

Proposal for a Conference Wide COM 2021

Rationale

The landscape of religious life is changing, and rapidly. In the past year alone every church has adapted to some kind of virtual platform. We are witnessing the emergence of all kinds of new forms of ministry and existing churches are learning to discern what of the tradition needs to be carried forward and what of it needs to adapt to meet the needs of future generations. We are seeking greater health for all our congregations, and we are recognizing the need for anti-racism training for authorized ministers and lay leaders throughout the conference. The technologies available to us today were non-existent when the structure of the United Church of Christ was first set up. While we can't fully know what the future church will look like, we do know that wise and excellent leadership, is and will continue to be, essential for effectively navigating this changing landscape.

In the United Church of Christ, authorization, oversight, and support for authorized ministers and local churches is the responsibility of Associations (in Conferences that have Associations). This work is carried out by the Associations' **Committees on Ministry (COMs)**. The UCC Constitution allows for Associations to delegate their oversight duties to their Conferences.

In order to better meet the demands of oversight and support in these rapidly changing and increasingly complex times, we are proposing that the five Associations of the Rocky Mountain Conference (RMC) delegate their authorization responsibilities to a Conference Wide Committee on Ministry (CWCOCM) that can provide sound and effective guidance and support as we move into this new era.

This initial CWCOCM proposal calls for a two year period of trial and experimentation; this will be accomplished by the Associations voting to delegate their Committee on Ministry work to the Conference, and the Conference establishing a new CWCOCM to do this work. During the two-year trial, the value of the CWCOCM will be assessed, and CWCOCM organization will be finalized. If it proves effective and successful, Associations and the Conference will modify their bylaws to make these Committee on Ministry changes permanent.

The Model

The CWCOCM will carry out its ministry through three subcommittees: The Formation and Authorization Subcommittee, the Supportive Oversight Subcommittee, and the Accountability Subcommittee. Members serve three-year terms, and will be drawn from all geographic areas of the Conferences. Members will be nominated by the RMC Nominating Committee and elected at either the Annual or specially called meeting of the Conference. Especially during the initial two year trial period, the RMC Nominating Committee will seek input regarding nominees from all the Associations as well as draw from those currently serving on COM's.

The Formation and Authorization Subcommittee (FAS) will be composed of 15-18 members, drawn from all five Associations and nominated by the RMC Nominating Committee and elected at either the Annual or specially called meeting of the Conference. The committee's officers will be Chair, Vice Chair, Record Manager and Record Assistant, and Discernmentarian.*

The FAS relates to individuals seeking initial authorization or Standing in the RMC. The FAS oversees processes for Members in Discernment seeking Ordination or Lay Ministerial Standing, Full Communion ministers seeking Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing (OMPS) ministers from other denominations seeking a Privilege of Call in the UCC, and Dual Standing for ministers of denominations other than the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or the United Church of Canada who are serving UCC calls within bounds of the RMC. The FAS also works with New Church Starts and congregations seeking to affiliate with the UCC. The FAS organizes Ecclesiastical Councils for Ordination, Privilege of Call, and the reception of local churches into the UCC. The FAS also works with ministers and congregations to hold ordinations and installations. During the two year trial period, decisions about setting quorums for, and how to hold Ecclesiastical Councils (Conference-wide including virtual attendance, or convened in specific geographic areas of the Conference) will be finalized. The FAS will serve as the body within the CWCOM that will adjudicate Fitness Reviews. *Conference Ministerial Staff: Sue Artt, Erin Gilmore; Conference Administrative Staff: Melissa McCarl. The FAS meets monthly on a digital platform, and yearly in person at the Leadership Training Retreat at La Foret during the month of August.*

**We are using this term as a place holder for what is essentially a spiritual director for the COM. This person's role is to tend to the spiritual life of the COM and help guide the COM in practices of discernment.*

The Supportive Oversight Subcommittee (SOS) will be composed of 15-18 members with representation from every Association, or geographic region of the Conference. The officers of the SOS will be Chair/Vice Chair, or Co-chairs. SOS members will be nominated by the RMC Nominating Committee and elected at either the Annual or specially called meeting of the Conference.

