

# Candidacy Pathway: Community of Faith Connection

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## Handbook for Orientation

2024



Office of / Bureau de la  
**vocation**

The United Church of Canada  
L'Église Unie du Canada

Candidacy Pathway: Community of Faith Connection, Handbook for Orientation (2024)



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# Contents

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- About the Community of Faith Connection ..... 4
  - Learning Context ..... 4
  - What Is Supervised Ministry Education? ..... 4
  - The Community of Faith Connection..... 5
- Sample Learning Covenant Format ..... 11
  - Learning Covenant ..... 11
- Celebrating the Covenant ..... 12
  - Sample Covenanting Service ..... 12

## About the Community of Faith Connection

### Learning Context

Candidates the church has called into service are **formed for ministry** across three integrated avenues of preparation:

Community of Faith	Theological School	Personal and Communal Discernment
<p>The candidate is or becomes immersed in the life of the church as a primary place of learning, practice, and formation for ministry, reliant on the modelling of other ministers, the support and feedback from lay people, the relationship with a supervisor, and the oversight of employers. The church calls its leaders into service in ministry, and forms them for that ministry.</p>	<p>The candidate completes an integrated program of academic and practical education and formation for ministry at a United Church of Canada school (or, in some cases, has begun or completed an accredited program elsewhere to which additional United Church courses are added). All United Church theological schools offer <b>integrated programs of practice and study</b> that meet standard learning outcomes through various modes of delivery.</p>	<p>The candidate engages in ongoing discernment, integration, personal and spiritual preparation, and an intentional relationship with the Candidacy Board, other mentors, Elders or spiritual directors, and companions/accompaniers, entrusting the discernment of call, suitability, and readiness for ministry to the wider community.</p>

### What Is Supervised Ministry Education?

Supervised Ministry Education (SME) is an intentional learning experience that enables people preparing for ministry to deepen their competence for ministry leadership, reflect theologically on the practice of ministry, develop healthy practices for self-care, enhance ministry skills, and develop their pastoral identity.

- SME is described in more detail in the *Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education* resources on the [Candidacy Pathway](#) webpage.
- SME occurs at a learning site, a community of faith that has been approved as an appropriate setting for learning and meets the requirements for SME. This learning experience involves reflecting on the practice of ministry aided by feedback from a community of faith and progress on specific learning goals through the support of supervision and evaluation.
- The integrated learning experience is supported by a [Learning Covenant](#) and requires reflection and integration on the practice of ministry to take place with an Educational Supervisor and a Community of Faith Connection.

## The Community of Faith Connection

The Community of Faith Connection (CFC) consists of representative lay people associated with the learning site who are committed to the mission and ministry of the church, to provide support and guidance to the candidate, to be active participants in the Learning Covenant, and to help the candidate to know how their ministry is being experienced. A minimum of two, preferably three (and up to five) people are assigned to this role so they can share the responsibility and offer a breadth of perspectives in assessing the community of faith's experience of a candidate's ministry.

The Community of Faith Connection is appointed by the governing body of the community of faith. It is recommended that if only a small team can take on this role, they commit to check in with others in the community of faith about the feedback they are offering the candidate. The CFC cannot be paid staff of the community of faith or a member of its Ministry and Personnel Committee (M&P).

## Role of the Community of Faith Connection

The CFC provides the invaluable eyes and ears on the ground as the candidate exercises their practice of ministry. They meet regularly with the candidate as support, encourager, and honest interpreter of the community of faith's experience of the candidate's ministry.

- The CFC is responsible for helping the community of faith understand the Supervised Ministry Education process and objectives. It is also responsible for helping the candidate know and understand the community of faith.
- The CFC prepares two evaluations for the Candidacy Board. If it is a very small team, it seeks the participation of trusted others to contribute to evaluating the candidate's ministry. A sample evaluation report is provided at the CFC training.

