

Admission to the Order of Ministry: Admission Board Resources

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The United Church of Canada
L'Église Unie du Canada



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“Conducting Interviews with Intercultural Awareness” adapted from the 2009 United Church resource of the same name, by Steve Willey, Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry.

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Contents

About This Resource	4
Understanding Admission to the Order of Ministry	5
Five Components	5
Role of the Admission Board	6
Individual Roles	6
Assessment	7
Interview Guidelines	7
Human Rights Principles and Legislation	8
Accompaniment for Interviews	11
Interview Teams.....	11
Interview Outlines and Resources	12
General Process for Interviews	12
Entrance Interview.....	15
Admission Entrance Interview Rubric.....	16
Response Form for After an Entrance Interview	22
Final Interview.....	24
Admission Final Interview Rubric.....	25
Note-Taking Template	30
Response Form for After a Final Interview	31
Appendix A: Role of Interview Chairs	33
Sample Timetable for Interviews.....	33
Appendix B: Template for Interview Summary and Recommendation.....	34

About This Resource

This resource contains best practices that provide information, guidance, and advice to the Admission Board. It recommends ways to live out the mandatory policies and procedures found under section H6 in *The Manual* and in the *Admission to the Order of Ministry Policy and Procedures* resource (www.united-church.ca/handbooks). Please refer to the current editions of both.

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

Thank you for serving on the Admission Board. You are supporting the church in living out God's mission in the world by helping to ensure that those who are admitted to the order of ministry are supported, competent, faithful, and effective.

Understanding Admission to the Order of Ministry

The following is a list of resources that Admission Board members should be familiar with:

Admission to the Order of Ministry Policy and Procedures

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

Learning Outcomes for Admission Applicants

Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel

Five Components

Admission to the order of ministry includes five components that must be completed before an admission applicant is admitted to the order of ministry. The five components are

1. **Entering the process:** includes discernment, credential clearance, and entrance interview
2. **Contextual in-ministry experience:** minimum of 20 hours per week for 12 consecutive months in a community of faith or other recognized ministry of the United Church
3. **Orientation and mentorship:** becoming sufficiently familiar with the polity, history, and theology of the United Church with the help of an assigned mentor and a program of orientation
4. **Final interview:** ensuring all requirements for admission have been completed and assigned learning outcomes have been achieved
5. **Rite of admission:** regional council's responsibility at their Celebration of Ministry service

Admission Board members must be well versed in the five components. See *Admission to the Order of Ministry Policy and Procedures* (www.united-church.ca/handbooks) for a description of each component.

Role of the Admission Board

The Admission Board provides oversight to admission applicants and the process by which they move through the admission process. One of the most significant roles is to assess admission applicants for learning outcomes already attained before entering the admission program, and those required to be achieved before admission can be granted. This is done through a review of documentation and the entrance interview. At the final interview, the Admission Board assesses whether prescribed learning outcomes have been achieved and determines whether the applicant is ready to serve in ministry in The United Church of Canada.

Many admission applicants are from other countries and from cultures different from the dominant culture in Canada. It is crucial that the Admission Board be well versed in intercultural issues and instill sensitivity and awareness related to racialized people and the challenges they may face in entering both Canada and the United Church.

Individual Roles

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

- **Chair:** conducts decision-making meetings and works with the Office of Vocation minister to oversee the work of the Admission Board
- **Secretary:** records the decisions of the Admission Board and liaises with the Office of Vocation minister or administrator regarding documents and reports
- **Theological schools liaison:** is knowledgeable about theological education opportunities and the various programs at theological schools that an admission applicant may be required to participate in as part of their orientation program. This individual acts as liaison to the theological schools and is responsible for orienting fellow members of the Admission Board.

Assessment

Admission applicants have made a decision to explore ministry in the United Church and to undertake a program of orientation to United Church ethos, policy, and history. Admission candidates have already been ordained in another denomination and may come with significant experience in ministry. The role of the Admission Board is not to assess applicants for their suitability to ministry in general but to assess their suitability (entrance interview) and readiness (final interview) for ministry in the United Church.

When the Admission Board assesses suitability and readiness, they seek to discern God's hope for both the applicant and for the church. The Admission Board should be committed to the spiritual practice of prayerful discernment and embrace an attitude of openness to the Spirit in their work of assessment.

In their work of assessment, the Admission Board has three primary references:

- ***Learning Outcomes for Admission Applicants*** identify the knowledge, skills, and competencies the admission applicant should exhibit by the end of the orientation program and after at least one year of serving in ministry with the United Church. The Admission Board is responsible for measuring a minister's proficiency in these learning outcomes.
- ***Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel*** act as a resource for ministry personnel as they struggle with ethical issues in their daily practice. These standards also enable ministry personnel to be accountable to self, church, and community. Admission ministers may have been guided by specific ethical standards and standards of practice developed in their denomination.

