

Candidacy Pathway:
Candidacy Board Resources
Vol. 1: Orientation

2024



Office of / Bureau de la
vocation

The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada

Candidacy Pathway: Candidacy Board Resources, Vol. 1: Orientation (2024)



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About This Resource

This resource is the first of two volumes. It contains best practices that provide information, guidance, and advice to the Candidacy Board. It recommends ways to live out the mandatory policies and procedures found under section H in *The Manual* and in the [Candidacy Pathway Policy](#) resource. Please refer to the current edition.

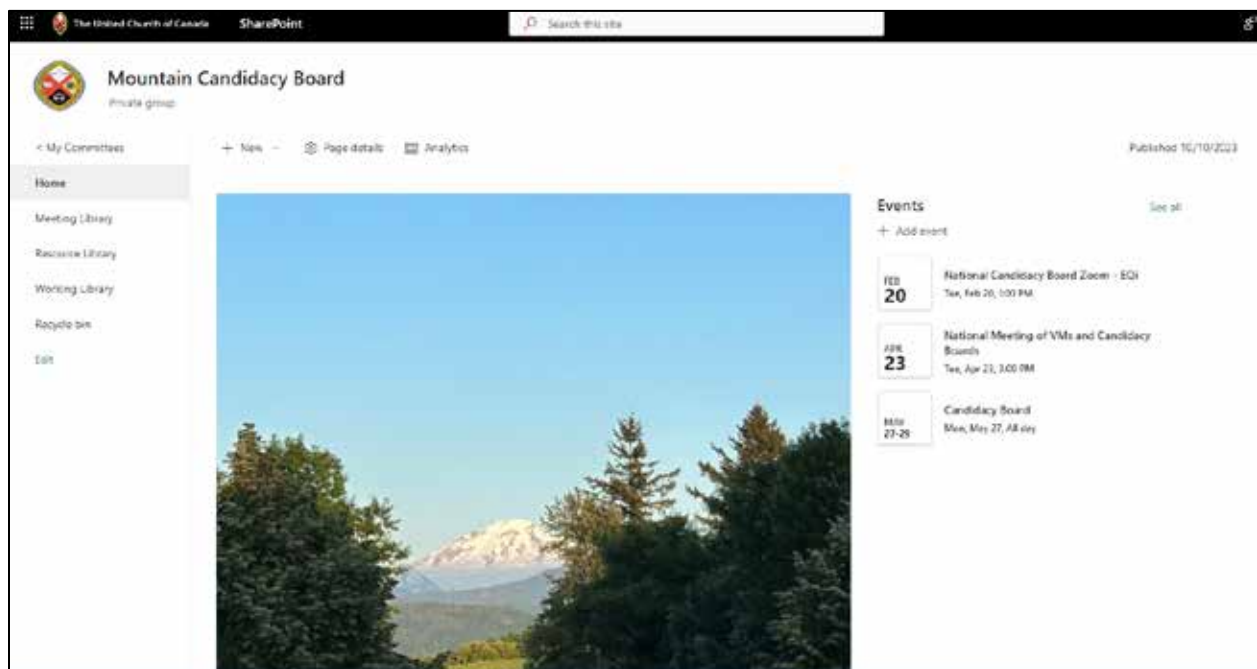
All aspects of the role of the Candidacy Board specifically related to interviews are outlined in [Candidacy Pathway: Candidacy Board Resources, Vol. 2: Interview Handbook](#).

All United Church documents that are referenced can be found at united-church.ca.

Thank you for serving on the Candidacy Board. You are supporting the church in living out God's work in the world by helping to ensure that those who enter ministry are competent, faithful, and effective.

The online Sharepoint site for your Candidacy Board is the current, live resource library for your work as a Candidacy Board member. Familiarize yourself with the material provided.

The Candidacy Board site is also where you will access the files to prepare for interviews and keep current on the status of all the applicants and candidates your Board is responsible for.



The Indigenous Context

The [Calls to the Church](#)¹ Preamble states:

We, the Indigenous ministries and communities of faith of The United Church, declare that we will tell our own story of what ministry means for us. We will decide for ourselves who we are, who constitutes our ministries groups and practices.

Within this context, the Indigenous Office of Vocation supports and guides those who are called by their Indigenous community into ministry in The United Church of Canada, offering the Indigenous Candidacy Pathway of discernment, formation, and preparation for those individuals.