Community of Faith Connection Report				
Please DESCRIBE how the candidate performs in this area of ministry				
Area of Responsibility <a href="#">ethical-standards-practice-ministry-personnel.pdf</a>	Evidence of competence in this area of ministry			Please describe this area of ministry and give examples:
	limited ✓	developing ✓	well-developed ✓	
<b>1) pastoral care</b> As providers of pastoral care, candidates for ministry <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ are sensitive to the situation and needs of those to whom they offer pastoral care, and recognize the unique dynamics of the pastoral relationship</li> <li>▪ provide a supportive presence for and are accessible to people in times of change and crisis</li> <li>▪ encourage and facilitate a process to ensure that pastoral care occurs on a regular basis</li> </ul> Any other responsibilities in this area of ministry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### Key Skills for the CFC

- holding a vision of ministry as a shared endeavour between the laity and the minister
- active listening
- confidentiality
- knowledge of different aspects of the community of faith
- ability to observe behaviour and offer constructive feedback and encouragement
- interpersonal skills and good communication
- administrative skills (note-taking, record-keeping, evaluative report writing, scheduling meetings)

The CFC is accountable to the candidate to assist their process of learning, to the governing body that appointed the team, and to the Candidacy Board for evaluating the candidate's effectiveness as a minister in their community of faith.

### Relationship to Ministry and Personnel Committee

The Ministry and Personnel Committee manages the employment relationship between the community of faith and the candidate. M&P also oversees working conditions and compensation, reviews the position description regularly, and conducts an annual performance review ([Ministry Personnel Reviews](#)).

### CFC Meetings

Through planned times for conversation, prayer, and reflection, the CFC supports the candidate's ongoing formation as a minister. During meetings, members are to offer support, keep notes for evaluative reports, give feedback, and consider opportunities for ongoing learning. It is recommended that the [Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel](#) guide the focus of the meetings.

- The CFC should prepare before the candidate arrives for a welcoming and hospitable introduction to the community of faith. If the candidate has a partner or family, invite them to a social gathering to welcome and get to know them.
- If working as a small group, the CFC might appoint a convenor or chair, someone able to encourage all members of the team to take part in the discussions, express their points of view, and listen to one another.
- The CFC meets with the candidate frequently at the outset of the Supervised Ministry Education to get to know the candidate and develop the Learning Covenant. Thereafter, the CFC may meet monthly with the candidate. Additional meetings may also be required to finalize evaluations.
- Meetings should be held in a comfortable place with no distractions, such as a church room or in one of the homes of the CFC members.
- If the CFC is operating alone, it is not appropriate to invite anyone else in the community of faith to join the meetings. Only CFC members, and the Educational Supervisor on occasion, meet with the candidate in CFC meetings.
- The length of meetings will depend on how long is needed to discuss the aspects of

ministry in some depth, as well as allow time for prayer and social connection. The Educational Supervisor may encourage the candidate to bring particular agenda items related to the candidate's learning goals to the CFC meeting or may wish to join such a meeting on occasion, at the CFC's invitation.

- Since the meetings are intended to focus on the experiences of the candidate and of the community of faith, it is not appropriate for the candidate's partner or other family members to be present.

### Schedule of Meetings

The first meeting between a Community of Faith Connection member or team and the candidate takes place before the start of the Supervised Ministry Education. This meeting is an opportunity to:

- a) Get to know one another, orient the candidate to community of faith, plan introduction of the candidate to the community of faith, and ensure Ministry and Personnel Committee supports are in place for candidate.
- Complete and submit the first report by filling out the top portion only to indicate that the relationship with the CFC has begun.
  - Read the [\*Standards of Practice\*](#) together and discuss anything that arises. Are there obvious areas in which the candidate would need more support? Are there upcoming opportunities related to one or more areas of responsibility that the candidate might take on? Are there areas the candidate is most eager to engage? Apprehensive to take on?
  - Discuss how regular meetings might be structured and what would most support the candidate's self-awareness and growth as they gather feedback on their practice of ministry. Learn how the candidate best receives feedback.
  - Discuss how the candidate's learning goals with their Educational Supervisor relate to the standards of ministry practice.

Subsequent meetings between the Community of Faith Connection and the candidate may use the feedback rubric on the report as a touchstone to discuss the candidate's experience of ministry and how the community of faith is responding to their leadership, or may reflect on the events of the past month and how these have been experienced by both the candidate and the community of faith.

- Before the mid-term and final evaluations are due, use the meetings to share and discuss the evaluation with the candidate and the Educational Supervisor.
- At the final meeting, use the opportunity to exchange gratitude and mutual learning.

### Learning Covenant

The Learning Covenant is a commitment to work, learn, and grow together for the sake of the church's ministry and, in particular, for this candidate's part in it.

- The learning goals are created by the Supervisor and the candidate and set in the context of the community of faith as the learning site. The goals are articulated and shared during the service with the community of faith to recognize the covenant between all parties in the Supervised Ministry Education learning experience: candidate, supervisor, Community of Faith Connection and community of faith as a whole. The Vocational Minister can provide additional resources on creating a Learning Covenant.

