

## **Office of Vocation**

Hello Friends:

It is always a great privilege to provide the three Atlantic Regional Councils with an annual report of the activities of the Office of Vocation and in particular my role as Vocation Minister.

A big part of my work is in supporting the work of the Candidacy Board which authorizes candidates for ministry in the United Church. This is a very able and dedicated group of lay and ministry personnel from across Atlantic Canada who meet once a month to interview candidates and potential candidates for ministry. The interviews are primarily done via zoom. Many thanks to Jane Johnson our able chair, and the members of the board for their dedication and the seriousness with which they take their work.

We currently have 28 candidates. (1 Diaconal, 5 DLMs and 22 ordained. This year Alicia Walls will be commissioned, and Chris Walker will be ordained and Sandra Irving will be recognized as a Designated Lay Minister. Congratulations to these three candidates as their all their hard work and discernment comes to fruition. The board is confident in their readiness for ministry.

As well, the General Council ended the DLM program and created a path by which current DLMs with at least five years experience in a pastoral charge, could be ordained. Ten DLMs have been interviewed by the credentialing committee and approved for ordination at the regional AGMs. The church has been well served by the ministry of DLMs for many years and it is a privilege to welcome these ten DLMs into ordered ministry. Again, the office of vocation, has every confidence that they will continue to provide excellent ministry within our denomination.

Of the 28 candidates 19 are currently serving pastoral charges while under appointment or as part of their supervised ministry education (SME).

The majority of candidates for ordination choose to study at Atlantic School of Theology, with only one candidate at another school. The majority of these are in the distance program.

Three candidates are currently in the Canadian Armed Forces and looking to become CAF chaplains.

Candidates and applicants remain overwhelmingly over 50.

In addition I have had conversations with 40 people who are discerning their call to ministry.

The Candidacy Pathway, the route to ministry in the United Church, continues to be evaluated and has seen some significant changes. The most current version of the Pathway can be found at the United Church Web site <https://united-church.ca/handbooks-and-guidelines>.

Some changes to the pathway include new pathways to meeting the requirements of ordination, including approving a new Bachelor of Theology program at Atlantic School of Theology.

In response to feedback about the excessive demands on lay supervision teams, revisions were made to their responsibilities for support and evaluation of SME candidates. Assessment of the candidate's on-the-ground practice of ministry is now based on The Ethical Standards and Standards of Practice for Ministry with a practically focussed evaluation report. The Educational Supervisor's role continues to focus on skills for theological reflection, reflective practice on learning goals, and Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership.

In 2023 across the country, there were 17 cases dealt within the formal complaint system:

- 14 Ordered ministry personnel and 2 Candidates for ministry
- 13 cases were alleged breaches of ethical standards
- 2 cases came through the Sexual Misconduct Response Policy & Procedures
- 2 cases came through the Workplace Discrimination, Harassment & Violence Policy & Procedures

Ministry Personnel comprising the 17 cases this year:

- A. 1 Retired
- B. 7 – served 20+ years
- C. 3 – served 10+ years
- D. 4 – served less than 5 years

As with past years, the themes arising in the remedial work are:

- A. emotional intelligence (self-awareness and relationship management)
- B. boundaries power dynamics
- C. awareness of polity and procedures
- D. isolation in ministry practice
- E. relationships with persons served
- F. concerns related to social media use.