Entrance and final interview questions have been developed with these reference documents in mind.

Interview Guidelines

Interview teams must foster an environment of openness and trust in order to witness a true reflection of the interviewee. The physical setting, the attitudes and behaviours of the Admission Board members, the pace of the discussion, and the expectations of those involved will influence whether the interview truly becomes a time of accurate assessment.

The content of an interview is kept confidential. However, decisions of the Admission Board are public.

Be aware of potential conflicts of interest. If an Admission Board member is related to the person being interviewed, has a close working relationship with them, or is a member of their community of faith, that member will face the challenge of overlapping roles and may have difficulty being objective. Members who have a conflict of interest must not participate in the interview session with the individual in question. If you are unsure about whether your

relationship with an interviewee constitutes a conflict of interest, disclose the situation to the rest of the board, who will help you discern.

Human Rights Principles and Legislation

You must comply with human rights principles and legislation when conducting interviews. For example, using sexist language and asking sexist questions, questions about marital status, and questions about sexual orientation are inappropriate. There should be no difference between the questions asked of any gender, or of those who are known to be married and those who are single. Information about provincial and territorial legislation can be found on government websites.

In general, it is illegal to discriminate on the basis of

- race
- ancestry
- place of origin
- colour
- ethnic origin
- citizenship
- sex
- sexual orientation
- handicap
- age
- record of offences
- marital status
- family status
- gender identity and expression

The church is allowed to “discriminate” on the basis of religious creed as long as this is a bona fide occupational requirement.

The process must be transparent and fair. Interview teams should work from a standard set of questions.

Interviewers must be careful not to ask questions that will clearly lead the interviewee to provide information related to any of the prohibited grounds.

Interviewers should be aware of their own subconscious biases or stereotypes and attempt to compensate for them. If a member of the interview team asks an inappropriate question, the other members must be prepared to identify it as such at the time.

Conducting Interviews with Intercultural Awareness

Representing one’s true self in an interview is challenging. Additional challenges and further dynamics are at play when the majority of the interview team belongs to one ethnocultural group and the interviewee belongs to another. Admission Board members need to engage in individual and collective self-examination to discover whether their beliefs and assumptions might create gaps in their discernment and block insight into how God is working in the world and in the life of the person being interviewed.

An interculturally aware interview team tries to look at the process from the perspective of the other person and the ways in which they are required to accommodate, as in this example:

I am a person from Korea being interviewed to assess my suitability for the Admission program. I am attempting to communicate who I am in English, which is my third language. I must accommodate the interview team's requirement that English will be spoken. I will similarly accommodate the interview team's request that a videoconference interview is the most practical means of conducting the interview, although this arrangement makes me feel nervous and unsure.

I am doing my best not to panic at the thought of talking about myself with a group of individuals with whom I have no prior relationship, but I will accommodate this Western practice and hope that I will not be perceived as being evasive or vague.

As a sign of respect, I would like to offer a gift to the Office of Vocation minister, but I'm afraid that the group might think I am trying to ingratiate myself to influence the outcome of my interview. I have learned not to cringe when a man in the circle crosses his legs and shows me the soles of his shoes, or to be offended by the apparent disinterest of a woman who knits while I am speaking. In this interview, I am in their culture, and I will accommodate to what they do and need.

Recognizing how much of the responsibility to navigate cultural differences normally falls upon the individual being interviewed, a culturally aware interview team is committed to the principle of mutual accommodation. As the group in control of the interviewing process and format, it does whatever it can to narrow the cultural gap so the person being interviewed is less anxious and intimidated, and more able to accurately communicate their character and competencies.

A commitment to mutual accommodation requires an adaptive, flexible approach to interviewing rather than adherence to a formulaic, rigid model. To build bridges across the cultural divide and empower the person being interviewed, the interview team could employ practices such as the following:

Preparation

- Consult with a member of the interviewee's ethnocultural community to offer coaching to your team on culture-specific sensitivities; for example, formal greetings, eye contact, the meanings of silence and pause, posture toward hierarchy and authority, the meaning of gift-giving, the meaning of intonation in speech, how agreement and disagreement are expressed, and gestures to avoid.
- Vet the interview questions with the coach to avoid any inquiries that could put the interviewee on the spot about, for example, their personal circumstances or feelings.
- Ahead of time, provide at least a sample of the questions that will be asked so the interviewee is less pressured to think on the spot in a language that is not their first language.

Representation

- Ensure that the interview team is racially and culturally diverse.