The Indigenous Candidacy Pathway shapes the denomination's candidacy experience by informing the church's approach to call, formation, Eldership, ministry, and community accountability.

¹ The Calls to the Church were adopted by General Council 43 in Oshawa, ON, in 2018.

Introducing the Candidacy Pathway

The Candidacy Pathway falls under the [Candidacy Pathway: Policy](#), which Candidacy Board members should be familiar with. The requirements of the Candidacy Pathway aim to ensure the suitability and readiness of those who are authorized by the church to ministry leadership.

The following is a list of resources that Candidacy Board members must review:

[Candidacy Pathway: Policy](#)

[Calls to the Church \(2018\)](#)

[Guide to Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership](#)

[Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel](#)

[Supervised Ministry Education resource series](#)

[Candidacy Pathway: Roadmap](#)

[Candidacy Pathway: Candidacy Board Resources, Vols. 1 and 2](#)

[Candidacy Pathway: Circle of Accompaniment](#)

[Statement on Ministry \(2012\)](#)

The Candidacy Pathway includes seven overlapping phases:

- **Call Forth** – a call to ministry is identified, experienced, or explored
- **Identify** – promise and suitability for a vocation in ministry in the church is discerned
- **Accompany** – the individual is offered, and demonstrates a desire and capacity for, companionship, guidance, and support by the Candidacy Board, chosen mentors, and a Circle of Accompaniment
- **Equip** – completion of a church-accredited program offered through theological schools and field-based supervised practice of ministry
- **Assess** – ongoing determination of promise, suitability, and readiness for ministry
- **Authorize** – for appointments, commissioning, recognition, and ordination
- **Celebrate** – the church’s acknowledgement of a person’s candidacy, recognition, commissioning, or ordination

No two individuals make the same journey. The Candidacy Pathway is designed to take into consideration the applicant’s experiences, gifts, education, and call to ministry. For this reason, the pathway is designed to be flexible and not to insist that steps (phases) are followed in a particular sequence, over a specified duration.

Exceptions to the non-sequential nature of the Candidacy Pathway are outlined under “Required Markers of the Pathway” in [Candidacy Pathway: Policy](#). For example, there are particular requirements that must be accomplished in order to be approved as a candidate.

The Candidacy Pathway involves these core features:

Discernment

We believe the Spirit is at work in every generation to renew the vitality and faithfulness of the church. Discernment is understood as an ongoing journey of attending and responding to the Spirit's leading. Discernment is woven through all aspects of the Candidacy Pathway from beginning to end, and is the responsibility of everyone involved in the pathway.

When a person has been identified by their community or mentor as having gifts for ministry, or themselves have experienced a call to or are interested in exploring the vocation of ministry, they are encouraged to learn about the Candidacy Pathway.

Resources, including discernment events, are available to support people in their prayerful listening, seeking counsel, learning about ministry in the United Church, and accessing information about theological schools.

Application

When a person's sense of call has been affirmed in the community and by mentors, and they are ready to meet with a Candidacy Board, they submit an application to the Office of Vocation. At this stage in the process, the person is referred to as an "applicant." Applicants who show promise and suitability for commissioned or ordained ministry are referred to as "candidates."

Each threshold on the Candidacy Pathway requires submitting of application to meet with the Candidacy Board.

Interviews

The Candidacy Board determines the number of interviews on a case-by-case basis to be conducted with the applicant. The following are possible scenarios, depending on the initial application:

- **Promise:** During an initial interview, the Candidacy Board assesses the applicant's promise for candidacy.
- **Promise and Suitability:** During the first interview, the Candidacy Board follows the criteria for assessing promise and suitability.
- **Promise, Suitability, and Readiness for Supervised Ministry Education (SME):** The initial application to the Candidacy Board may include a request to assess readiness for Supervised Ministry Education. This scenario applies when the applicant has completed the required course of study or intends to enrol in a program of study that incorporates SME.

For the remainder of the process, the Candidacy Board walks with the candidate to assess growth, readiness, and effectiveness for ministry leadership and to ensure that all of the requirements are fulfilled. The Candidacy Board can meet with an applicant or candidate at any time during the process to check in, address concerns, and provide guidance or support.

See [Candidacy Pathway: Candidacy Board Resources, Vol. 2 Interview Handbook](#) for detailed outline of interview policies and practices.

