

Office of Vocation - Vocational Minister Update
Antler River Watershed † Western Ontario Waterways † Horseshoe Falls

Tanya Cameron

May 8, 2024

It is my privilege as the Vocational Minister for the three regions in SW Ontario to provide a report on the work of the Office of Vocation for the past year. I continue to have many conversations with ministers involving the vocational realm: Excitement for a new call or appointment; helping discern “if it’s time for a change”; the stressors and joys of service; and general wide-ranging ministry topics. This report will touch on some elements of this role and you can find the full Office of Vocation Accountability Report to the Board of Vocation in the United Church Commons.

Who Are We?

% Compared to National Average per Category
 (it is *not* % status distribution within region)

Minister Status @ May 8, 2024	National Distribution of Status by Type		Antler River Watershed		Western Ontario Waterways		Horseshoe Falls		Tri-Regional Councils	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Active	1806	43.7%	88	4.9%	118	6.5%	124	6.9%	330	18.3%
Admissions	81	2.0%	1	1.2%	0	0.0%	1	1.2%	2	2.5%
Long Term Disability	62	1.5%	7	11.3%	6	9.7%	4	6.5%	17	27.4%
Ministry Partner	14	0.3%	3	21.4%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	3	21.4%
Non-UCC	10	0.2%	2	20.0%	2	20.0%	1	10.0%	5	50.0%
Restorative Care	36	0.9%	1	2.8%	3	8.3%	3	8.3%	7	19.4%
Retired	2128	51.4%	113	5.3%	172	8.1%	175	8.2%	460	21.6%
Totals	4137	100.0%	215	5.2%	301	7.3%	308	7.4%	824	19.9%

Candidacy Pathway

At the end of December 2023, there were 193 candidates for ministry in Candidacy Pathway, guided by the 7 Candidacy Boards and resourced by Vocational Ministers. The SW Ontario Candidacy Board has been meeting entirely online for the past year and engages with other Candidacy Boards in regular gatherings hosted by the General Council Office to “tend to the pathway” as needs arise and to share and receive best practices. There has been a recent update to the role of the Community of Faith Connection team, and in October 2022 the new Guide to Competencies for Ministry and Lifelong Ministry Leadership was implemented.

The SW Ontario Candidacy Board currently has 25 candidates in various phases of the Pathway (plus 1 to be Commissioned and 3 to be Ordained on May 25, 2024) with more applicants to be interviewed for Suitability for Ministry throughout 2024.:

3 in the Designated Lay Ministry Program at St. Andrew’s College, Saskatoon SK

6 in the Diaconal program at the Centre for Christian Studies, Winnipeg MB

15 in Ordained programs:

6 Emmanuel College, Toronto ON

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- 7 Atlantic School of Theology – Summer Distance Integrated, Halifax NS
- 2 Vancouver School of Theology

Many candidates are in ministry-based integrated programs requiring Supervised Ministry Education (SME) sites; similar to 2022, the 2023 calendar year had 15 active SME appointments at December 31, 2023 with 17 active as of May, 2024.

The SW Ontario Candidacy Board has partnered with the Indigenous Church to arrange a unique SME partnership experience with Grand River United Church, Six Nations of the Grand River. A non-Indigenous candidate is exploring and developing ministry leadership with a focus on the parallel path, while being mentored by an elder and a Grandmother's Circle. It is proving to be full of learnings and deepened relationship.

A functioning SME site requires intensive investment and discernment by Communities of Faith (CoF), Regional staff, Regional Commissions, and Educational Supervisors. Together they do the critically important work of candidate formation. SME appointments are generally 24 months and during that time, candidates meet regularly with their Educational Supervisor and Community of Faith Connection Teams. Working collaboratively these three bodies perform evaluations, work on Learning Goals, offer theological reflections and identify and ensure opportunities for growth in the competencies of ministry.

The Regions support SME experiences and Candidate formation by offering initial discernment meetings with CoF leadership when a congregation wonders about engaging with the ministry of formation; providing financial support to candidates; appointing pastoral charge supervisors to an SME site; and, continuous pastoral relations support. In addition to the 17 candidates in SME appointments, there are 5 candidates in supply appointments not under supervision (diaconal; in 5th year of AST integrated program; or are about to complete 3rd year in non-integrated MDiv program and will interview for SME Readiness in 2024.)

The SW Ontario Candidacy Board is incredibly thankful for the more than 107 volunteers that facilitate Candidacy Pathway in our regions. (17x4 CFC + 22 Charge Supervisors + 17 Educational Supervisors – *all volunteers* - that make ensure that those in Candidacy Pathway become faithful, effective and well-equipped to serve the church.) God is good!

The Board is ably and well-served by its current membership:

Rev. Laurie O'Leary, Chairperson	Pastor Jenn Brown
Rev. Tessica Hackshaw	Rev. Ann Stafford
Rev. Gerry Hofstetter	Rev. Wendy Noble
Rev. Mary Elizabeth Piercy	Nancy Hind, Recording Secretary
Rev. Gord Dunbar	

The SWON CB meets monthly on the third Thursday morning of each month and interviews 6x per year (the Thursday afternoon and Friday mornings of 6 different months in addition to their regular third-Thursday meetings).