- Ensure that at least one person at the interview is from the interviewee's ethnolinguistic community.

Language

- Ask the interviewee if they would like to have someone present who is fluent in both English and the interviewee's first language should clarification be required.
- Have the interviewing group practise speaking English slowly and plainly for conversations with people who do not have advanced English fluency.
- Communicate that the person's ability to speak more than one language is a valuable asset, and that accented English is not a problem to be overcome.
- Interviewers also need to stay mindful of their own familiarity with church language and traditions. Those being interviewed might not have the same experience and should not have to contend with unrealistic and unfair expectations about knowledge and context.

Guidelines for Asking Questions

There is a Western tendency to view the gathering of information as the primary purpose of an interview.

While some of this information is "personal" in nature, all of it is "of the person." Hence, what and how a person thinks, believes, functions, relates, and knows speaks of their very heart and soul. This heart is something an intercultural church seeks to honour and protect. It recognizes that for interviewees coming from many non-Western cultures, the interview is not primarily about information sharing as it is about establishing a relationship.

The interviewing team may ask questions that are intended to give information that will help them get to know an interviewee; meanwhile, the interviewee may be pulling away from the group because those questions seem too direct, personal, or prying.

When asking interview questions, consider the following:

- Acknowledge at the beginning of the interview that this is an intercultural encounter, and that both parties should feel free to ask questions for clarification, if needed.
- Confirm the interview as a space that seeks to honour cultural differences by inviting a member of the group to open with prayer in a language other than English, and/or by offering a prayer in English that asks God to bless the intercultural time together.
- Be aware that the issue of saving face is always present, regardless of a person's cultural heritage. Do whatever you can to avoid making the interviewee feel overly self-conscious or put on the spot to answer questions that would be embarrassing to answer.
- Too broad an opening question can not only make it difficult to know where to start but also may immediately cross the uncomfortable boundary of sharing personal information. "Tell us about yourself" is too broad. "Tell us about your experience as it relates to ministry leadership" is better.

- Similarly, a common final question in an interview is “Do you have any questions you’d like to ask us?” In many cultures, asking questions can be seen to not know what one should know. “Is there anything you would like to say to us before the interview ends?” is more inviting.
- Generally, Western thought patterns tend to be abstract in nature. This is not the case in many other cultural traditions that employ concrete images and are story-based. It is always a good idea to include scenario or case study questions that will help an interviewee connect to their lived experience and lived expertise.
- If the interviewee is a recent immigrant, avoid questions about their reasons for immigrating to Canada or how long they intend to stay. The first communicates that the group thinks some reasons are more valid than others, and the second tends to be asked more frequently of racialized people, especially if they are coming from a country in the global south. Both questions emphasize the status of the person as an outsider, or “other,” who might be hiding some clandestine motivation. Interviewers are neither immigration officers nor inquisitors.
- Interviewers do have a careful discernment to make. It is entirely appropriate, therefore, to ask questions to help the group get to know an interviewee’s posture toward the United Church without unfairly scrutinizing their motivations or intentions. These might include questions such as “What is it about The United Church of Canada that appeals to you?”, “What are the similarities and differences you see between the denomination of your ordination and The United Church of Canada?”, “Can you tell us the story of when you heard God’s call into the ministry?”, and “In what ways have you seen God at work in your decision to seek to be admitted to the United Church of Canada Order of Ministry?”

Accompaniment for Interviews

Interviewees are accompanied by a person of their choosing—for example, someone who has been a companion with them on their discernment journey but is not a relative or their minister. This support person does not take an active role in the interview but is an observer who can help the individual debrief and reflect post-interview. Make sure the accompanier understands their role beforehand.

Interviews cannot proceed unless an accompanier is present.

Interview Teams

The Admission Board can divide into smaller groups of interview teams to conduct interviews. Decisions, however, must be discussed and voted on by the whole Admission Board. Teams of three to four people help keep the discussion interactive and informal, and give the interviewee a chance to more fully engage with each person as well as the team as a whole.

Interview Outlines and Resources

General Process for Interviews

Using Videoconference Technology

Because the Admission Board members are located across Canada and admission ministers seeking interviews are located even more widely, including overseas, interviews are conducted by videoconference.

Interviewing by videoconference rather than in person has unique challenges. Admission Board members need to be aware of these challenges and accommodate for them accordingly.

Technical Challenges

Although technologies that support videoconferencing such as Internet speeds and software are constantly improving, glitches are to be expected. In some cases, interviewees have limited access to good-quality Internet. A smooth videoconference call requires all participants to have high-speed reliable Internet and a computer device that has good audio and video capabilities.

Challenges include broken connections, poor-quality audio or video, and users being unfamiliar with the technology.

