written by the Rev. Eric S. Anderson, Minister of Technology Services for the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ.*

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