Circle of Accompaniment

Because ministry is not independent work, building relationships of support and accountability is key to a vocation in ministry. Moreover, like ministry, the Candidacy Pathway is demanding. The requirement to establish a Circle of Accompaniment both ensures support AND demonstrates a candidate's commitment and ability to form appropriate peer and mentor relationships in ministry.

The candidate is responsible for calling together, maintaining, and reporting to the Candidacy Board about their experiences with the Circle of Accompaniment. The following are three possible formats:

Group Format

The Circle of Accompaniment may be a small group of people, perhaps four or five, that the applicant or candidate gathers for regular meetings.

Individual Format

The circle may be made up of individuals who fill particular supporting roles with whom the applicant or candidate meets one-on-one rather than as a group. Relationships that form this type of Circle of Accompaniment may include

- a spiritual director—or Elder, if preparing for ministry within the Indigenous context—to focus on ongoing discernment, personal awareness, and identity
- a mentor who is well versed in the requirements of the Candidacy Pathway and of the applicant's or candidate's chosen ministry stream, who helps navigate their journey
- a person who helps shape the applicant's or candidate's learning goals and provides feedback in relation to their ongoing growth and development

Professional Format

Professional mentorship and coaching (see "[Assessments and Lifelong Leadership Development](#)") enhances, and may with your permission stand in for, a Circle of Accompaniment. If this is appropriate for a particular candidate, inform them about opportunities for professional accompaniment.

Formation for Ministry

The policies and best practices for the Equipping phase are found in the [Candidacy Pathway: Policy](#) and the [Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education](#) resource.

The Candidacy Board ensures that the Equipping phase of the pathway is designed to optimize the applicant or candidate's preparation and formation for their ministry stream. One requirement to complete the equipping phase is the integrative educational requirement

(*testamur*); the other is the practice of ministry requirement (Supervised Ministry Education). An explanation of the *testamur* requirement and the schools and programs that offer it follows.

Integration

The Candidacy Pathway involves three sources of preparation for ministry:

- the communities of faith where the role and responsibilities of ministry are learned and practised
- the theological schools accredited to educate, form, and equip people for ministry
- individuals and communities who support spiritual and personal growth, and the formation of pastoral identity

Through these three sources, the pathway offers opportunities for the candidate to grow in vocational identity, knowledge, and practice. More importantly, the Candidacy Pathway is designed to integrate learning from these three sources of formation.



For this reason, a Candidacy Board assesses satisfactory thresholds of vocational identity, knowledge, and practice *and* the successful integration of this preparation for ministry.

Circumstances may work against integration. For example, a Candidacy Board might observe that a candidate has completed a theological degree in the past but not been immersed in the practice of ministry. Or, a candidate may be long-serving and outstanding in the practice of ministry but hesitates to complete a program of study. Or, a gap may exist between a candidate's self-knowledge and their academic and practical preparedness because their spiritual healing or social-emotional development needs more attention.

The Candidacy Board can insist on integration as a candidate navigates the Candidacy Pathway, knowing that this is foundational to readiness for ministry.

Assessments and Lifelong Leadership Development

Candidacy Boards use third-party professional assessments for a variety of reasons.

- To help discern an applicant's vocational promise and suitability for ministry
- To better understand and support an applicant or candidate who has particular challenges on the pathway
- To allow the candidate to demonstrate openness to self-reflection and to identify areas for growth associated with an assessment
- To observe a candidate's ability to set learning goals and express commitment to lifelong leadership development for ministry

Professional assessments are conducted by licensed third-party organizations, consultants, and other professionals. More on the Candidacy Board's use of assessment follows in the next section.

Determining the Pathway on a Case-by-Case Basis

The Candidacy Board must remain flexible and responsive to applicants who have previously completed requirements of the pathway and determine the process accordingly. The Candidacy Board may consider the following:

- Does the applicant have prior theological education? How might this prior education determine a unique way forward?
- Will an applicant's first interview(s) include assessment for readiness for candidate supply appointment or for Supervised Ministry Education, depending on their stream of ministry and chosen program of study?
- How many interviews are needed through their program of study?
- What do the theological school reports reveal, and how will these insights guide the Candidacy Board in assessing the applicant/candidate? How will the Candidacy Board work in partnership with the theological school to determine the pathway for the applicant/candidate?
- What is the most appropriate time for the applicant or candidate to establish a Circle of Accompaniment?


