

Standard for Continuing Education for Ministry Personnel

Framework: Continuing Education Standard for Ministry Personnel

Introduction

Through statements and actions, the United Church considers continuing education as integral to helping communities of faith and ministry personnel to thrive. There are many opportunities to engage in continuing education so ministry personnel can cultivate their skills for lifelong ministry leadership. The framework that follows offers a new way to pursue growth and learning in the context of ministry and leadership.

The [Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel](#) outlines the expectation and commitment to lifelong learning for ministry personnel: “Education is a lifelong and ongoing process. Ministry personnel are responsible for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills.”

This commitment to lifelong learning goes further – across the whole church, through continuing education allowances, communities of faith invest more than \$2 million annually in their ministry personnel!

Policy

Ministry personnel serving in communities of faith or in other ministry appointments are expected to, at least every three years, nurture and grow their skills in the areas of Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice (the [Call](#) of The United Church of Canada).

Explanation of the Framework

The Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership offer guidance on areas of growth and learning for ministry personnel. In the new framework that follows, the competencies for the practice of ministry are organized in four main ways:

1. Engage in Spiritual Practices and Development of Identity in Ministry
2. Integrate, Articulate, and Facilitate Learning of Christian Faith
3. Expand Cultural and Contextual Knowledge and Analyses
4. Demonstrate Leadership within the Faith Community and Wider Community.

By following the two steps that are outlined below, ministry personnel select competencies for growth and learning, and then connect the chosen competencies with the [Call](#) of The United Church of Canada. The FAQs that follow this section provide further guidance for how this

framework can be used by ministry personnel and communities of faith or other employers, including examples.

Continuing Education Standard Framework

Step 1

From this quad chart, select which competency or competencies are the focus of your continuing education. Reflect on how your plans for continuing education will grow this competency or on how you will pursue continuing education opportunities to grow this competency.

<p>1. Engage in Spiritual Practices and Development of Identity in Ministry</p> <p>Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Demonstrates evidence of personal and spiritual growth and healthy self-awareness B. Demonstrates a clear understanding of call to ministry and sense of identity in ministry 	<p>2. Integrate, Articulate, and Facilitate Learning of Christian Faith</p> <p>Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Interprets the Bible and makes it accessible to the community B. Knows, teaches, and embodies the theologies and traditions of the historic church and the particular theology of the United Church C. Demonstrates knowledge of the unique history and place of the Indigenous Church within the United Church and is committed to working toward reconciliation D. Shows respect for and appreciation of the traditions, beliefs, and practices of the ecumenical Christian community and the major global religious traditions
<p>3. Expand Cultural and Contextual Knowledge and Analyses</p> <p>Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Uses contextual analysis to guide participation in God’s work and love in the world B. Engages the community with a biblical vision to recognize and respond to needs beyond their own C. Exercises creativity and imagination and good judgment to enable groups and communities to adapt in the face of changing contexts and demands 	<p>4. Demonstrate Leadership within the Faith Community and Wider Community</p> <p>Competencies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Models effective leadership B. Fosters the community’s spiritual life C. Leads worship designed for meaningful engagement

Step 2

Having selected which competency or competencies you wish to grow or deepen, consider how they connect to one part of the [Call](#) of The United Church of Canada.

Deep Spirituality Worship, pastoral care, self-care	Bold Discipleship Faith formation and Christian education, leadership development	Daring Justice Community outreach and social justice
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Animating the Standard for Continuing Education for Ministry Personnel

FAQs

Why do we need a Continuing Education Standard?

Both the Office of Vocation and the local community of faith have responsibilities related to continuing education. The Office of Vocation establishes standards for the continuing education of ministry personnel (*The Manual*, E.2.2.d), but the community of faith oversees the continuing education of ministry personnel who are called or appointed to the community of faith (*The Manual*, I.2.3.4).

This standard can be used by all ministry personnel, including those who also serve in other ministry appointments outside communities of faith, to guide their continuing education.

Why should ministry personnel be lifelong learners?