To mitigate these challenges:

- Have a non-video option as a back-up plan, and simply turn the interview into a conference call.
- Ensure all participants have a minimum standard of equipment by sending a list of requirements to all Admission Board members and interviewees.
- In situations where someone is using the technology for the first time or is unsure of the standards of the equipment they are using, do a test run at least several days before the interview.
- In situations where technical challenges are impeding the interview, be prepared to end the interview and reschedule it. It is not fair to interviewees if technical challenges are impairing their ability to communicate clearly with and present themselves authentically to the Admission Board.

Communication Challenges

A videoconference is not equal to an in-person interview but may be your best option. Much of human communication is non-verbal, and while videoconferencing allows for some visual cues, others are not possible. Furthermore, for interviewees communicating in a language other than their primary one, videoconferencing can add an extra layer of anxiety and difficulty in expressing themselves authentically and clearly.

To mitigate these challenges:

- Make sure video quality is optimal. Ensure all participants are front-lit rather than backlit (facing window or light, rather than having it behind the participant).
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Pay extra attention to ensuring that interviewees understand the questions being posed.
- Proceed in a fashion that facilitates deep listening in a safe space: be attentive to the other person, don't rush, communicate a comfort with silence and pauses, communicate affirmation and encouragement with your body language, show interest but don't pry, and laugh together as much as possible (but never at anyone else's expense).

The Accompanier

Ideally, the accompanier can be physically present in the same room as the interviewee. However, it may not always be possible. If not, the accompanier and the interviewee should be encouraged to touch base before the interview by videoconference or phone.

The videoconference platform used by many in the United Church is Zoom, which allows the meeting host to place any participants in a virtual waiting room. When placing the interviewee in the waiting room, ensure the accompanier is also placed in the waiting room unless the interview panel wishes to speak with the accompanier separately. Knowing the accompanier may or may not be physically present with the interviewee, arrangements need to be made to have a private conversation with the accompanier if the interview panel requires one.

Before the Interview

- Carefully study any written submissions by the interviewee.
- Review the admission policy and interview guidelines, above.
- Determine the process of the interview: what areas you want to focus on, who will ask which questions, and how you will begin and end.
- Ensure the accompanier understands their role as a silent observer.

During the Interview

- Refer to the interviewee's written material.
- Have at least one member of the interview team take notes. These can be used to give feedback during the interview and afterwards as needed, as well as to keep track of the process. The notes should be destroyed after the interview.

After the Interview

The interviewee leaves the interview (can be placed in a virtual waiting room with videoconferencing tools). The accompanier is invited to meet briefly with the interview team to name any concerns and share whether they believe the interview team experienced an accurate reflection of the interviewee.

The full Admission Board then meets to hear the recommendation of the interview team and make a formal decision.

The interviewee rejoins the Admission Board to receive the decision and hear the Admission Board's guidance on next steps.

A written record of the decision, direction, and guidance of the Admission Board is shared within two weeks of the interview.

Entrance Interview

Criteria

The Admission Board determines *suitability* for ministry in the United Church based on the following criteria:

- The minister has a sufficient understanding of The United Church of Canada and the Canadian context.
- The minister is in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of the United Church and agrees to comply with the governance and polity of the United Church.
- The minister is open to learning more about the United Church and engaging in ongoing lifelong learning.

The entrance interview is also when the Admission Board assesses which of the learning outcomes the admission minister has already gained and which ones will form part of their orientation.

Written Documentation

Interview team members are provided with some of the documentation that was used in Component One of the admission process. This includes

- work history (CV)
- educational background
- letters of reference
- narrative responses to questions
- academic transcripts

This written documentation is available to interview team members two weeks before the interview.

Entrance Interview Guidelines

Interviewees are provided with a sample of questions (at least one from each category) from the interview rubric on the next page. The aim is to strike a balance between providing interviewees with information about the interview so they can thoughtfully prepare and allowing them to speak from the heart.

Beginning

- Interviewers introduce themselves and describe their involvement in the church and interest in being part of the Admission Board.
- Outline the process and timing.
- The interviewee is given a chance to ask questions about process, expectations, and so on.
- Pray.

Admission Entrance Interview Rubric

(To determine an applicant's suitability for ministry in the United Church)

This rubric is for an applicant for admission in The United Church of Canada. It is meant to provide a common language and some direction for interviewers.

This rubric should be used to evaluate both written and oral material. There is a three-category system to aid interviewers: Limited Expression, Developing, and Mature Expression. At this stage of the process we expect to see candidates fall primarily into the Developing or Mature Expression categories.