Admissions *(excerpted from the Office of Vocational Accountability Report)*

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The number of ministers in the Admission process reached 200 people in 2022. This led to a shortage of accompaniers meaning that ministers expressing interest in admission were told there were dozens of ministers ahead of them waiting to speak with someone about applying for the Admission process.

Most significantly, the Admission Board noted an alarming reality: when it came time to seek an admission appointment, the process was not functioning equitably for racialized ministers. Consequently, we entered 2023 with the Admission process paused. Throughout 2023, the focus of admission work has been on addressing these bottlenecks and inequities. The Admissions Pilot Matching Program began in 2023, and evaluation of the Admissions experience and various processes revealed two priorities:

- We need to help these ministers get their foot in the door. They have so many skills and gifts that The United Church of Canada has identified as needed in our strategic plan.
 - o One fifth of them are people who have or are currently working on PhDs.
 - o Almost all of them speak at least two languages, with many of their additional languages being those that newcomers to Canada also speak.
 - o All of them bring diverse theological backgrounds and life experiences that can enrich our denomination. Many of them have specialized experience in ministry such as youth ministry, church planting, chaplaincy, and ecumenical work.

- We need to continue working with congregations to confront xenophobia and racism; as well as making sure that support for search teams are well informed of the Admission process and the benefits of considering an applicant from another country. While the myth exists in our denomination that we have a shortage of ministers, the reality is that we have more than 50 who are available. They simply need our search teams to recognize that they are highly qualified, experienced ministers who are keen and feeling to called to serve in The United Church of Canada.

Enhancing Effectiveness, Oversight And Discipline Of Ministry Personnel

(excerpted from the Office of Vocational Accountability Report)

This area represents a significant portion of the work of the Office of Vocation, and is managed by staff, elected members who sit on the response and remedial committees, along with consultants, reviewers and investigators. There was a training event held in person over 5 days for 39 Consultants, Investigators, Reviewers and Staff of the Office of Vocation in October, including the revisions made to the Sexual Misconduct and Workplace Discrimination, Harassment and Violence Response Policies & Procedures and Office of Vocation: Structure & Responsibilities, Appendix A.

Sabbatical and Strategic Plan

From September through November, 2023, I was on sabbatical with a project focused on analyzing the outcomes of the Response and Remedial committees, and identifying supports to ministry personnel to regain effectiveness. Response and Remedial are the bodies responsible for managing the Complaint Response process involving ministry personnel.

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This project aligned with my role as Activity lead in the Strategic Plan; specifically, “**Activity lead in 2.2.1** related to examining work done previously in effective leadership including regarding isolation.” My research involved reading the complete set of minutes of these two committees since inception and seeking to identify if isolation had a role in the precipitating action to the complaint. Between January 1, 2019 and January 31, 2024 (60 months) the Response Committee met 48 times and the Remedial Committee met 106 times. At September 7, 2023 Response had ordered 61 investigations or reviews (formal process) of ministry personnel.

The roles of Vocational Minister, Pastoral Relations Minister or Community Capacity Development Coordinator, and others involved in this work are also consistently engaged in informal processes. This data set had the possibility of expansion to analyze and provide learnings related to ministry effectiveness and isolation that are not captured in the formal process. I asked the Vocational Ministers to tally up their informal situations that met the following criteria:

- You have had concerns about minister’s performance brought to you by the Pastoral Relations Minister or M&P or other body that has knowledge (perhaps a fellow ministry colleague or yourself); *and*,
- Does not fit into our formal complaint process; *and*,
- You have had at least 2 long conversations about the concerns directly with the minister that includes areas of growth or development for them; *and*,
- The PRM or Executive Minister or M&P or Regional Staff/Commissions (or combination of same/similar) is also party to various conversations/concerns about this person’s ministry; *and*,
- You suspect that they are isolated, lonely, do not have collegial support in their role, or do not engage in wider church or regional events. You might also colloquially call some of these ministers “Lone Wolves.”

At September 30, 2023 an additional 119 ministers since 2019 were identified that might qualify for consideration of the focus of this project. From the Board of Vocation Accountability Report, “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.

Newer themes emerging relate to understanding of, and compliance with, oversight responsibilities; those in long-term pastoral relationships, and those who have not utilized their full study leave, vacation and sabbatical opportunities. The Remedial Committee is hoping to seek out additional resources for Directed Programs, particularly learning what other denominations find effective in similar remedial matters, in 2024.”

There have been many instances in the Remedial process where developing conflict resolution skills, attending emotional intelligence workshops and working with an executive coach or Spiritual Director on specific goals,

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and mentorship by United Church ministry colleagues have been very successful components in directed learning programs.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tanya Cameron".

Tanya Cameron, MBA

Vocational Minister

Antler River Watershed, Western Ontario Waterways and Horseshoe Falls Regions