

Recommendation to the Associations of the New Hampshire Conference For the Adoption and Implementation of the 2018 Manual on Ministry

Prologue:

In the United Church of Christ, Ministerial Authorization is an act of an association. So that there is consistency across the United Church of Christ, the processes for Ministerial Authorization are guided by the Manual on Ministry (MOM). Over the past several years, the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Team and the Habakkuk Group have worked on a revision to the Manual on Ministry which was last fully revised in 1986. The revision was to do things like account for the Ministry Issues Pronouncement passed by General Synod in 2005, and to update fitness review processes to current best practices. The “new” Manual on Ministry was introduced in draft form in December 2016. The MESA Team and Habakkuk Group engaged in conversation about the draft MOM in various settings of the United Church of Christ for at least a year. They then set to work on a final draft of the new Manual on Ministry. The 2018 Manual on Ministry was made available to the wider church in November and December of 2018.

The issue that is proving to be a sticking point with regards to adoption, and/or implementation, of the 2018 Manual on Ministry is the move to one form of ministerial authorization. The previous version of the Manual on Ministry provided for three types of ministerial authorization: commissioned, licensed, and ordained. The 2018 Manual on Ministry provides for only one: ordained. While those who are currently licensed can continue (with annual renewals from the CoCM) that authorization as long as they serve at their current ministry setting, and those who are commission can continue that authorization as long as they continue the work they are commissioned to, under the 2018 Manual on Ministry there should be no new use of those forms of authorized ministry. The 2018 Manual on Ministry does provide for a new form of standing – Lay Ministerial Standing – which does share some things in common with licensing, but there are also significant differences. The most impactful of these differences is that Lay Ministerial Standing may only be granted once (for service in one setting) with a recommended duration of no longer than seven years.

Challenges to Adoption and Implementation of the 2018 Manual on Ministry by the Associations of the New Hampshire Conferences:

1. *The constitutions and/or by-laws of the seven Associations of the New Hampshire Conference differ on the process for adoption and/or implementation of the Manual on Ministry for use by our Committees on Church and Ministry. The Grafton-Orange-Sullivan Association is essentially our only automatic adopter based its Constitution which simply says that the Committee on Church and Ministry will be guided by the most recent Manual on Ministry. In the Southwest Association and the Merrimack Association, the most recent Manual on Ministry is to be the guide on “matters not provided for” in their constitutions and/or by-laws. In both cases, commissioning and licensing are mentioned as part of the work of Committees on Church and Ministry but there are not really provisions for these tasks in the constitutions and/or by-laws. It is the case of the Carroll-Strafford, North Country and Rockingham Association where things start to become particularly complicated. In the constitutions and/or by laws of all three, Committees on Church and Ministry are to be guided by the most recent version of the Constitution and By-laws of the United Church of Christ, and the most recent version of the Manual on Ministry. While the new Manual on Ministry has been fully adopted for use by the MESA Team, the Constitution and By-laws of the United Church of Christ still refer to the three forms of ministry in robust measure. The Constitution and*

By-laws of the United Church of Christ and the 2018 Manual on Ministry are not incompatible, but they are far from complementary at this time. The MESA Team has said the earliest such Constitution and By-laws changes could be brought to General Synod would be 2021 (and then the Constitution changes would require ratification by Conferences). Thus the situation for Carroll-Strafford, North Country and Rockingham Associations Committee on Church in Ministry is determining how to be guided by both the UCC Constitution and By-laws and the 2018 Manual on Ministry which are not in sync with each other. The Hillsborough Association has the most complicated situation. Its Constitution references guidance by both the Constitution and By-laws of the United of Christ and the most recent Manual on Ministry yet includes the statement “but only for matters not provided for within the Hillsborough Association Constitution”. The rub in this situation is the Hillsborough Association Constitution does include both requirements and some process for both Licensing and Commissioning. In order to fully adopt use of the New Manual on Ministry, the Hillsborough Association will have to amend its Constitution. ***(It needs to be clearly stated that what is provided here are summaries of Constitution and By-law provisions. Each Association should review the specifics of its own Constitution and/or By-laws as part of its discernment.)***

2. *Because of the Constitution and By-laws difference between Associations, adoption and use of the 2018 Manual on Ministry may happen on very different timelines among the seven associations of the New Hampshire Conference.* The concern with different timelines is that it leads to confusion. If neighboring Associations have different authorization options, confusion may evolve into frustration for our ministry candidates. Additionally, it is very difficult for our Conference staff to provide appropriate training for our Committees on Church and Ministry when utilization of the 2018 Manual on Ministry differs from Association to Association.

3. *The conversation and discernment regarding if the one form of authorization in the 2018 Manual on Ministry best serves our churches remains active in many of our associations.* The reason the United Church of Christ Constitution tasks Associations with ministerial authorization is because our Associations are most directly connected with the needs of our local churches. The MESA Team and Habakkuk worked fervently and faithfully to prepare a resource that would serve the whole of the United Church of Christ. They then engaged in conversation with the wider church for a significant period of time. Covenant requires that we faithfully discern how to engage the incredible resource they have provided for us. Yet our covenant also requires discernment regarding how any resources of our Associations, Conferences or United Church of Christ National Setting serves the interests of the base unit of the church – our local churches.

Proposal:

Because of these challenges, this proposal for adoption and implementation of the 2018 Manual on Ministry is being put before the Associations of the New Hampshire Conference. This proposal is being made so that the Associations may “move together” as best as possible towards this end. Yet the of task discernment ultimately rests with each gathered Association. This proposal is merely being provided as a starting point for such discernment. The intent is that the proposal be adopted in whole (all five items). Number four of the proposals does recognize that it may not be applicable to all Associations.

1. The _____ Association commits itself to becoming familiar with, not only the contents, but the theological undergirding of the 2018 Manual on Ministry. Further, our Association will review the Committee on Church and Ministry provisions in our Association Constitution and/or By-laws. The New Hampshire Conference Ministerial Staff will be itself available to resource this work as much as possible.
2. The _____ Association adopts, as its guide for its Committee on Church and Ministry, all parts of the 2018 Manual on Ministry with the exception of Section 2, Article 4 (Ministerial Authorization – Ministerial Standing for Lay Persons).
3. The _____ Association Committee on Church and Ministry may continue to utilize Licensing and Commissioning as forms of authorized ministry guided by the processes outlined in the 1986 Manual on Ministry. The gathered Association will reconsider this at such time as the Constitution and By-laws of the United Church of Christ and the 2018 Manual on Ministry are in full agreement regarding one form of authorization. Those licensed or commissioned after January 1, 2019 will only have their authorized ministerial standing recognized within the New Hampshire Conference.
4. If Constitution and/or By-law changes are necessary for full adoption of the 2018 Manual on Ministry, the _____ Association Executive Committee will work with New Hampshire Conference Ministerial Staff to prepare proposed amendments for Association consideration.
5. The _____ Association will engage in conversation and discernment as needed regarding how the “one form of authorization” section of the 2018 Manual on Ministry meets the needs and interests of its congregations. If the needs and interests of local churches are discerned to be met, we will rejoice together in the full adoption of the 2018 Manual on Ministry. If it is discerned that there are unmet needs and interests of our local churches, the Association Committee on Church and Ministry will work with the New Hampshire Conference and the other Committees on Church and Ministry within the Conference to develop supplemental options at a conference level in order to serve its churches faithfully.

Respectfully offered to our Associations by:
The gathered Chairs of our Committees on Ministry,
The Rev. Richard Slater, Associate Conference Minister
and the Rev. Gordon Rankin, Conference Minister

*Approved for presentation to Associations on
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