### Feedback

The CFC, acting on the community of faith's behalf, offers ongoing feedback to the candidate, holding a mirror to their practice of ministry so the candidate has an opportunity to learn and grow.

- If the CFC is very small, they are expected to check their perceptions with trusted others in the community. They are not expected to check every opinion but rather to check and broaden their own interpretation and experience before offering feedback.
- Useful feedback is descriptive rather than judgmental and specific rather than general, providing options for possible improvements. It includes positive observations and appreciations.
- It may be helpful to give the candidate the opportunity to ask for feedback, perhaps through a congregational questionnaire, or to ask the CFC for feedback on a specific experience.
- Feedback is more useful if it is given at the earliest opportunity, is directed toward behaviour that the candidate has control over, and is related to the Standards of Practice in ministry.
- Feedback requires courage and grace, fairness, honesty, and humility.

### Conflict Resolution

Even in the best of relationships disagreement can arise. At the outset of the journey the Community of Faith Connection and candidate will take together, it is important to outline how conflicts will be settled.

- The Learning Covenant includes a process for resolving differences that cannot be resolved by those involved, including naming a third party to assist in the process.
- Each party is to identify steps to take in the event of conflict.
- The CFC person or persons can name someone outside of the community of faith who they feel confident to mediate in any dispute, the candidate can name someone, and the supervisor can name someone.
- This process should be outlined in the Learning Covenant, which is presented during the covenanting service with the community of faith.



## Boundaries and Confidentiality

Like all relationships, the one between candidate and Community of Faith Connection is based on trust, a sacred bond established by the Learning Covenant that provides safety and protection for both parties. There is an expectation that what is said at CFC meetings will remain confidential to provide a safe place for the candidate and CFC to share questions, concerns, or burdens without fear of disclosure. This also helps create a context of respect and trust. Both the candidate and the CFC must respect confidentiality.

- The CFC will share their feedback on the learning goals in the evaluation, which will be seen by others. This is done only after sharing it first with the candidate and as much as possible leaves out confidential information.
- Noted that confidentiality is not the same as secrecy. The CFC is obligated under law to report any evidence of sexual abuse or criminal activity.
- As well, the CFC is obligated to share information that may be harmful to the candidate, the faith community, or the wider church. If the CFC is considering breaching confidentiality they must first consult with the Vocational Minister for direction.

## Reports

At certain points a mid-term report and a final report need to be completed by the Community of Faith Connection. If the CFC is a small group, all members should participate in preparing these reports. If the CFC is a two-person team, the report should represent wider views than their own through the consultations they have sought to check and broaden their own perspective.

- The CFC report is shared with the Educational Supervisor and the candidate; the reports of the Educational Supervisor and the candidate are shared with the CFC.
- It is up to the candidate to ensure that all three reports (the CFC's, the Educational Supervisor's, and the candidate's) are signed by all members, copied, and transmitted to where they need to be sent.
- Open and frank discussion throughout the term is critical. There should be no surprises for the candidate in the reports.

## What makes a good evaluation?

- Use the form provided by the candidate or their Vocational Minister and write comprehensive comments in each section. It is most helpful if, when writing the final report, you simply add to the mid-term report using a different font for the new information.
- Take notes along the way.
- There should be no surprises for the candidate. The content of the report needs to be a summary of previously discussed feedback.
- Give clear, concrete examples or illustrations. For example, instead of "preaches well," something like "preaches with a clear voice, telling engaging stories that relate the scripture passage to our daily lives, especially the time when..." is more helpful.
- Include both affirmations and areas for growth. We ALWAYS have more to learn!

- Write with a spirit of honesty and a spirit of caring for the candidate in the ministry they offer the church.

## References

- [\*Candidacy Pathway: Policy\*](#)
- [\*Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel\*](#)
- [\*Guide to Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership\*](#)
- [\*Candidacy Pathway: Supervised Ministry Education—Educational Supervisor's Orientation\*](#)
- Supervised Ministry resource series:
  - [\*Supervised Ministry Education: Roles, Responsibilities, and Reporting\*](#)
  - [\*Supervised Ministry Education: Learning Goals and Learning Covenant\*](#)
  - [\*Supervised Ministry Education: Theological Reflection\*](#)
  - [\*Supervised Ministry Education: Feedback and Evaluation\*](#)

All of these documents can be found on the [Candidacy Pathway webpage](#).