Those categories may include indicators such as

- **Limited Expression:** Difficulty articulating, does not appear to have considered the question, lack of interest in the area, insecurity
- **Developing:** Some articulation of concepts, demonstrates a willingness to wrestle with the questions, curious, ability to integrate experiences with concepts, competence, growing self-awareness
- **Mature Expression:** Gives thoughtful and articulate answers, demonstrates confidence and critical self-awareness, and acknowledges limitations of their own knowledge and experience

There is a lot to cover. During the interview it is difficult to get answers to all the possible questions, so start by evaluating the written material and then focus the interview on areas that are not covered or that need clarification.

Especially for interviews that may fall into the category of cross-cultural, take extra care to prepare for by using the 4 Cs:

- **Check** assumptions, biases, and prejudices, and stay in the neutral zone.
- **Carefully** prepare for the conversation by researching cultural information.
- **Choose** the questions carefully, focussing on the experience and what is happening rather than on the person—for example, “How was your day today?”, “How do you think this will go?”
- **Consider** the cultural realities when material is read and when questions are being asked.

Introductory Questions

This first section of the interview is designed to be a conversation starter and to make the interviewee feel comfortable.

- Tell us about your original journey to ministry, and how this journey is now leading you to choose ministry in the United Church.

Spiritual Life

- Ministry requires a profound sense and experience of God (Creator, Spirit, Jesus). It also requires an ongoing discernment of the Holy.
- We expect admission applicants to have a well-developed and intentional spiritual life.
- Admission applicants should express an ongoing willingness to learn and explore, especially within United Church tradition and practice.
- Applicants may name specific practices (journalling, retreats, singing, worship, advocacy, prayer, etc.). They may also express an openness to change or to new revelations on their faith journey.

Questions

- How do you nurture your spiritual life?
- What expression does your spiritual life have in your daily life?
- Describe a biblical character, image, or story that you identify with at this point in your faith journey.
- What is your experience of congregational life, particularly worship in a community of faith?
- Is there something you would like to explore as you continue on your spiritual journey?

Identity, Authenticity, and Capacity for Critical Reflection

- Ministry requires the integration of the emotional and spiritual self.
- It also requires a thorough knowledge of self, including competencies.
- Suitability for The United Church of Canada includes agreement with our doctrine and ethos.
- The applicant's image of themselves and their passions should have some connection with their beliefs and actions.
- The applicant should have some sense of their ethical code and some insight into and acceptance of their strengths and limitations. Applicants may show resilience: awareness of personal needs, maintaining a good personal support system, time for self-care, work/life balance, and an ability to set limits and healthy boundaries.

Questions

- What stands out for you when you read and reflect on the United Church doctrine/creeds (for example, A New Creed and A Song of Faith)? What do you resonate with? Is there any aspect that you have concerns or questions about?
- What is your understanding of baptism and communion?
- What gifts do you bring to ministry in The United Church of Canada?
- How do you practise self-care as a whole person: body, mind, soul, and relationships?
- How can you tell you are overworked or approaching burnout? How do you manage anxiety or codependency? How do you balance the different roles and relationships in your life?

Working with People: Understanding Human Behaviour and Capacity to Collaborate in Ministry

- Pastoral ministry requires a well-developed capacity for active listening.
- It also requires a psychological and sociological understanding of human dynamics in both individuals and groups.
- Applicants should show an awareness of context, including culture, gender, power, and privilege.
- Applicants should have an awareness of the nature of their leadership in ministry.
- The ability to work with other people is central to everything a minister does. Whether it is working with team members within a church, with volunteers and lay members, or with outside groups or agencies, everything is done in community in The United Church of Canada.
- We expect applicants to have skills that may include developing networks, managing conflict, resolving problems, enabling divergent visions, encouraging others, etc.

Questions

- What experience or knowledge do you have of different ages? cultures? other diverse populations? Or, what experience do you have with diversity—races, ages, genders, ethnicities, abilities?
- How do you maintain healthy boundaries? (Boundaries include personal, sexual, relational, and emotional concerns.)
- How do you define conflict? What is your normal approach when you are in a conflict situation? Give an example.

Passion for Justice

- The commitment to work for peace and justice is an integral part of ministry in The United Church of Canada. Issues of gender justice, racial justice, and right relations with indigenous peoples are critical to ministry and mission in The United Church of Canada.
- Applicants should bring with them a sense of justice in the world, and they should show evidence of community engagement.
- They should display a desire to understand and analyze the world around them.

Questions

- In your ministry, what justice issues have you been involved with?
- How do you envision continuing your justice ministry in The United Church of Canada?
- What is your understanding of justice? How important is justice ministry to you?

Appreciation of Administration

- Ministers are required to perform some managerial and administrative duties and maintain good records.