Role of the Candidacy Board

As a commission of the Board of Vocation, the Candidacy Boards are responsible for

- a) approving an individual for candidacy for ministry in the United Church;
- b) terminating candidacy if necessary;
- c) determining an individual's readiness for accreditation for ordination, for commissioning, and for recognition as a designated lay minister; and
- d) overseeing the Candidacy Pathway process. (*The Manual*, E.3.3.3)

Providing oversight of the process is a key part of the Candidacy Board's role. Effective oversight ensures that there is continuity, transparency, and encouragement for the applicant or candidate. To enable the applicant or candidate to take responsibility for navigating their pathway, it is essential for the Candidacy Board to be clear and transparent about its expectations. Oversight also means collaborating with Candidacy Boards across the denomination and the Vocational Ministers who resource them. It includes being knowledgeable about the programs offered in theological schools, and attuned to the realities of ministry.

The following chart summarizes the Candidacy Board's oversight role in relation to the seven phases of the pathway:

Phase	Candidacy Board's Role	
Call Forth	Receives applications and reports and discerns the Spirit's leading in the applicant's sense of call and the church's leadership needs	Oversees the process and provides continuity 
Identify	Discerns whether the applicant demonstrates promise and suitability for ministry	
Accompany	Ensures that the applicant/candidate receives support during their pathway and determines with them the suitable format for their Circle of Accompaniment	
Equip	Receives and reviews reports from the theological school, approves learning goals, determines the type of Supervised Ministry Education program as required, receives evaluations from field placements and Supervised Ministry Education experiences, and ensures that the candidate completes all requirements of the pathway Uses the Competencies for Formation for Ministry as a measure to monitor the growth and development of the applicant/candidate throughout the pathway	
Assess	Assesses the promise, suitability, and readiness of the applicant/candidate for designated lay, diaconal, or ordained ministry by following the required markers of the pathway and the guidelines provided in this resource	

Authorize	Authorizes readiness for serving in a candidate supply appointment as required; for Supervised Ministry Education as required; and for commissioning, ordination, or recognition	↓
Celebrate	Participates in celebrating all aspects of the pathway with the church and with the applicant/candidate	

Individual Roles

Individual members fill specific roles on the Candidacy Board. Additional roles may be identified and added as needed.

- **Chair:** Conducts decision-making meetings and works with the Vocational Minister to oversee the work of the Candidacy Board.
- **Secretary:** Records the decisions of the Candidacy Board and liaises with the Vocational Minister or Administrator about documents and reports.
- **Supervised Ministry Education (SME) Specialist:** Is knowledgeable about the SME requirements and supports the candidate in setting up their SME experience.
- **Theological Schools Specialist:** Is knowledgeable about theological education requirements (understands the testamur) and is familiar with the various programs at our theological schools. This person attends occasional meetings with the Office of Vocation or receives updates from the Vocational Minister.
- **Assessment Specialist:** Is knowledgeable about the third-party consultants and agencies and the assessments they offer. The Assessment Specialist has expertise in interpreting reports for fellow members of the Candidacy Board.
- **Technician:** Brings expertise to technical aspects of hosting and recording interviews, per the recording policy.
- **Liaison:** Is assigned to particular candidates as their contact with the Candidacy Board.

Role of Liaison

Not all Candidacy Boards use the liaison role at all or in the same way. Generally, the liaison

- keeps in touch with applicants between interviews
- is a listening ear/compassionate contact
- does not give feedback or provide counselling
- does not advocate
- shares fact-based updates of any relevant candidacy-related events to the Candidacy Board meeting (studies, placements, relocations, etc.)
- advises the applicant to forward questions to the Vocational Minister
- participates as one of the interview team

Dual Roles and Perception of Bias on the Candidacy Board

One of the principles guiding the interviews at the heart of a Candidacy Board's mandate is fair and unbiased process. All members are committed "to avoid situations that might result in a

conflict of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest"² and are dedicated to critical self-reflection as interviewers and decision-makers.

