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**PROVISIONAL GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR ENTRY INTO MINISTRY  
IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) IN TENNESSEE**

The fundamental ministry within the Church is that of Jesus Christ. He calls the Church to participate in this ministry.

By virtue of baptism in the Church, every Christian enters into the corporate ministry of God's people. Within the corporate ministry, each Christian fulfills her or his own calling as a servant of Christ.

In addition, the Church recognizes and authorizes an Order of Ministry to which is entrusted the responsibility to lead in transmitting the Christian tradition, interpreting the Scriptures, proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ, administering the sacraments, serving to maintain a company of Christians, and acting as pioneers and leaders in the Church's reconciling mission in the world.

The Order of Ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) includes two offices beyond the local congregation: the office of ordained minister and the office of commissioned minister. The foregoing paragraphs are based on The Design for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and "Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)" approved by the General Assembly of the Christian Church in 1971 and amended in 1977, 1981, 1985, 1987, and 2009.

While Disciples are congregational in authority, congregations have covenanted with one another in regions to ordain and commission ministers and recognize standing under the guidance of regional Commissions on Ministry, constituted in accordance with regional structures and policies. In order to promote and maintain the development of a qualified and competent commissioned and ordained ministry, the Christian Church in Tennessee has established a Commission on Ministry. The Commission holds responsibility for establishing and interpreting guidelines and procedures for persons entering the Order of Ministry (see Appendices), for giving nurture to those preparing for entrance into the Order as well as those already within it, and for cooperating with congregations in assuring that the work of the Order of Ministry is effectively fulfilled.

The Commission on Ministry of the Christian Church in Tennessee has established the following required guidelines and procedures for recognition of ministerial standing.

General statements

1. Persons currently under care of the Commission on Ministry will be considered under the guidelines active in the region when accepted into candidacy.
2. This document shall supersede all previous guidelines.

3. Each person residing in, or performing a recognized ministry in the Region of Tennessee, who wishes to be commissioned or ordained, is expected to come under the care and nurture of the Commission on Ministry. Those under the care of another Region will not be the responsibility of the Commission on Ministry in Tennessee except by personal request. In the event a candidate from another Region seeks ordination or commissioning in Tennessee, the Commission on Ministry shall consult with the Region of candidacy regarding transfer of candidacy. If a candidate under the care of the Tennessee Commission on Ministry seeks licensing or ordination in another Region, the Commission on Ministry will cooperate with that Region.

The following paragraphs present the guidelines and procedures in four categories:

A. Commissioned Ministers

Men and women commissioned as ministers are authorized annually to perform general ministerial functions in relation to a specific institution with the approval of the Commission on Ministry and supervision by an ordained Disciples minister. The institution which the commissioned lay minister may serve is stated on the commissioning certificate. Approval must be renewed annually by the Commission on Ministry.

Persons currently licensed with standing will be granted commissioned status upon request by the individual and congregation. The Commission on Ministry encourages commissioned ministers to continue in study, guided by the core competency areas noted below in B. 2.a.

B. Ordained Ministers

Men and women are ordained as ministers of the Church for life (though standing is subject to regular review: see paragraph C). The Region and its congregations share responsibility for ordination through the Commission on Ministry. Such ordination is recognized in all Regions of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada.

Two tracks are available for ordination:

1. **The Seminary Track.** Preparation for ministry ordinarily includes the securing of a baccalaureate degree and the completion of a seminary program of study (normally the Master of Divinity) at a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. (For a list of accredited institutions, go to [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu))
2. **The Apprentice Track.** In rare occasions, the Commission on Ministry may approve an Apprentice track to ordination.
  - a. Those in the apprentice track will demonstrate competency in areas of ministerial practice by completing a program of study approved by the Region. Those areas are: Biblical Knowledge, Church Administration and Planning, Communication, Cross Cultural and Anti-Racism Experience, Ecumenism, Education and Leader Development, Ethics, Evangelism, Mission of the Church in the World, Pastoral Care, Proclamation of the Word,

Spiritual Development, Stewardship, Theology, Understanding of Disciple Heritage, and Worship. (For further information on the Competency Areas, see 2009 document on The Ordering of Ministry)

- b. In addition, candidates must complete a Healthy Boundaries or Clergy Sexual Ethics course approved by the region.
- c. Those seeking ordination through the Apprentice Track will have an intentional plan for gaining competencies in areas of ministerial practice, approved in advance by the Commission on Ministry, and be making progress along the plan.