The SOS relates to Authorized Ministers (ordained, licensed, commissioned, OMPS, dual standing) holding Standing in the RMC, providing support and resourcing for the continued authorization for professional ministry. The SOS also provides support for the congregations of the RMC. The SOS may be broken into smaller groups, either by association/geography or by types of call to provide vocational reviews for all Authorized Ministers. The SOS provides Situational Support Consultations between Authorized Ministers and other covenantal partners, oversees the process for Authorized Ministers seeking Ecclesiastical Endorsement, periods of Leave of Absence, and requests for Exempt Standing. The SOS also oversees transfers of Standing in and out of the RMC. *Conference Ministerial Staff: Erin Gilmore; Conference Administrative Staff: Melissa McCarl. The SOS meets monthly on virtual platform, often breaking up into smaller groups to meet with authorized ministers. The SOS meets yearly at La Foret at the Leadership Training Retreat.*

The Accountability Subcommittee (ASC), will be made of at least 3 members. ASC members will be nominated by the RMC Nominating Committee and elected at either the Annual or specially called meeting of the Conference.

The ASC is trained in fitness review process, leads fitness reviews, staff fitness review teams, has responsibility of keeping database up to date with standing requirements (Healthy Ministry Relationship (HMR) Training, Mandatory Reporting training, Anti-racism Training, and Cultural Competency Training) for all Authorized Ministers in the RMC. The ASC is in communication with HMR team and other entities to ensure awareness of educational opportunities being provided across the conference.

Fitness Reviews address potential violations of ministerial ethics that are delineated in the Ordained Ministerial Code of the United Church of Christ. Individuals who wish to raise a formal question of Ministerial Fitness regarding any Authorized Minister with Standing in this Conference may deliver their confidential report to the ASC, or through any Conference Minister. A Fitness Review is initiated if the ASC determines that the behavior, actions, or conduct alleged in the complaint, if true, would constitute a violation of the Ordained Ministerial Code. The ASC may call upon other CWCOW members to conduct Fitness Reviews. All Fitness Reviews will be done in accordance with the process described in the current UCC Manual on Ministry. The ASC will present Fitness Review findings to the FAS for adjudication. Conference Ministerial & Administrative Staff: Sue Artt.

The Executive/Leadership Committee is made up of the chairs and vice chairs of each of the teams, the records manager, the Discernmentarian and the conference staff. The Executive Committee ensures communication and collaboration between the three subcommittees and works together to provide overall leadership and guidance to the Committee on Ministry. The Leadership team meets quarterly on a virtual platform and helps plan and lead the yearly Leadership Training Retreat at La Foret.

Guidelines for Nominating positions on the COM:

Because the work of the Committee on Ministry carries incredible responsibility in the authorization and oversight of clergy, and in the care and accountability among our churches, it is essential that we nominate a diverse*, qualified pool of individuals to serve on the CWCOW. Inspired by the list of characteristics for Faithful and Effective Committee on Ministry members developed by the National UCC Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization (MESA) Teams, the following qualifications serve as a starting point for recruiting members of the CWCOW. Members of the RMC Nominating Committee are encouraged to talk to clergy, governing boards, pastoral relations committee of local churches for recommendations of people who fit the description listed below. *Diversity in gender, age, race and ethnicity, orientation, as well as representation from all five Associations and both clergy and lay members.

Qualifications:

- For clergy, minimum 3 years' experience serving as authorized minister in authorized setting of the UCC
- For lay members, minimum 3 years in active participation with the life of a UCC church
- Demonstrated ability to work collaboratively with others
- Demonstrated integrity and trustworthiness
- Willing to make difficult decisions through collaboration
- Can hold confidentiality as appropriate
- Capacity to listen generously and actively.
- Healthy sense of self
- Understand UCC polity and can articulate an ongoing commitment to the ministry of the COM and to the core values of the UCC

Training for the CWCOM

Members who serve on the CWCOM are required to participate in the Leadership Training Retreat in August. If they cannot attend, members work with Conference Staff and other members of the COM to ensure they have the necessary training to serve on the CWCOM.

The training event will include:

- Healthy communication
- Anti-racism
- Decision making through Discernment, Consensus and Parliamentary procedure
- Manual on Ministry
- Working with Marks for Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers
- Perspectives of those within seminaries and current trends in preparation for ministry

Training is led by a team that is drawn from previous members of the COM, HMR, Conference Staff and in consultation with the MESA Team from the national setting.