In general, Candidacy Board members should recuse themselves from interviewing people with whom they have a pre-existing relationship that would bias them either positively or negatively and/or might give the appearance of a conflict of interest. If in doubt, err on the side of caution and seek guidance from the Vocational Minister. Examples of pre-existing relationships include, but are not limited to, a candidate's

- current or former minister
- current or former professor or instructor
- current or former mentor, spiritual director, or counsellor
- current or former colleague or classmate
- friend or relative
- current or former congregation member where candidate is serving or has served, including in supervised ministry or theological field education
- current or former educational supervisor or pastoral charge supervisor
- spouse of anyone listed above

So that individuals are not serving in dual roles related to the candidacy process, certain roles prohibit participation in some or all circumstances:

- Candidacy Board members also may not be serving a Regional Council Executive.³

Candidacy Board members who serve in the following roles should recuse themselves from any conversations and decisions about, or interviews with, the candidate:

- educational supervisor serving in the region
- pastoral charge supervisor serving in the region
- theological educator currently teaching or mentoring in the region in which the candidate studies (or recently retired from this role)
- regional council staff in pastoral relations roles or recently retired from these roles
- General Council staff in candidacy or pastoral relations roles or recently retired from these roles
- pre-existing relationship roles listed above

The following reminders are about biases that, if unchecked, may influence the interview and discernment process. Candidacy Boards using liaisons for candidates must exercise particular care in relation to that role and any developing bias.⁴

² [Conflict of Interest Policy \(March 2019\)](#)

³ Board of Vocation, 01-05 2019

⁴ [Pastoral Relations: Guidelines for Search and Selection \(April 2020\)](#)

- **Motivational Bias:** This bias occurs when the interviewer and/or interviewee are motivated to provide a particular kind of outcome to please the other and thus to do better in the interview.
- **Confirmatory Bias:** A confirmatory bias occurs when we hold prior information. We tend to notice things that confirm the ideas we already hold rather than notice things that contrast with our ideas. Both interviewees and interviewers can hold confirmatory biases.
- **Cognitive Bias:** We hold cognitive biases because they allow us to make quicker decisions. But when interviewing people, cognitive biases act more as a barrier than an enabler of good decisions. They can cause us to interpret things too quickly without taking time to check the assumptions we have made about other people.
- **Observational Bias:** Like cognitive bias, observational bias is based on our life experiences. It involves what we observe in other people (posture, attire, etc.). We all tend to observe some physical attributes more than others and to ascribe more value to these observations.

Tools Employed by Candidacy Board

References

Reference checks are conducted with those who have direct, relevant experience with the applicant or candidate. Written references are requested as part of the initial application and are provided to the Candidacy Board. Phone interviews are an opportunity for the referee to convey their perception of the applicant or candidate, and for those requesting the reference to ask clarifying questions. The Candidacy Board can ask for references at any time during the Candidacy Pathway process.

Sample Reference Questions

- How long have you known x, and what were the circumstances?
- How would you describe x to me? What stands out?
- How does x demonstrate their Christian faith? Are they willing and able to articulate their faith, and if so, how is it expressed?
- How effective is x in working with teams? As an individual contributor?
- Describe occasions when you have seen x in a leadership role, including projects or committee involvement. Describe their leadership style.
- To your knowledge, does x have a good support network in place? How do they deal with issues of self-care?
- In your opinion, what provides x with the most satisfaction in their ministry involvement? When have you seen them at their best? Are there areas of ministry involvement that appear more challenging or problematic?
- What gifts will x bring to ministry?
- What will be important for x to learn in order to take on a ministry leadership role? In your opinion, what are their development priorities?

Reports

Formation for ministry takes place across the church in

- **communities of faith**, whether they are a congregation, a new form of ecclesial community, a regional or denominational office, a community ministry or network
- **communities of formation**, among theological schools and their field-based supervisors, and the church’s own supervised ministry
- **communities of discernment**, including the Candidacy Board itself, along with mentors and guides throughout the candidacy process

Community of Faith	Theological School	Candidate
<p>The community of faith, through its Community of Faith Connection, provides valuable feedback about the experience of being served by the ministry candidate. The Educational Supervisor further supports and guides the candidate’s learning and capacity for self-reflection.</p> <p>Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel guide this appraisal in addition to Guide to Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry.</p>	<p>The theological school reports on progress toward completion of the testamur and provides an assessment of readiness to begin ministry.</p>	<p>Meeting with the candidate at significant thresholds on the pathway provides opportunities to assess the candidate’s knowledge and depth of faith, and to reflect with the candidate on their ongoing sense of call, learning, self-awareness, practice of ministry, and relationships in the community.</p> <p>The Guide to Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership frame this assessment.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Reports</p> <p>The Community of Faith Connection submits an evaluation report on various aspects of the candidate’s capability for ministry as experienced in the community of faith. The Educational Supervisor submits a report reflecting on the candidate’s Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry, including their progress and self-awareness in meeting their learning goals.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Reports</p> <p>This report is submitted annually using the Annual Theological School Report or equivalent. Notice of completion of the testamur is required for commissioning or ordination.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Reports</p> <p>The candidate completes reflective reports to prepare for meeting with the Candidacy Board. These reports articulate the candidate’s faith in relationship to the traditions of the Christian church, and at the final interview affirm their essential agreement with United Church of Canada doctrine.</p>

