

## INTRODUCTION TO ENDORSEMENT FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The recommendation to grant ecclesiastical endorsement, for a government agency (military chaplaincy, Federal Board of Prisons and Veterans Administration chaplaincy), is particularly important when working with the United Church of Christ Ecclesiastical Endorser. With this recommendation, the Committee on Ministry verifies that the individual can minister in culturally diverse and challenging pastoral settings while representing the entire United Church of Christ to the wider ecumenical community. Ecclesiastical endorsement is a prerequisite for formal application for the chaplaincies mentioned above. It is also a necessary authorization for continuing to function in these settings.

The procedure for governmental ecclesiastical endorsement is similar to the procedures for ordination and granting of ordained ministerial standing. However, in the case of ecclesiastical endorsement, the Endorser is the only endorsing agent for the United Church of Christ. The Committee on Ministry recommends that a Minister be endorsed for government chaplaincy.

The decision to recommend ecclesiastical endorsement is the judgment of, and verification by, an Association of the United Church of Christ that an *ordained* minister seeking endorsement *for a government agency* is in good standing, has the ecclesiastical qualifications and the personal qualities to minister competently in settings of pastoral care and counseling beyond the Local Church setting. It is recommended that, in cases of endorsement for government agencies, the Minister and the Committee on Ministry work with the denominational endorser from the beginning of the process to avoid redundancy and to ensure that all documentation is submitted in a timely fashion. It should also be noted here that the Ecclesiastical Endorser may withdraw its endorsement of a Minister at any time for cause.

Ecclesiastical endorsement for governmental agencies are primarily for chaplains serving in our nation's military, chaplains serving in the Federal Bureau of Prison system and those chaplains serving in the Veterans Administration health

system. The Ordained Minister assembles a Discernment Committee at their Local Church of membership, is recommended to their Association Committee on Ministry for government ecclesiastical endorsement (by the LC Discernment Committee), notifies the UCC Ecclesiastical Endorser and completes the application and file for consideration (Section 2.5). The Ordained Minister is interviewed by their Committee Ministry, and is recommended for endorsement to the Ecclesiastical Endorser for the United Church of Christ. The final decision on endorsement is the decision of the Endorser, confirming that the individual is specifically qualified to serve in and on the behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Once endorsed, persons continue to be subject to all of the requirements and oversight procedures for the nurture and accountability of ministerial standing with the Association. If at any time an endorsed person's ordained standing is under review by the Association Committee on Ministry the UCC Endorser must be notified immediately. If the Ordained Minister's ministerial standing is terminated, his or her endorsement is terminated concurrently. The UCC Endorser will notify the government agency employing the Ordained Minister that standing has been terminated and that the ecclesiastical endorsement has been withdrawn with cause.

The Ordained Minister, endorsed for government agency chaplaincy, must maintain her/his ministerial standing at the Association. Therefore, the endorsed individual has the responsibility to maintain standing according to the requirements of their Association of standing (this may include boundary training, continuing education units, attendance at certain meetings and functions and etc.).

### **Chaplain Candidate Program**

A Chaplain Candidate Program sponsored by the Army, Navy or Air Force requires that the individual be ecclesiastically endorsed. Therefore, the individual must go through the entire process for endorsement: working with a Local Church Discernment Committee, filing the ecclesiastical endorsement application, creating the endorsement file, securing the recommendation of the Committee on Ministry to endorse and the final interview with the UCC ecclesiastical endorser. These

programs are reserved for seminary students and each military branch will have specific requirements concerning units completed, units being taken each semester and length of the Program.

### **Initiating the endorsement process**

The applicant assembles a Discernment Committee at his/her Local Church of membership. After 2-4 meetings the Discernment Committee decides if the applicant should be recommended to the Association Committee on Ministry to be reviewed for ecclesiastical endorsement for government chaplaincy. If so, a letter is sent to the Chair of the Committee requesting that the Ordained Minister be considered for endorsement for a government chaplaincy. Along with the UCC Ecclesiastical Endorser, the Association Committee on Ministry then provides the applicant with the necessary documentation, guidelines and related materials to complete the endorsement process.

The Ordained Minister completes and forwards the necessary documentation to the Chair of the COM. The UCC Ecclesiastical Endorser is notified that the Association Committee on Ministry will be meeting with the Ordained Minister to consider endorsement.

### **Interview and decision**

The Committee On Ministry receives and studies the materials provided by the applicant and sets a date to meet with and interview the applicant. The Committee may want to invite a Reserve or Active Duty chaplain to be present for the interview (in cases of military chaplaincy), both to sharpen the questions to be explored and to provide information to the Committee and the applicant. The purpose of the interview is to help the Committee gain satisfactory answers to the following questions:

- Does the person fulfill all of the current requirements for ordained ministerial standing in that Association? The Committee may want to use the Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers.
- Does the person have a realistic understanding of the specialized ministry being sought?

- Is the person adequately grounded in the faith perspectives and commitments of the United Church of Christ?
- Can the person function in a ministry setting which is theologically and denominationally diverse?
- Can the person function collegially in a team ministry?
- Will the person be an effective, faithful and respected representative of the United Church of Christ in U.S. Government chaplaincy?
- Has the person and his or her family explored the implications of this type of ministry for family life and life-style considerations, such as mobility and long periods of separation?

Questions which the Committee may explore with the applicant may include:

- What are your basic understandings of the goals of this type of ministry and why are these important to you?
- How do you understand this type of ministry in terms of your career in ministry?
- How do you see yourself in this ministry as a representative of the United Church of Christ?
- How will you continue to be a part of the United Church of Christ and participate in the life of the United Church of Christ?
- What is the distinctiveness of your ministry in this field?

Following the interview. The applicant is dismissed and the Committee deliberates and makes its decision on whether to recommend endorsement of the applicant. It communicates its decision to the applicant. If the decision is to recommend endorsement, the Committee sends the applicant's documentation to the United Church of Christ Ecclesiastical Endorser with a Letter to Recommend that the Ordained Minister be endorsed for government chaplaincy.

The Endorser maintains records of all United Church of Christ chaplains. The Endorser provides this information to the

appropriate Association and CARD for inclusion in the *The United Church of Christ Yearbook*.

To ensure current and accurate information in the files of the Endorser and the Endorsement Office, the endorsed person provides updates of pertinent information about her or his duty assignment as changes take place, change of mailing address and changes of name (such in cases of becoming married) and updated email addresses. The Endorser shares this information as necessary.

It is recommended that chaplains hold ordained ministerial standing in an Association that knows them and in which an ongoing relationship can be maintained. Chaplains and Committees on Ministry should take care to maintain a meaningful relationship, especially when the chaplain is serving outside the geographical boundaries of the Association where standing is held

All Ordained Ministers with ecclesiastical endorsement are subject to the oversight of the Association in which they have ordained ministerial standing. Extra care needs to be taken to find ways for chaplains to receive support from the church and to be accountable through these oversight proceedings when a chaplain is serving outside the geographical boundaries of the Association in which standing is held.

An Ordained Minister endorsed for the Reserves or National Guard may request to have an endorsement granted for Active Duty once s/he has accrued three years post-ordination experience. This will require that the Ordained Minister create a Discernment Committee at the Local Church of membership and apply for an Active Duty endorsement. The Endorser will make the determination to grant an Active Duty endorsement based on the file submitted, new letters of reference and Officer evaluation reports submitted by the chaplain's commander.