

**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST COMMUNITY  
MINISTRY  
A GUIDE TO AFFILIATION FOR UU  
CONGREGATIONS  
AND  
PARISH MINISTERS**

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CONGREGATIONS AND PARISH MINISTERS

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## **Introduction**

Since 1991 the Unitarian Universalist Association has formally recognized community ministers as eligible for fellowship with the Association and has required those ministers to be in relationship with a local congregation. Over the years congregations and community ministers have greatly benefited from these relationships, enriching both the broader ministry and social commitment of the local congregation, helping ministerial colleagues connect and collaborate, and satisfying the UUA's requirements for maintaining fellowship and right relationship with the Association. This resource has been created to aid parish ministers and congregations in understanding the benefits and requirements of affiliation between a community minister and a congregation.

Community ministers perform creative and inspirational ministries beyond the walls of an individual UU congregation. Most of these ministries are in non-congregational settings working with individuals from many different faith traditions, or none at all. Affiliating with a local congregation allows community ministers to ground their work in our faith tradition and provides a UU context for their ministries.

Recognizing that many people first become aware of Unitarian Universalism through contact with a community minister, supporting one of these special ministers provides an excellent opportunity for a congregation to help share our faith perspective with the wider world in a focused and inspirational way. In addition, congregations often experience a deepened sense of commitment and connection to social justice work and a broader sense of what ministry can be within and outside the church community through their relationship with a community minister.

## **Community Ministry**

Community ministry has been around for centuries, whether it has been called community-based ministry, specialized ministry, public ministry, social ministry, ministers-at-large, the larger ministry or another name. From the first days of Unitarian and Universalist history in America there have been forms of ministry taking place outside congregations. Joseph Tuckerman is often credited as the "father of community ministry" because of his work providing services to the poor in the city of Boston in the early 19th century. He established the Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian churches in Boston in 1826 which still operates today as the Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry involving approximately fifty congregations in providing service, especially to inner city youth at risk and persons fleeing domestic abuse. Over the years community ministry has taken a myriad of forms from directing homeless shelters, teaching at Universities, serving as spiritual directors, or working in prisons, hospitals, or religious service agencies such as the UU Urban Ministry. Military chaplains and those ministers employed by the UUA and our Districts serve as community ministers as well.

Community ministers are trained to participate in all the traditional forms of ministry such as worship, preaching, pastoral counseling, religious education, social witness and advocacy, and

institutional leadership. Unlike their parish or religious education colleagues, community ministers experience a call to use these skills in different settings, often less visible to the congregation. Many community ministers also require specialized skills, depending on their particular ministerial setting. They often study and achieve professional credentialing in their particular area of ministry. For example, many hospital chaplains seek a credential from the Association of Professional Chaplains, an additional rigorous program.

### **Congregational Polity and Community Ministry**

In a religious association organized according to congregational polity, each local congregation has the sole authority to govern itself. Each congregation has the right to hire or call whomever they choose to serve them as minister, to ordain ministers, and to affiliate with a community minister.

The UUA is an Association of UU congregations in the United States. The Association's job is to serve and support the member congregations. In that capacity, the UUA has set certain standards for all UU ministers through the ministerial fellowshiping process. The Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) was established to create and enforce those standards by which ministers may be "in fellowship" (or credentialed) with the UUA and to evaluate ministers to see that they meet and maintain those standards.

A congregation knows that a minister meets certain standards when they are in fellowship with the Association. The UUA does not ordain ministers; only a congregation can do that. The UUA also cannot require a congregation to affiliate with a community minister. However, the UUA can and does require that a community minister in Preliminary Fellowship (the first stage of their credential) must be affiliated with a local congregation to maintain that credential and progress to Final Fellowship.

### **Requirements of Fellowship for Community Ministry**

All ministers, whether they serve in a community or parish-based setting, must meet specific requirements to be in fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association. To be accepted into Preliminary Fellowship (the first stage of credentialing) all ministers must have a Masters of Divinity degree, have completed an internship, served in a chaplaincy training program, had a career assessment and completed an extensive list of required reading. When their preparation is complete or nearly so, they appear before the Ministerial Fellowship Committee for an interview, and if deemed creditable and ready, are granted Preliminary Fellowship.