The Candidacy Board is part of a network of relationships in the ministry formation ecosystem. Requesting, receiving, and relying on reports from these communities is central to the role of the Candidacy Board. In addition to the submissions of the applicants and candidates

themselves, these reports are essential to the Board's discernment responsibility. The confidential reports are available to Board members on the Sharepoint site. Inform the Vocational Minister or Office of Vocation Program Assistant if a report is unavailable when needed.

Assessments for Leadership Development

Professional assessments are conducted by licensed third-party organizations, consultants, and other professionals. Early in the process (include in promise and/or suitability application), applicants should be encouraged to make use of one or more of the following tools for building self-awareness. These professional third-party assessments are sometimes offered by the theological school, or are available through pastoral leadership organizations or a professional counselling service:

- EQi (Emotional Quotient Inventory) assessment
- intercultural development inventory
- vocational assessment

Professionally administered assessments include a written report and session with the consultant or organizational representative to discuss the results and invite self-reflection. Candidacy Boards make use of both the report and the applicant's reflection in order to assess the person's self-knowledge.

Ask the applicant or candidate to reflect on the report offered by the consultant by responding to these questions:

- Were you surprised by any results or comments in your assessment?
- If yes, why did that surprise you?
- What is the most valuable learning for you in doing the assessment?
- How has that informed your self-understanding of your leadership?

Readiness for ministry requires demonstrating the commitment, skills and habits for lifelong leadership development. A candidate's commitment to lifelong learning may be demonstrated through one or more of the following:

- a leadership assessment (360-degree review)
- engaging a spiritual director
- engaging a professional leadership coach
- engaging a professional ministry mentor
- engaging reflective pastoral supervision
- participating in a peer-support group
- keeping a professional portfolio or CV of professional development courses and workshops
- creating learning goals for Supervised Ministry Education and beyond
- having a five-year continuing education plan

- developing additional ministry specialization (e.g., cooperative ministry, chaplaincy, church planting)

Candidates can apply for bursaries to offset a portion of the associated fees. Candidates in appointments can use their continuing education allowance for costs associated with many of these services.

Case Studies

Case studies present the applicant or candidate with a scenario that they could encounter in ministry leadership. The scenario describes opportunities and/or problems within a pastoral relationship and raises questions of faith that invite theological reflection. A case study invites the applicant or candidate to demonstrate judgment and resourcefulness as well as their attitude toward serving others. It is a useful tool to assess an applicant or candidate's knowledge of the Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice.

Presentations

Presentations are used to explore the applicant or candidate's understanding of a particular topic, their communication skills, and their desire and ability to connect with listeners. It is a useful tool to invite the applicant or candidate to demonstrate competency related to a particular Competency for Formation for Ministry.

Interviews

The purpose of interviews is to provide a space that supports reflection, faithful inquiry, and discernment for everyone involved. Guidelines for conducting interviews are found in Volume 2 of these Board Resources.

Material for Candidacy Board

Pause on Candidacy Pathway

When a candidate steps away from a program of study and formation, and/or a supervised and evaluated practice of ministry, the formation for ministry that the pathway is designed for is interrupted. Generally, a candidate should not step away for any length of time.

Some events may necessitate or invite a pause of up to 24 months.

- ill health or crisis (self or family)
- family or immigration requirement to relocate temporarily
- opportunity for additional theological study (outside Candidacy Board assessment/reporting process)
- opportunity for additional practice of ministry (outside Candidacy Board assessment/reporting process; for example: candidate supply appointments, paid or voluntary community-based ministry, para-church, camp and youth leadership, helping professions, ecumenical experience)

When appropriate, the Candidacy Board can discern with the candidate how the experiences of the interruption can contribute to the ongoing growth and development assessed by the Candidacy Board.