- Applicants should show an awareness of this and some appreciation of its necessity.

Questions

- Are you willing to comply with the governance and polity of The United Church of Canada?
- Part of the admission process is to serve in a ministry appointment in a United Church congregation. During this time you will have a Pastoral Charge Supervisor – someone appointed by the regional council to oversee the pastoral charge and attend board and congregational meetings. This person is not your mentor (that is a separate person) and is not your personal supervisor. However, they are a resource person to you and may at times offer advice on pastoral charge administrative and other matters. Can you share a time when you experienced the oversight of the wider church? How did you experience that oversight, and how did you handle it?
- When do you know that you've reached your limits in terms of work? What helps you to say no?
- How do you take care of yourself, especially in times of difficulty?

Determining Suitability for Ministry in the United Church			
Interview Area	Limited Understanding or Evidence	Evidence of Being Open to Learning and Development	Well-Developed Understanding and Evidence
Spiritual Life			
Identity and Authenticity, and Capacity for Self-Reflection			
Working with People			

Capacity to Be a Life-long Learner			
Passion for Justice			
Appreciation for Administration			

Response Form for After an Entrance Interview

This chart can be used to record the details that need to be shared with an applicant following an entrance interview.

Decision of the Admission Board
Feedback, Including Affirmations and Growing Edges
<p>Next Stages and Recommendations</p> <p>Consider recommended learning goals related to the Learning Outcomes, direction on orientation program and mentorship, and other details the applicant will need to enter the next stage of the admission program. If the decision is to not proceed with admission at this time, provide direction on what the minister needs to do to discern further and a timeline for another interview.</p>

Post-Interview Decision

After the interview, the Admission Board makes one of the following decisions:

- The minister is suitable for entry into the admission process and for ministry in The United Church of Canada. The Admission Board indicates the requirements for orientation.
- The minister is not suitable for entry into the admission process and for ministry in The United Church of Canada.
- The minister has not sufficiently discerned the call to minister in The United Church of Canada. The Admission Board makes explicit what the minister needs to do to discern further and provides a timeline for another interview.

Final Interview

Criteria

The Admission Board determines *readiness* for ministry in the United Church based on the following criteria:

- All of the requirements for admission have been completed.
- The minister is ready to become ministry personnel of the United Church.
- The minister shows competence in the learning outcomes, taking into consideration the report from the Pastoral Charge Supervisor and feedback from the instructors of the admission orientation program, as well as the minister's responses during the final interview.
- The minister is in essential agreement with the statement of doctrine of the United Church and demonstrates that they agree to comply with the governance and polity of the United Church.

Written Documentation

Interview team members will be provided with the following written documentation:

- report from the instructors of the admission orientation program
- report of the Pastoral Charge Supervisor

This written documentation will be available to interview team members two weeks before the final interview.

Admission Final Interview Rubric

(To determine an applicant's readiness for admission to the United Church Order of Ministry)

This interview is to assess a person's readiness to serve the church. The answers should show depth, complexity, and integration of knowledge and self. The Background section of the *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel* (www.united-church.ca/handbooks) may be helpful here:

[P]ersonal and professional growth is a developmental process and...ministry personnel move through a variety of career and life changes that affect their practice of ministry.

In practice, ministry personnel are expected to know and understand the culture of the ministries in which they serve so that they are responsive to the spiritual needs of those contexts. They take seriously local traditions of faith and worship, and share their faith in ways that are relevant and constructive.

Ministry personnel are responsible for leading, guiding, and supporting the community of faith in the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ. What is more, they touch people's lives at various points of joy, pain, celebration, and vulnerability. Ministry personnel do this in a variety of ways—by leading in worship, by providing pastoral care, by standing with those who suffer, and by working for justice and peace.

Ministry is a serious undertaking and occurs with many people in vulnerable moments. There is no expectation of perfection (there is a lot to learn and experience is a great teacher) but there is the anticipation that strong signs of readiness to perform in a variety of situations will be displayed.

There is a lot to cover. During the interview it is difficult to get answers to all the possible questions, so start by evaluating the material provided by the Pastoral Charge Supervisor and the instructors in the orientation program, then focus the interview on areas that are not covered or that need clarification.

Bold and italics indicate a question that is mandatory.

Introductions

- Interviewers introduce themselves.
- Outline the process and timing.
- The interviewee has a chance to ask questions about process and expectations.
- Pray.

General Questions

- Please share some of the key insights and personal learning you have experienced as you have navigated this admission process.

- What have you found particularly helpful in terms of your well-being and resilience through this process?
- How has your call to ministry developed over this time?