Education is a lifelong and ongoing process, as the [Standards of Practice for Ministry Personnel](#) states. Ministry personnel are responsible for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills; they can do this by:

- a) pursuing personal, vocational, and professional goals for continuing education with the appropriate persons or committees related to their ministry.
- b) striving to be up to date with issues in theology, ministerial practice, and community and world events.

What background documents provide the foundation for this standard?

The Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership were approved by the Board of Vocation in September 2022 and developed as part of the revisions to the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership. Grounded in the [Competencies for Formation](#), this standard was developed during the revisions to the Learning Outcomes for Ministry Leadership.

Further, the [Call](#) of The United Church of Canada – Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice – is shared as a pledge of identity and hope with the broader community. The Call was adopted on October 23, 2021, at the annual meeting of General Council 43. It is entrusted to regional councils, communities of faith, and United Church-incorporated ministries, for engagement and discernment for their ministry. The Call statements also provide purpose and direction within the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan of the General Council Office.

How do ministry personnel serving in a community of faith apply this standard?

Denominational policy on continuing education for ministry personnel outlines three important factors:

1. Continuing education allowance – The annual [Minimum Salaries and Reimbursements for Ministry Personnel](#) outlines the minimum continuing education allowance to help toward the costs of:
 - attending workshops or conferences
 - purchasing books
 - acquiring spiritual direction, and
 - obtaining electronic and other resources relevant for ministry leadership.
2. Study leave time – Study leave is a paid leave of absence for three weeks per year and is available to ministry personnel in communities of faith (*The Manual*, I.2.3.4).
3. Content of the continuing education – The United Church of Canada has not previously provided specific direction on the content of lifelong learning for ministry personnel, except for the broad topics covered in the Standards of Practice. This framework offers a way to select and track content and recognizes that lifelong learning can be gained from a variety of sources and organizations.

How should a minister use this standard?

The framework is meant to help ministry personnel set goals to deepen their competency or identify gaps in their competency. It is their responsibility to integrate their own learning and recognize their growth in the competency.

How does this apply to a minister who doesn't serve in a community of faith?

While these ministry personnel may not have the mandated study leave time or continuing education allowance of those in a community of faith, they are still responsible for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills. They should spend time on lifelong learning specific to their context.

The framework can also be used by the body that supervises ministry personnel who are in other ministry appointments. Ministry personnel in these contexts are encouraged to define both the continuing education allowance and study leave as part of their employment terms; they should strive to at least meet the pastoral relations minimum standards.

Who am I accountable to for my continuing education?

Ministry personnel serving in a community of faith are accountable to the Ministry and Personnel Committee (*The Manual*, B.7.8.5.g) for their continuing education (*The Manual*, I.2.3.4). Ideally, this happens in conversation with the M&P Committee, such as through annual reviews and ongoing conversations. Ministry personnel who serve in a ministry outside a community of faith can use these guidelines with their employer, if required.

What happens if I disregard this standard and don't do any continuing education?

As mentioned above, the Standards of Practice call upon ministry personnel to pursue continuing education:

Education is a lifelong and ongoing process. Ministry personnel are responsible for maintaining and improving their knowledge and skills. To this end, they:

- a) pursue personal, vocational, and professional goals for continuing education in conjunction with the appropriate persons or committees related to their ministry;
- b) strive to be current with issues in theology, ministerial practice, and community and world events.

If ministry personnel don't pursue continuing education as outlined by the Continuing Education Framework and its timeline (and the [Standards of Practice](#)), the Ministry and Personnel Committee (or equivalent) could share their concern/complaint with the Office of Vocation via the Response Committee, which will use the [Ethical Standards](#) to assess the ministry personnel's effectiveness (or ineffectiveness because of the lack of continuing education and growth). Specifically, they could rely on the standard that speaks to competence:

Ministry personnel come to their work adequately prepared to fulfill the positions to which they are called or appointed. In these positions, they are called to:

- a) represent, truthfully and accurately, their abilities, skills, education, qualifications, and experience;
- b) acknowledge the limitations of their skills, abilities, and competencies and make referrals when necessary and/or appropriate;
- c) establish, maintain, and communicate appropriate personal and professional boundaries.

What about mandatory training? How does that fit in?

