



Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership

Education, Formation, Competency, and Standards of Practice

The competencies for lifelong ministry leadership are determined by the needs of the church, the social and global contexts in which it finds itself, and the professional standards of practice in ministry. The United Church of Canada recognizes certain schools, centres, and affiliated programs of education and formation to prepare students to meet the church's expectations of its leaders. Each educational centre and each theological program in the United Church has requirements and processes of assessment that the church relies on as part of the overall formation for ministry leadership and development of specific competencies.

Candidacy Boards are not responsible for assessing these programs of formation and education. Rather, Candidacy Boards assess the applicant or candidate's **demonstrated ability** to meet the needs of the church, navigate well the social and global contexts in which the church finds itself, and exercise the professional standards of practice in ministry. Demonstrated competence in these areas relies not only on knowledge and skills gained through programs of education and formation, but also depends on character, spiritual maturity, and integration of faith in the practice of ministry. It is an assessment of this overall competency to which Candidacy Boards attend.

Purpose of the Competencies in the Context of Formation for Ministry

The *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel*¹ articulate the ways that the United Church expects competencies to be exercised by its ministry leaders. Development of competence in ministry begins in the Candidacy Pathway process but is expected to continue throughout a person's ministry. The purpose of this Competencies document is to identify threshold competencies for successful completion of the candidacy process.

A competency is "the development, through substantial experience in the field, of the habits or arts of ministry that leads to effective ministry leadership." There may be a minimum demonstration of competence needed but because of the extreme diversity in context it would be impossible to be expertly competent in all things and to require no further learning—even after graduation.²

¹ united-church.ca/handbooks-and-guidelines

² *Candidacy Pathway Policy* (Toronto: The United Church of Canada, 2019), 9. Quoted in "Things They Do Teach: Reflections on Theological Field Education," Brenda Fawkes, in *Before Theological Study: A Thoughtful, Engaged and Generous Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021).

The particular set of competencies in this document guide Candidacy Boards in measuring an applicant or candidate's growth, suitability, and readiness for the particularities of the leadership context for which they are preparing.

The integration and practice of knowledge, skills, and identity are central to developing competencies for ministry leadership.

As Kathleen Cahalan has noted, there are “three apprenticeships: **cognitive** apprenticeship which focuses on developing knowledge and cultivating habits of mind; the **practical** apprenticeship which focuses on habits of practice and the **moral** apprenticeship, which focuses on learning the values, ethical commitments and personal responsibilities of the profession.”³

How the Competencies Are Organized

Knowledge, skills, and identity form the basis of each of the following competencies. Quotations from [A Song of Faith](#) are interspersed with the competencies.

The competencies for the practice of ministry are organized in four main ways:

1. Engage in Spiritual Practices and Development of Identity in Ministry
2. Integrate, Articulate, and Facilitate Learning of Christian Faith
3. Expand Cultural and Contextual Knowledge and Analysis
4. Demonstrate Leadership Skills for Community Life

A note to applicants and candidates

In creating learning goals to help learn and deepen your knowledge and skills, as well as continue to shape your identity in ministry, you may wish to use “SMART” goals as a framework. SMART goals are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-limited. See also the *Guide to Competencies* at united-church.ca/handbooks for examples of learning activities that may help you develop your learning goals.

³ Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Introducing the Practice of Ministry* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2010), 118. Emphasis added. Quoted in “Things They Do Teach: Reflections on Theological Field Education,” Brenda Fawkes, in *Before Theological Study: A Thoughtful, Engaged and Generous Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2021).

1. Engage in Spiritual Practices and Development of Identity in Ministry

General Competency

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.
We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.



In community, we are formed as disciples of Christ. Candidates of The United Church of Canada will demonstrate a deep understanding of their identity in relationship to systemic power, privilege, and oppression as a person and as a minister. The candidate will articulate a strong sense of call to ministry and an awareness of power and vulnerability. The candidate will identify spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental practices that sustain well-being and will integrate these into their ongoing vocational formation. The candidate will have a strong and active spiritual life.

Competencies

- A. Demonstrates evidence of personal and spiritual growth and healthy self-awareness⁴
- B. Demonstrates a clear understanding of call to ministry and sense of identity in ministry

We are each given particular gifts of the Spirit.
For the sake of the world,
God calls all followers of Jesus to Christian ministry.
In the church,
some are called to specific ministries of leadership,
both lay and ordered;
some witness to the good news;
some uphold the art of worship;
some comfort the grieving and guide the wandering;
some build up the community of wisdom;
some stand with the oppressed and work for justice.
To embody God's love in the world,
the work of the church requires the ministry and discipleship
of all believers.



⁴ [Competencies for Ordination to the Priesthood](#), The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, 2013, 10.

2. Integrate, Articulate, and Facilitate Learning of Christian Faith

General Competency

God is Holy Mystery,
beyond complete knowledge,
above perfect description.

The candidate of The United Church of Canada will be able to articulate the faith traditions of the United Church, the wider ecumenical community, and historic Christian traditions; and show evidence of integrating and embodying Christian belief in their work, personal life, and relationships.

Competencies

- A. Interprets the Bible and makes it accessible to the community
- B. Knows, teaches, and embodies the theologies and traditions of the historic church and the particular theology of United Church

Our ancestors in faith
bequeath to us experiences of their faithful living;
upon their lives our lives are built.
Our living of the gospel makes us a part of this communion of saints,
experiencing the fulfillment of God's reign
even as we actively anticipate a new heaven and a new earth.



- C. Demonstrates knowledge of the unique history and place of the Indigenous church within the United Church and is committed to working toward reconciliation
- D. Shows respect for, and appreciation of, the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the ecumenical Christian community and the major global religious traditions

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.



3. Cultural and Contextual Knowledge and Analyses

General Competency

We sing of a church
seeking to continue the story of Jesus
by embodying Christ's presence in the world.
We are called together by Christ
as a community of broken but hopeful believers,

loving what he loved,
living what he taught,
striving to be faithful servants of God
in our time and place.

The candidate will be able to read, understand, and relate to the cultural and systemic realities of the United Church in its diverse environments. This includes social and theological awareness and willingness to listen with and for all types of diversity. It includes an ability to inspire authenticity and faithfulness of believers within community.

Competencies

- A. Uses contextual analysis to guide participation in God's work and love in the world
- B. Engages the community with a biblical vision to recognize and respond to needs beyond their own
- C. Exercises creativity and imagination and good judgment to enable groups and communities to adapt in the face of changing contexts and demands



4. Leadership within the Faith Community and Wider Community

General Competency

In and with God,
we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.
We can discover our place as one strand in the web of life.
We can grow in wisdom and compassion.
We can recognize all people as kin.
We can accept our mortality and finitude, not as a curse,
but as a challenge to make our lives and choices matter.



The candidate will demonstrate vocational identity, practise effective ministry, and provide responsible leadership in both ecclesial and secular contexts.

Competencies

- A. Models effective leadership
- B. Fosters the community's spiritual life
- C. Leads worship designed for meaningful engagement

We sing of God's good news lived out,
a church with purpose:
faith nurtured and hearts comforted,
gifts shared for the good of all,
resistance to the forces that exploit and marginalize,



fierce love in the face of violence,
human dignity defended,
members of a community held and inspired by God,
corrected and comforted,
instrument of the loving Spirit of Christ,
creation's mending.