



Authorizing Ministry in Today's Church

by Rev. Jane Anderson

Friends,

How do Church and Ministry Committees in our associations discern whether a candidate is ready to serve the United Church of Christ as an ordained minister? How do these committees know that the person has the knowledge, skills, wisdom and life experience to serve in a variety of settings (local church, hospital, prison, healthcare facility) that a candidate feels called to minister? These are some of the big questions that our Committees on Ministry wrestle with in their work to authorize, support and oversee ministers and churches in their respective associations.



The criteria for determining readiness for ministry has changed over the years as the church has changed. Historically, a typical pathway to prepare a candidate for ministry included 3-4 years of seminary education, clinical pastoral education, field education and so on. While the Marks for Ministry outlined in our Manual on Ministry provided the basic understanding of what is needed for ordination, formation largely happened through our seminaries. Our Committees on Ministry relied more on a checklist of coursework and corresponding references to be assured that the candidate met the broad range of knowledge and skill sets needed to be an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. Much of that has shifted, especially since we have candidates who are not coming to us through traditional means, but are being formed through alternates paths to ordination. The new Manual on Ministry has updated the Marks for Ministry to be relevant to the shifting tides in our churches and in the denomination. [You can see them here.](#)

The Marks for Ministry are now the primary criteria for how Committees on Ministry assess a candidate's readiness to serve in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ as an ordained minister. The focus is on how a candidate demonstrates both an understanding of that Mark and how they are living that out in their ministry.

On January 23rd, all of our Committee on Ministries will be meeting with Dr. Sandra Graham and the Associate Conference Ministers to understand about outcome-based learning and authentic assessment using the new Marks for Ministry. Dr. Graham has already been

working with Rev. Tisha Brown on the Damascus project and has developed some great tools for us to use in this process.

I am very grateful to all of our Committees on Ministry for the tireless work they do on our behalf. And, I'm very grateful that we have clergy, like Dr. Graham and our staff, to help guide us in helping in the formation process to shape clergy who will help serve as leaders in our churches for years to come.