For all ministry personnel, there are currently two kinds of mandatory training (racial justice and boundaries) required to be on the registry of accredited ministry personnel. While these are important pieces of professional development, they are intentionally excluded from this Continuing Education Standard because mandatory training is a different level of accountability. If ministry personnel are not up to date on this training, they are not on the registry of accredited ministry personnel and they will not be eligible to seek a call or appointment.

What could the application of this standard look like for me in my community of faith?

The following scenarios integrating the framework may be helpful:

- a) For a week of study leave to prepare for Advent/Christmas or Lent/Easter

While there should be other continuing education experiences throughout the year, our continuing education surveys illustrate that because the costs of a course or conference may be prohibitive, many ministry personnel use some study leave for worship planning and preparation. For a minister taking a week of study leave to prepare for Advent/ Christmas, they could highlight and comment on the following competencies:

Competency: Demonstrating evidence of personal and spiritual growth and healthy self-awareness

Call: Deep Spirituality

“I see the activity of reviewing worship planning resources (including hymnbooks, other music resources, lectionary-based resources, and online resources), and of praying through the scriptures as a spiritual practice. Being spiritually grounded as we begin a busy season is important to me. I hope that this work will help me to nurture the community’s spiritual life and encourage them in their own spiritual practices during this season.”

b) For a reading week focused on recent book purchases

Some may learn best by self-directed learning during a reading week. For this type of continuing education, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association encourages book study to be done in a group; conversation partners can help deeply integrate the learning. However, for those choosing an individual reading week, they could highlight the following competency:

Competency: Demonstrates knowledge of the unique history and place of the Indigenous Church within the United Church and working toward reconciliation.

Call: Daring Justice

“I have selected a group of books on the theme of Indigenous history in Canada and within the United Church for the reading week. The week is focused on growing my competency in this area. I hope that my learning will enable me to offer more grounded worship for Indigenous Day of Prayer. I also hope that the learning will help me lead those in my community of faith who are committed to working toward right relations and reconciliation, a focus of our social justice work.”

c) For taking the Fundamentals of Transitional Ministry courses with the Interim Ministry Network

Competencies: Engages the community with a biblical vision to recognize and respond to needs beyond their own AND exercises creativity and imagination and good judgment to enable groups and communities to adapt in the face of changing contexts and demands.

Call: Bold Discipleship

“As this community discerns where God is calling us during this transitional time, the training of the Interim Ministry Network will help expand my cultural knowledge and analyses. I expect the training to provide tools to help me work with groups to adapt in the face of changing contexts. The learning will empower me to help the community to continue following Jesus.”

d) For taking a course/workshop by my local Canadian Mental Health Association

Not all continuing education has to be undertaken with theological colleges or church-sanctioned organizations. Some secular organizations offer learning that can be helpful for ministry personnel.

Competency: Engages the community with a biblical vision to recognize and respond to needs beyond their own.

Call: Bold Discipleship or Daring Justice (because I’m unsure whether the learning will be integrated with more of an in-reach focus for the community of faith or more of an outreach focus for the community)

“In learning about mental health realities in our community, I will expand my own cultural and contextual knowledge. I hope to acquire tools, skills, and knowledge to help the congregation respond to mental health needs within our broader community.”

e) For learning about family systems theory and its application to congregational work

Competency: Uses contextual analysis to guide participation in God’s work and love in the world.

Call: Bold Discipleship

“I want to improve my systems thinking by learning more about family systems theory and its application to my ministry context. I will engage in learning from the Bowen Centre on Bowen Family Systems theory, as well as Edwin Friedman’s book Generation to Generation.”

I don't understand what the competencies mean. What are some practical activities of ministry that would fall under each one?

The [Guide to Competencies for Formation for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership](#) provides more explanation. The activities listed under each competency may illustrate how you can develop or demonstrate each one.

Who is the Standard for Continuing Education for?

This standard is primarily written for ministry personnel to help them plan their continuing education and their proposals for continuing education with their M&P Committee. A secondary audience is the M&P Committee. From a survey in 2022, the Standards for Accreditation Committee heard that some M&P committees feel ill-equipped; they don't know what continuing education possibilities are available, to encourage their minister to pursue them. Hopefully, this Continuing Education Standard will empower M&P committees to have these conversations because they can encourage their ministry personnel to focus on a certain competency.