C. Ministerial Standing

1. Standing affirms that the ordained or commissioned minister is presently engaged in an approved practice of ministry in Tennessee, whether on an occasional, part-time or full-time basis, with continuous accountability maintained with a congregation, organization, related institution or Regional or General Unit of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Such ministers are listed in the Year Book and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and may call upon the church for services and support such as relocation assistance, ecclesiastical endorsement, scholarship aid; and have voting privileges in the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
2. More information concerning standing is found in the Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) Section F.
3. Standing may be terminated at any time by the Commission on Ministry for reasons such as those described in the “Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)”, Section F, #4

D. Granting of standing to those ordained in other Communion

Recognition of ordination and granting of standing may occur for those persons who have been ordained in another Communion but who wish to be recognized by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Standing will be granted to such persons upon fulfillment of the requirements established by the Commission on Ministry of the Region, in accord with the general Theological Foundations and Policies and Criteria for the Ordering of Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Section F.

**A. SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR COMMISSIONED MINISTRY**

1. Commissioning is reserved for those who are actively engaged in a professional ministry, or who agree to discipline themselves to further study and training following the granting of a commissioning certificate and who, where feasible, hold membership in a congregation of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).
2. A period of candidacy of up to one year shall be designated by the Commission on Ministry, during which the candidate will complete any assignments made by the Commission.
3. The Applicant shall:

- a. Submit biographical information to the commission on a form secured from the Regional Church office.
  - b. Submit a letter of recommendation from the official board or elders of the congregation of which the applicant is a member.
  - c. Submit a letter from the congregation or institution the applicant will serve, requesting commissioning.
  - d. Meet with the Commission on Ministry.
4. If the candidate is a student, the student shall request that the college or seminary in which he or she is enrolled send a letter to the Commission on Ministry indicating satisfactory standing of the candidate in the institution.
  5. All commissioned ministers will participate in a workshop entitled Clergy Misconduct: Sexual Abuse in the Ministerial Relationship.
  6. If approval is granted, the candidate will be officially recognized as a Commissioned Minister and an appropriate certificate will be provided by the Commission on Ministry. This certificate is valid only in Tennessee, for a specific placement, and is reviewed annually for continuation and standing.

## **B. SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR ORDINATION TO MINISTRY**

1. Admission to candidacy is a prerequisite step ordinarily lasting for at least one year prior to ordination. Having applied for ordination, a candidate shall come under the care and nurture of the Commission on Ministry during this period of preparation.
2. The applicant shall take the following steps to become a candidate:
  - a. Submit biographical information to the Commission on Ministry on a form secured from the Regional Church office.
  - b. Submit a letter of approval and recommendation from official board or elders of the congregation of which the applicant is a member.
  - c. Submit a letter from the sponsoring congregation indicating their desire to do so.
  - d. Meet with the Commission on Ministry.
  - e. Upon approval of candidacy, the candidate will be assigned a mentor and will maintain regular contact with his or her sponsor throughout the candidacy.
3. The candidate will meet at least annually with the Commission throughout the period of candidacy leading up to an ordination interview.
  - a. At such meetings, the Commission will explore the candidate's faith journey and call, review the candidate's current work and preparation for ministry, offer guidance and support in a spirit of prayer, and make suggestions about next steps in the candidate's preparation for ministry. The Commission seeks to discern with the candidate his/her fitness for ministry in its various forms among Disciples and will seek to do so in a relational attitude of love and care for the church and its ministry, in company with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
  - b. The Commission on Ministry may require that the applicant undergo an assessment with a qualified counselor approved by the Commission. This shall include an

assessment of gifts, talents, vocation interests, personal strengths, growing edges, skills in relating to people, and any other areas deemed appropriate by the Commission on Ministry.

