The Ministry Committee
Christian Church in Illinois/Wisconsin
Required Papers
For Candidates for Commissioned/Ordained Ministry

Introduction:

As a part of the process of getting to know one another and exploring issues related both to one's *call to* and one's *fitness for* ministry, the Ministry Committee asks all candidates for commissioned or ordained ministry to submit four papers. They are: (1) a spiritual autobiography, (2) a paper expounding the candidate's concept of ministry, (3) a paper explaining the candidate's understanding of the nature of the church, and (4) a paper dealing with the history and polity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

Spiritual Autobiography:

The first paper in the series focuses upon your own story and how you came to a conviction of being called to ministry.

In asking you to write this paper the Ministry Committee is particularly interested in learning about those people, events, books, or other influences that shaped your sense of vocation, or calling, to commissioned or ordained ministry. These might include family or friends, summer camp experiences, school, previous employment, pivotal/defining moments, etc. What you look back upon and identify as influential and formative of your sense of call is as interesting to the Ministry Committee as what you choose to say about those people, experiences, or events.

In short, how did you come to be called to the ministry? And what is the nature of that call?

This paper should be approximately 5 double-spaced typewritten pages in length. Please devote roughly one page to each of the following topical areas: 1) Family History, 2) Spiritual Journey, 3) Mental Health History, 4) Vocational History, and 5) Current Life Status.

Concept of Ministry:

Having explored the spiritual journey that led you to a sense of calling to the ministry, in this second paper you are asked to reflect upon the nature of the ministry to which you have been called.

What does it mean to be a commissioned or ordained minister? Does a minister have a role to play in the church and in the world that is different from a Christian who is not a minister? If so, what is the nature of that difference?

You might also wish to reflect upon the different forms commissioned or ordained ministry takes and the form(s) to which you feel called.

"Fitness for ministry" is an important discernment issue for the Ministry Committee. Therefore, we would like for you to reflect upon ways you feel yourself fit for ministry, where you feel you have some "growing edges," and what kind of preparation for ministry you believe you need.

This paper should be no more than six to eight double-spaced pages (approximately 1500 to 2000 words).

Ecclesiology:

For the third paper the candidate is asked to reflect upon the church universal in which s/he will practice ministry.

The Ministry Committee is interested in learning about your beliefs and concepts concerning what the Church is, why it exists, and what is its role in the lives of faith seekers and the world. One approach might be to explore the scripture verse or theological model/metaphor that is most meaningful to you about the Church. Another approach might be to imagine that you have been called upon to preach a sermon about the Church; what would you say?

Thematically, you might wish to discuss topics such as: the church as "the body of Christ," the church as "a fellowship of believers," the nature and role of sacraments, the concept of the "priesthood of all believers," or the role of the commissioned or ordained minister in the church. Please note that these are only suggestions; there are other topics about which you might wish to write.

This paper should be no more than six to eight double-spaced pages (approximately 1500 to 2000 words).

Disciples History and Polity:

The fourth, and final paper, will be written after you have completed the Disciples of Christ history and polity course. In this paper you are asked to focus upon and address the unique and attractive "distinctives" of this denominational tradition. In other words, within the context of ecclesiology you are now asked to focus more narrowly upon one particular manifestation of the universal church.

More specifically: Imagine that you are speaking to someone who is generally familiar with the Christian tradition but who is "unchurched" and is seeking a church home. S/he asks you, "Who are these Disciples of Christ? What do they believe or practice that might make them an attractive church home for me?"

How would you reply?

This paper should be no more than eight to ten double-spaced pages (approximately 2000-2500 words) in length.

Spiritual Autobiography

Write an autobiographical statement approximately 5 double-spaced typewritten pages in length. Please devote roughly 1 page to each of the following topical areas: 1). Family History 2) Spiritual Journey 3) Mental Health History 4) Vocational History, and 5) Current Life Status. We urge you to approach this experience as an important story to be shared as you prepare yourself to carry out a sacred duty. Here are pertinent questions for you to address under each topical area. They do not all have to be answered explicitly, but please use them for general guidance as you weave your story.

1. Family History

What was it like growing up in your family? In terms of your personality development…what function did each parent or parental figure play? How are you alike and different from them now? In your "family" of origin group, what roles or implicit job description did you accommodate? In your childhood development, what significant physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, or educational events occurred that were keenly felt by you and still influence you today? When your family faced a significant crisis, how did your parents cope? What did you do at the time? Who were influential persons in your life…guides so to speak…what did they model or mirror for you? In your group of friends at school, what was your special identity in the group? How does your family's socioeconomic, ethnic, racial or religious status impact your social relationships?

2. Spiritual Journey

What is your earliest faith experience? How do God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit exist in your life? What does the Holy Spirit and the sacraments mean to you in your faith journey? How active have you been in the life of a church…childhood, adolescence, and adulthood? How has your personal identity and cultural development impacted, challenged, informed, and reformed your faith development? What are some prominent theological questions that you struggle with and concern you? How have they affected your decision to seek standing in the Order of Ministry? What form of ministry do you find yourself best suited? If you have received spiritual direction or pastoral counseling, what impact did it have upon your faith journey?

3. Mental Health History

Have you ever received counseling? What was the impetus? What were your goals and focus? What did you accomplish? Have you ever been hospitalized or taken medication for your mental health concerns? Have any family members? In your psychological/social history, what have been some significant events or concerns? How do they affect you now? How do you manage conflict? What are your current mental health practices? What personality characteristics do you believe area critical to success in the ministry? How do your traits and personality style fit these criteria? Describe two experiences, one that was intensely positive and one that was intensely negative. How did you respond then? What would you do differently now? Sometimes ordained/licensed ministry can feel as if you are "set apart" from others. How do you anticipate this will affect your tendency to be just yourself?

4. Vocational History

What is your employment history? What skills in each job are transferable to work in ministry? What jobs have you thrived in and what jobs did you not? What do you plan to be doing 5 years from now? If you could pick any three jobs outside of ministry, what would you select? What are the attractive features inherent in each? How has preparation for ministry caused you to address gender role issues? Is your current health status a consideration in your plans for ministry? What personal attributes will you draw upon to be an effective minister? What are your growing edges? Describe yourself. What are your hobbies? Is your family and partner supportive of your career goal?

5. Current Life Status

Information that you wish to share about your current situation, and any summary you wish to offer or issues or topics you wish to discuss, can be shared here.