How is a Ministry and Personnel Committee expected to use this standard?

This Standard for Continuing Education provides the M&P Committee with an assessment tool of the types of continuing education their ministry personnel could choose to pursue. The standard is less a tool for evaluation and more a container for conversation about continuing education between ministry personnel and M&P Committee.

It is not up to the M&P Committee to evaluate or determine competency after a minister has completed a piece of continuing education. It is the responsibility of the ministry personnel to integrate their own learning and recognize their growth in the competency.

How can an M&P Committee use the Standard for Continuing Education?

An M&P Committee could identify a competency they believe would benefit their minister and encourage them to focus some (but not necessarily all) of the continuing education in growing that competency in the next year. They could also identify how it matches with part of the Call (Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, Daring Justice).

Example: One M&P Committee may want to approach their minister who is trying to control everything in the church: there is no lay leadership in worship, the minister chairs every committee, and the minister does not allow study groups without their approval or leadership. A competency focus for this minister could be Fosters the community's spiritual life, which is about discerning and encouraging the leadership gifts of the community, to help them grow in collaborative leadership. The relevant part of the Call is Bold Discipleship.

This standard is meant to inspire conversation between ministry personnel and their M&P Committee. M&P committees are invited to use this resource positively as they balance their consultative and support role with their supervisory role. The standard should focus the conversation about continuing education between ministry personnel and M&P committees

and must not be used in an adversarial way. This tool should not be used by the M&P Committee to put pressure on their ministry personnel when the pastoral relationship is unhealthy.

If there is difficulty in the pastoral relationship and this framework is making the conflict between ministry personnel and the M&P Committee worse, regional council staff should be contacted for support.

Who was consulted to develop the standard?

In the spring of 2022, the Standards Committee heard from 457 ministry personnel and 136 M&P committees who responded to continuing education surveys. The results of the survey were significant in the shaping of this standard. The committee sought feedback from Office of Vocation and regional council pastoral relations staff; chairs of M&P committees; staff of United Church theological schools who design continuing education programs, and groups of ministry personnel.

How does this standard compare to those of other ecumenical partners?

This standard is similar to the expectations for continuing education named by our ecumenical partners, including the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, the United Methodist Church, the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, some Conferences in the United Church of Christ, and some dioceses in The Anglican Church of Canada.

Is there a policy about what is to be done with unused continuing education allowance or study leave time?

There is no policy, but this question arose from the survey of ministry personnel and M&P Committees that the Standards for Accreditation Committee undertook in 2022. While ministry personnel should be using their continuing education allowance and study leave time, there could be occasions when some money and time are left over at the end of the year. The ministry personnel and the M&P Committee can have a conversation about whether some of the money and time can be carried over to the next year. For example, the ministry personnel might have plans for a larger piece of continuing education next year, so they have negotiated with the M&P Committee to save up time and money and carry it over to the next year.

As ministry personnel, can I track my continuing education in ChurchHub?

The Office of Vocation does not require you to track and report your continuing education in ChurchHub. However, you might wish to use the tools of ChurchHub to keep track of your continuing education as part of your own practice of staying organized.

There are two possible ways to track your continuing education in ChurchHub. You could use the “Education and Experience” portion of your minister profile on ChurchHub to list the continuing education you have undertaken and how it’s linked to the Competencies and the Call. You could also create and maintain your own tracking document and store it within “My Private Documents” on ChurchHub.

Planning Tools

As ministry personnel prepare to use the standard and converse with their M&P Committee about their continuing education, they may find the following questions helpful to guide their journaling, reflection, or discernment:

- What types of continuing education have you participated in over the last few years, and how have they been meaningful to you and applicable to your ministry leadership?
- What areas of learning or growth are calling you in the next three years?
- Brainstorm a list of possible things you'd like to do for continuing education.
- What on this list could be realistic in the next three years?
- Which competency do you wish to develop/grow in? How do you plan on developing/growing this competency in the next three years? How does it connect with Deep Spirituality? Bold Discipleship? Daring Justice?