United Church Polity

Admission ministers need to demonstrate knowledge of, adherence to, and appreciation for the organization, governance, and policies of The United Church of Canada. Admission ministers should be able to identify how the United Church's polity relates to the mission and ministry of the church and understand and accept oversight and accountability by the denomination as ministry personnel.

- In what ways are the courts of The United Church of Canada significant in congregational life?
- Before you participate in a protest or social action, what must you consider as ministry personnel?
- What does accountability mean to you in the context of The United Church of Canada? How would you describe the obligations of ministry leaders in this regard?
- Comment on strengths or weaknesses of the policies The United Church of Canada has in place to deal with sexual misconduct and workplace harassment.
- What do you understand by the conciliar approach to power and authority in The United Church of Canada?
- What is your understanding of ecumenism and the United Church's commitment to collaboration with other denominations and other faiths?
- As ministry personnel, to whom are you accountable?
- How does the United Church's polity relate to the mission and ministry of the community of faith?
- Is there any area of United Church polity that you find problematic? Explain.
- ***Do you agree to comply with the governance and polity of the United Church?***

United Church Theology and History

Admission ministers should demonstrate a mastery of theological concepts as well as a commitment to lifelong learning. These questions are designed to probe the candidate's ability to describe their faith coherently. They are also designed to challenge the candidate on the ever-present issue of how faith relates to everyday life. It is critical that candidates feel confident in their own understanding so they will be able to help others explore theological issues. The United Church is not a confessing church, and the minister is not expected to have memorized vast sections of the doctrine. However, they should show a critical and nuanced understanding of the statements of faith and the creeds.

Questions

- ***Are you in essential agreement with the Basis of Union as outlined in The Manual 2019 in chapter 2, and what does "essential agreement" mean to you?***
- The United Church recognizes the following as doctrine: the Basis of Union's Twenty Articles of Doctrine, A Statement of Faith (1940), A New Creed, and A Song of Faith.

Which is the most meaningful for you, and why? What role do these statements have in the life of a faith community?

- What is your understanding of the relationship among reason, scripture, tradition, and experience?
- What has been the impact of “The Decision” made by the United Church in 1988 on
 - the culture and ethos of The United Church of Canada?
 - the community of faith in which you serve?
- Tell us about your understanding of the challenges faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada and about The United Church of Canada’s role in and response to the situation.
- What possibilities or challenges are involved in designing worship in a multicultural setting? Describe any direct experience you have had in this area.
- How would you respond to the sometimes-expressed criticism of The United Church of Canada that “the church should not be political”?

Contextual Ministry Leadership

Leadership is complex. There are many different models for leadership in communities of faith and a long list of desirable leadership qualities. There is a great need to be aware of the realities of ethnic and racial diversities that exist in the communities served by the United Church. The admission minister should be able to use intercultural and cross-cultural skills to offer effective ministry in the ethnically and racially diverse Canadian context. These skills include being able to affirm and honour human differences as God-given, and upholding the vision of community with diversity; understanding that any perception of God and faith practice is deeply influenced by culture; welcoming, appreciating, and critically engaging other cultural perspectives; practising self-examination and cross-cultural dialogue; being aware of power dynamics between different cultures; and engaging methods to navigate difficult power dynamics.

Questions

- What particular challenges are involved in exercising leadership in a community of faith? Describe your leadership style. When do you find you are most effective with this style? When do you adapt it?
- What are some of the challenges involved in working in a setting where a variety of races or cultures are present? How have you navigated any situations you have encountered?
- How would you go about helping a community of faith design and apply an ethical decision-making process to support right relationships within the church and to address issues and concerns in the wider community?
- Ministry leaders are called to be authentic. What does this mean to you, and what are some challenges that come with authenticity?
- What tools do you use to make the Bible accessible, relevant, and culturally sensitive to a community of faith?
- Why is inclusive language in a worship liturgy important? What does inclusive worship mean to you? Feel free to illustrate with an example or story.

- How do you understand God’s mission in the world as it relates to injustice and exclusion with systems such as heterosexism, sexism, racism, and hierarchy?
- What is the role of the United Church, specifically of leaders in the United Church, in a multicultural and multi-faith and pluralistic society?

Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel

Ethical standards act as a resource for ministry personnel as they struggle with ethical issues in their daily practice. They also enable ministry personnel to be accountable to self, church, and community. The standards of practice recognize that ministry personnel move through a variety of career and life changes that affect their practice of ministry, while touching people’s lives at various points of joy, pain, celebration, and vulnerability, in a variety of ways.