Long pauses that are unrelated to the above circumstances may indicate the need for the candidate to return to discernment, as per the policy:

When the candidate has not met benchmarks of their pathway and/or they demonstrate that they are not able to achieve the growth and development required for the vocation of ministry.... ([Candidacy Pathway: Policy](#), p. 20)

A demonstration of growth and development refers to formation outcomes named

- in the program of study/formation
- by the Candidacy Board
- in the [Competencies](#) document
- by the Supervised Ministry Education supervisor
- in the Candidacy Pathway policy itself as a path of continuous formation, supervised and evaluated practice, critical self-reflection, openness to feedback, and commitment to life-long learning

Annually review files to determine whether any candidates have paused their process, and for how long. Contact candidates whose pause approaches or exceeds 24 months, inviting them to voluntarily suspend their candidacy until they feel ready to continue the pathway's continual formation, discernment, and assessment.

Former candidates who resigned or whose process was terminated who wish to re-engage the Candidacy Pathway process must wait two years from the date of termination or resignation before submitting an application to the Office of Vocation to be assessed for promise and suitability. The Candidacy Board must consider the reasons for the resignation or termination in their assessment of the former candidate. ([Candidacy Pathway: Policy](#), p. 21)

Understanding Testamur

A testamur (certification) is a requirement for commissioning or ordination in The United Church of Canada. It is granted on behalf of the General Council or Indigenous Church by its approved theological schools, centres, or colleges when a candidate has satisfactorily completed a program of study that

- is designed to prepare people for ministry leadership or service in communities of faith
- builds the human, spiritual, intellectual, and vocational dimensions of lifelong learning and formation, including intercultural competency, global awareness, and scholarship
- includes supervised practical experiences (e.g., practicum or internship) in areas related to a vocational calling in order to achieve the learning outcomes
- includes a variety of modes of educational engagement in four areas of vocational competence: understanding and communicating religious heritages, engaging cultural context, developing personal and spiritual formation, and effectiveness in religious and public leadership

Is a testamur the same as a degree?

No. An MDiv, BTh, or diaconal diploma from a United Church theological school is the most common way to earn a testamur, but they are not the same thing. It is possible to have a degree or diploma in theology and *not* have earned a testamur.

These schools currently grant a testamur:

- Vancouver School of Theology
- Emmanuel College, University of Toronto
- Atlantic School of Theology, Halifax
- United Church Studies at Montreal DIO in association with McGill University's School of Religious Studies
- St. Andrew's College in association with Saskatoon Theological Union
- Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre (for Indigenous ministries testamur)
- Centre for Christian Studies, Winnipeg (for diaconal ministry)

United Church theological schools are flexible, encouraging, and helpful in creating pathways for candidates to earn a testamur regardless of their previous experience in higher education, including making accommodations based on learning assessments. Candidacy Boards should be aware of the programs at our schools and their current entrance requirements.

United Church Theological School	Programs of Study	Website
Atlantic School of Theology Halifax, NS	3-year on-campus Master of Divinity degree and 5-year Master of Divinity summer distance program; Bachelor of Theology degree	astheology.ns.ca
Centre for Christian Studies Winnipeg, MB	4-year Diploma in Diaconal Ministries	ccsonline.ca
Emmanuel College Toronto, ON	3-year on-campus or hybrid Master of Divinity degree	emmanuel.utoronto.ca
Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre Beausejour, MB	Diploma in Indigenous Ministry (for ordained, diaconal, and Indigenous designated lay ministry)	sandysaulteaux.ca
St. Andrew's College Saskatoon, SK	3-year Master of Divinity degree	standrews.ca
United Church Studies at Montreal Dio/Études de l'Église Unie du Canada à Dio Montreal, QC	3-year on-campus Master of Divinity degree, 4–5 year Bachelor of Theology/Master of Divinity combined, 90-credit Licentiate in Ministry	montrealdio.ca/ucs/
Vancouver School of Theology Vancouver, BC	3-year on-campus or hybrid Master of Divinity degree	vst.edu

What if a candidate did not attend one of these schools or earned a different theological degree like an MA (theology) or ThM or PhD in theology?

All United Church theological schools, colleges, and centres that grant a testamur assess candidates with prior degrees, qualifications, certifications, and education according to a fair valuation of their current progress toward earning a testamur. All such schools use similar forms of assessment.