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## Sample Learning Covenant Format

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### Learning Covenant

This Learning Covenant covers the period from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
at \_\_\_\_\_

- Name of candidate \_\_\_\_\_
- Name of supervisor \_\_\_\_\_

Supervision will take place on \_\_\_\_\_ (date) at \_\_\_\_\_ (location)  
with opportunities to reflect on learning goals.

- Name of Community of Faith Connection representative \_\_\_\_\_

Community of Faith Connection meetings will take place at \_\_\_\_\_ (location)  
with opportunities for reflection on practice of ministry.

Evaluation will occur at the mid-point and end-point of the internship through the following process:

\_\_\_\_\_

Acknowledging our humanity, we agree to the following process for conflict resolution:

\_\_\_\_\_

This Learning Covenant with attached learning goals is agreed to by all participants, with opportunities for revision as learning unfolds.

Signatures \_\_\_\_\_ (candidate)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (supervisor)  
\_\_\_\_\_ (Community of Faith  
Connection representative)

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Attachments: The learning goals and action plans of all participants to the covenant are attached as well as additional documents to describe the covenant agreement.

## Celebrating the Covenant

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Rituals are important in the learning process. Through appropriate liturgies, participants identify and celebrate the various stages of the covenant. A liturgy at the beginning of the Learning Covenant can help to clarify terms of the covenant and confirm the commitment of all participants. It is also a way of involving members of the pastoral charge.

It is useful to share the learning goals with the community of faith so the whole community feels involved. This can be done in a variety of ways, such as a bulletin insert or part of a newsletter.

An ending liturgy offers a way to celebrate the learning experience and acknowledge closure.

Your rituals can be created especially for the occasion or borrowed from the traditions of the church. Usually, they can be included in a regular service of worship at the learning site. In some non-congregational settings, it may be necessary to create a special occasion or use some regular occasion, such as a board meeting.

What matters is that you acknowledge and celebrate the various rites of passage in the Learning Covenant in ways that are appropriate to the site and meaningful to you.

### Sample Covenanting Service

*Adapted from Trinity United Church, Nanaimo, BC*

- CFC member            Let us make a covenant together with God and with one another as we begin this journey of learning together.
- CFC member:            Into this circle we welcome \_\_\_\_\_, who will be sharing our congregational life until \_\_\_\_\_.
- Minister:                A covenant is a promise we make with God and with one another, a promise to live God's way. Let us now make a covenant with God and with one another.
- Congregation:        In the presence of God and one another, we give thanks for the example and lasting love of Jesus Christ, who shows us how to live God's way.
- CFC member:            The church recognizes the different paths that lead to ministry and celebrates the particular ministry of each person. There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but the same Spirit gives them.
- CFC member:            There are different ways of serving, but the same God is served. Christ is like a single body that has many parts. All of us are Christ's body, and each one is a part of it.
- Minister:                God has called \_\_\_\_\_ to learn and serve at \_\_\_\_\_, and they have accepted this call.

\_\_\_\_\_, are you willing to share your God-given gifts for ministry as you work and worship with this faith community, and are you willing to serve as the Spirit enables you?

Student minister: I will, God being my helper.

CFC member: God has called you to be \_\_\_\_\_'s supervisor. Will you share with them your knowledge and passion for ministry and your love of God, supporting them throughout the experience in our faith community?

Supervisor: I will, God being my helper.

Minister: Members of the Community of Faith Connection (*name them*), you have accepted God's call to fulfill the role as lay leaders in the Supervised Ministry Experience. Are you willing to receive \_\_\_\_\_'s gifts of ministry, offer wise counsel as \_\_\_\_\_ grows in their role, and support \_\_\_\_\_ in their relationship with this community of faith?

CFC team: We will, God being our helper.

CFC member or Chair of Board: Members of the congregation, you have heard the promises of (*candidate*), (*supervisor*), and the Community of Faith Connection, who have answered God's call to service. Let us pledge to them our support.

**Congregation: We promise to support you with love as we all try to live God's way.**

CFC member: Let us say our United Church Creed together...

CFC member: Let us pray...

**All: Loving God, we have made a covenant with you and with one another. We are grateful for this opportunity to learn and grow in faith and understanding of your ministry in the world. Help us to encourage the gifts of all those involved in this covenant relationship. We pray in the name of the One who shows us the way. Amen**