Questions

- Have you noticed a difference in pastoral care in your denomination and in the United Church? If so, describe the difference.
- Suggest a situation in which you would seek advice or help. From whom would you seek advice or help?
- A minister’s work hours need to be flexible given the nature of the work. They can also be overwhelming. What is your approach to setting boundaries around work hours and preventing burnout?
- How do you manage relationship dynamics when you are in a position of power and influence and when you are not?
- Tell us about a time when you were directly involved in a disagreement or conflict while in a ministry role. How did you handle it, and what were the points of learning?
- What have you learned about maintaining professional boundaries in your particular ministry context?
- How do you understand the importance of accountability and oversight in ministry as expressed in documents such as *The Manual* and *Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice in Ministry*?
- What strategies do you employ for self-care?
- How has your sense of call changed throughout the admission process?

Closing Question

As you prepare to be fully admitted to the United Church, what are your greatest hopes and fears?

Understanding and Evidence of Learning Outcomes			
Learning Outcome	Limited Understanding or Evidence	Evidence of Being Open to Learning and Development	Well-Developed Understanding and Evidence
United Church Polity			
United Church Theology and History			
Contextual Ministry Leadership			
Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice			

Note-Taking Template

A copy of this table can be used during an interview to help interviewers track their assessment and identify recommendations for next steps.

Understanding and Evidence of Learning Outcomes			
Learning Outcome	Limited Understanding or Evidence	Evidence of Being Open to Learning and Development	Well-Developed Understanding and Evidence
United Church Polity			
United Church Theology and History			
Contextual Ministry Leadership			
Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice			

Response Form for After a Final Interview

A copy of this chart can be used to record the details that need to be shared with an applicant following their final interview.

Decision of the Admission Board
Feedback Including Affirmations and Growing Edges
<p>Next Stages and Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the decision is to admit, provide instructions for next steps to admission. If the decision is not to admit <i>at this time</i>, list what the minister needs to achieve to be assessed again for readiness for admission, and provide a timeline for another interview.

After the interview, the Admission Board makes one of the following decisions:

- The minister is ready for admission into ministry in The United Church of Canada.

- The minister is not ready for admission at this time. The Admission Board makes explicit what the minister needs to achieve to be assessed again for readiness for admission and provides a timeline for another interview.
- The minister is not ready for admission and demonstrates that further growth and development will not be possible. The Admission Board can decide to follow the process to terminate the minister's admission process.

Appendix A: Role of Interview Chairs

The following are the key responsibilities of Interview Chairs:

1. Chair interview panels, including the preparation meeting, the actual interview, and the post-interview recommendation meeting.
2. Ensure that interview protocols, including human rights considerations, are respected during the interview.
3. Ensure that time schedules are followed, and conclude the interview and related panel meetings in accordance with the agenda of the day.
4. Open and close the interviews with prayer.
5. Provide a written summary of the interview for the Office of Vocation minister, along with the decision that was made.

Sample Timetable for Interviews

45 minutes: Panel meets to

- discuss written response from applicant and identify any areas that require clarification or further exploration
- review other documents, such as the applicant's résumé
- review the structure of the interview
- be reminded of human rights issues and discuss elements of cross-cultural interviewing if that is the nature of the interview
- appoint a timekeeper
- talk about the flow of the interview—who will ask which questions

15 minutes: Wrap up preparation and prepare to be joined on videoconference by the applicant.

45 minutes: Part 1 of the interview: keep track of the time so you can get about halfway through the interview.

10 minutes: Break (turn off your video and audio).

45 minutes: Part 2 of the interview.

45 minutes: Panel reflects on the interview and agrees on a recommendation to the Admission Board.

Appendix B: Template for Interview Summary and Recommendation

Date

To: Office of Vocation minister

From: *(your name)*

Re: Admission interview for *(name of interviewee)*

On *(date)* I chaired an interview team consisting of *(names of your interview team)* that interviewed *(name of interviewee)*.

Findings of Interview

(Highlight the main findings from your interview in one or two paragraphs.)

Decision

(Choose one.)

Entrance Interview

- The minister is suitable for entry into the admission process and for ministry in The United Church of Canada. (The Admission Board indicates the requirements for orientation.)
- The minister is not suitable for entry into the admission process and for ministry in The United Church of Canada.
- The minister has not sufficiently discerned the call to minister in The United Church of Canada. (The Admission Board makes explicit what the minister needs to do to discern further and provides a timeline for another interview.)

Final Interview

- The minister is ready for admission into ministry in The United Church of Canada.
- The minister is not ready for admission at this time. The Admission Board makes explicit what the minister needs to achieve to be assessed again for readiness for admission and provides a timeline for another interview.
- The minister is not ready for admission and demonstrates that further growth and development will not be possible. The Admission Board can decide to follow the process to terminate the minister's admission process.