An applicant may have as little as a few denominational courses to complete or as much as a full diploma to earn to be granted a testamur. Applicants must realize that not all schools teach courses leading to a testamur in the same way. For this reason, in order to meet the same learning objectives toward a testamur, one school may require an intensive course on polity and ethos, and another school may require a course on decolonizing the church. The church trusts the schools to assess and teach the program of study leading to a testamur, regardless of the name or number of courses designed to do so.

Applicants should not request an assessment without first meeting with a Candidacy Board, which will answer basic questions about the process of earning a testamur and only then invite applicants to request an assessment of the school of their choice. **It is inappropriate to “shop around”** for the best version of a customized program designed to earn testamur.

If the Candidacy Board has questions about the customized program as recommended, the Vocational Minister will be in touch with the school to seek clarification.

If a Candidacy Board requires more than a testamur in order for a candidate to meet the thresholds of competence required for readiness for ministry, this additional preparation lies beyond the testamur. Additional preparation may be done at the theological school or not, but it does not become part of the program designed to fulfill requirements for the testamur. Candidacy Boards should not hesitate to consult faculty about ways for candidates to achieve competency outcomes that are still not developed after the testamur is completed.

Can a person be ordained or commissioned without a testamur?

No. A testamur certifies that the person has completed the required vocational education and formation for ordained and commissioned ministry in The United Church of Canada.

Essential Agreement

Essential agreement can be compared to a string of transparent coloured beads: The string is “the continuity of the Christian tradition” expressed in the United Church; the beads are various gifts and commitments, skills and arts of ministry that the candidate offers the church. Together, these make a recognizable but unique design. The Candidacy Board’s responsibility is to look into those beads for the string. *Does this person present something that both illuminates and presents to us the Christian faith?*

Unlike denominations that require a literal subscription to a creed or doctrinal statement, The United Church of Canada requires a more rigorous examination of the **demonstrated alignment** of a candidate’s practice of faith and the living faith of the church expressed through its statements of faith and the scriptures on which these are founded. This alignment is not something a candidate decides; it is determined in community by the Candidacy Boards.

The task of the Candidacy Board is to uphold its responsibility to the church by ensuring that its ministry leaders are stewards of the faith that our church has collectively described in four statements: Twenty Articles of Doctrine in the Basis of Union (1925), the Statement of Faith (1940), A New Creed (1968), and A Song of Faith (2006). To steward the faith is not to parrot it uncritically but to represent it fairly and faithfully. It also means to *model* the faith. A Candidacy Board reads the whole of the candidate for essential agreement. It is not enough for the candidate to live in a way that aligns with *their* beliefs. The Candidacy Board must have confidence that the candidate is able to represent, teach, and preach what The United Church of Canada believes.

Guidelines for Candidates on Clerical Symbols and Language

Symbols and titles have history, communicate differently in different contexts, and are at the service of the community, not the individual.

Stoles are primarily a symbol associated with an activity (preaching and sacramental liturgy) rather than a person (ordained or commissioned minister). A candidate for ministry is a lay

person. *If the custom in the community of faith is for the preacher and liturgist to wear a stole during worship, it is appropriate for the candidate to do so while performing those functions. If not, there is no necessity to do so.*

Collars, unlike stoles, symbolize an identity: a member of the clergy, or cleric. *A candidate for ministry, like all laypeople, is not a member of the clergy. There is no occasion on which it is appropriate for a lay person to wear a collar. It is a breach of ethics to misidentify oneself in the practice of lay or ordered ministry.*

Minister is both a profession, like nurse, and a vocation, like mother. In the church, it is used to mean both the profession: “the minister of our church is the Rev. Lee” and the volunteer: “these are our hospitality ministers.” So it is appropriate to identify a candidate as a “student minister” or, in a post-program Supervised Ministry Education, as a “ministry candidate.”

Pastor is a synonym for minister used by Lutheran and Evangelical churches. It has been adopted by United Church ministers who consider it less formal than “Rev.” A candidate is not a pastor; they are a student minister.

Reverend or the Reverend is an honorific prefix (like the Right or the Very) used to designate a role. Signifying membership in the order of ministry, it can be used by ordained and commissioned ministers only.

Vocational Ministers can provide further information to candidates on using clerical language and symbols during and after candidacy.