After the counselor evaluates the assessment results, the candidate and counselor will arrange an interview to discuss the assessment and other pertinent background information. The counselor will then write his/her final evaluation which will be shared with the Regional Minister who will guide the Commission on Ministry in its work with the candidate.

c. As discernment goes forward, the candidate may move toward an ordination interview.

4. Although the Commission on Ministry will explore important aspects of a candidate's call, character, and preparation for ministry, cooperation between the Commission and a sponsoring congregation is essential. A sponsoring congregation has knowledge of a candidate and his/her everyday life of faith. The candidacy process depends on the insight and good assessment of congregations in sponsoring and recommending candidates to the Commission on Ministry.

5. At the time of the final ordination interview, the candidate in the Seminary Track shall submit:

- a. A letter from his or her seminary indicating the applicant has successfully (or will soon) complete a Master of Divinity or its equivalent and showing this person has passed a course in Disciples History and Polity (or Theology), Homiletics, and Pastoral Care.
- b. A letter from a member of the seminary faculty (a Disciple, if possible) recommending him or her for ordination.
- c. A four-to-six page personal statement on his or her understanding of the church, the ministry, ordination, and career plans for service within the church.

6. Subsequently, an Ordination Council shall meet and must approve ordination before a date for the service is set. The Ordination Council shall be composed of the presiding minister and some or all of the elders of the sponsoring congregation(s), at least one representative from the Commission on Ministry and at least two other persons chosen by the candidate. The Council shall meet to interview the candidate, discuss the concept paper, act upon the authorization for ordination granted by the Commission on Ministry, and assist the presiding minister and the candidate in planning the Ordination Service.

7. Candidacy is terminated by ordination, withdrawal by the candidate, or decision of the Commission on Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tennessee.

## **C. SUMMARY OF PROCEDURES AND REQUIREMENTS FOR RECOGNITION OF ORDINATION ORIGINATING IN OTHER COMMUNIONS AND GRANTING OF STANDING**

1. Admission to candidacy is a prerequisite step ordinarily lasting for at least two years prior to recognition of ordination and granting of standing. Having applied for recognition, a person shall come under the care and nurture of the Commission on Ministry during this period of preparation.
2. The applicant shall:
  - a. Submit biographical information to the Commission on Ministry on a form secured from the Regional Church office.
  - b. Submit a letter of approval and recommendation from the official board or elders of the congregation of which the applicant is a member (if practical).
  - c. Submit a letter from the sponsoring congregation indicating their desire to do so (if practical).
  - d. Submit a letter of recommendation from a judicatory official of the former denomination (where possible).
  - e. Submit a copy of the candidate's ordination certificate.
  - f. Be assigned a mentor by the Commission on Ministry and maintain regular contact.
  - g. Complete a course on Disciple History and Polity either by participation in a class or online course and through reading and discussion with his or her sponsor.
  - h. Meet with the Commission on Ministry at least annually.
3. At the time of the final recognition of ordination interview, the candidate shall:
  - a. Submit evidence that he or she holds a M.Div. degree or equivalent from a theological institution accredited by the Association of Theological Schools. (For a list of accredited institutions, go to [www.ats.edu](http://www.ats.edu))
  - b. Submit a four to six page personal statement on his or her understanding of the church, ministry, ordination, and career plans for service within the church.
4. As necessary, the Commission on Ministry may require that the applicant undergo an assessment with a qualified counselor appointed by the Commission. This shall include an assessment of gifts, talents, vocational interests, personal strengths and growing edges, skills in relating to people, and other areas deemed appropriate by the Commission.

After the counselor evaluates the assessment results, the candidate and counselor will arrange an interview to discuss the assessment and other pertinent background information. The counselor will then submit a written final evaluation which will be shared with the Regional Minister who will guide the Commission in its work with the candidate.
5. Candidacy is terminated by recognition of ordination, withdrawal by the candidate, or decision of the Commission on Ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Tennessee.
6. After approval of recognition of ordination and granting of standing by the Commission on Ministry, the candidate will then (and not before) schedule an appropriate celebration at which a "Certificate of Recognition of Ordination and Granting of Standing" will be presented by the Regional Minister or by a representative of the Commission on Ministry.