During Preliminary Fellowship, ministers are required to be evaluated in their ministerial positions and submit their evaluations to the MFC for review. Upon review, the MFC will either grant the minister renewal of fellowship or continue them in their current status pending additional material or another year of evaluated ministry. All ministers must have evaluations reviewed and their fellowship renewed for at least three years before being granted Final

Fellowship. In order for a minister's work to be eligible for renewal of fellowship, it must be at least ½ time and compensated. Although the MFC recognizes that there are competent ordained UU ministers doing legitimate ministerial work that is compensated at less than ½ time, or even working as volunteers, this is the standard required of all UU ministers for review leading to renewal of fellowship, and, following three renewals, Final Fellowship.

In addition to the requirements described above, community ministers must also be affiliated with a local UU congregation to progress from Preliminary Fellowship to Final Fellowship. As described in the section on congregational polity, in our tradition authority lies within local congregations. The purpose of this requirement is to help new community ministers remain accountable to, and ground their work in, a Unitarian Universalist context. Affiliation also benefits local congregations by offering opportunities to share their mission with their wider community and connect their members with a larger ministry. While a congregation may choose to affiliate with a minister not currently working in ministry, only those who meet these requirements are eligible to progress through Preliminary to Final Fellowship unless a waiver is sought and approved by the MFC.

While ministers in Final Fellowship are not required to be affiliated with a congregation, it is recommended and encouraged by the UUA, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) and the UU Society for Community Ministry (UUSCM) that all community ministers maintain an affiliation with a congregation. Only those community ministers who are affiliated with a congregation receive ministerial credentials to be a delegate at the UUA's annual General Assembly.

### **Affiliating with a Community Minister**

Community ministers establish relationships with local congregations in various ways. A congregation may seek a community minister to affiliate with them to broaden their own ministry beyond their congregation and to support an area community ministry. More often a community minister will initiate contact with a local congregation in hopes of affiliating. In some cases a minister will have come out of a local congregation as a lay leader, be trained for and credentialed as a UU minister, be ordained by the congregation, and then serve in a community setting while continuing a relationship with their long-time local congregation. In rare situations, a congregation may make a commitment to serve a larger community and hire or call a minister whose primary work will be outside the congregation, even though the congregation is paying their salary.

### **The Affiliation Agreement**

Affiliation with a community minister generally begins with a series of conversations. The community minister will speak with the parish ministers first. If supportive, the parish minister will then talk to the congregation's president or board chair. The request for affiliation will then be presented to the board or governing body. Unless the congregation has been in relationship with a community minister in the past, a lot of education is necessary for the congregation's

leadership to understand what community ministry is and how affiliation will benefit the congregation as well as the minister. The congregation, parish minister (or ministers), and community minister will negotiate a formal agreement regarding the affiliation which should be voted on by the board or governing body of the congregation. This agreement will describe the parameters and expectations of the community minister and congregation and include a statement recognizing the work the community minister is doing as a ministry.

The Affiliation Agreement includes sections on the following topics:

1. **The role of the community minister within the congregation** – The agreement should state clearly that the community minister has their primary employment outside of the church and is not on the staff of the congregation. It should clarify that if sought out for ministerial services like pastoral care for congregants, the community minister will refer individuals to the parish minister. Ministerial services will only be provided with the parish minister’s knowledge and agreement.
2. **Gratis services provided by the community minister** – In exchange for affiliation, it is not unreasonable to expect that some services will be provided by the community minister without remuneration. The congregation must remember, however, that the minister’s primary employment is elsewhere and sometimes under-compensated and/or consisting of several part-time positions. Uncompensated services should be kept at a minimum and expectations clearly articulated in the agreement. It is not unreasonable to expect the community minister to preach once annually with no honorarium, provide a newsletter article quarterly, report to the board annually, and/or teach one adult religious education workshop. Gratis services should be related to your congregation’s needs and the skills of the community minister with the goal of connecting the congregation with the community minister and their work outside the congregation.
3. **Fee schedule for other services provided** - Services beyond what was has been agreed upon should be compensated. For example, if the minister preaches more than once a year then the standard honorarium for a guest preacher is in order. If the community minister provides summer or sabbatical coverage for the parish minister, there should be compensation. If the community minister leads a special training for pastoral associates, the community minister should be paid. If possible, the agreement should include a list of services for which the community minister will be compensated and the rate of compensation. A sentence stating that compensation for services not anticipated when the agreement is written will be negotiated prior to those services being provided.
4. **Relationships with congregational ministers and staff** – The agreement should describe the community minister’s relationship with the other ministers and staff of the congregation. For example, the agreement may include a statement that the community minister is not in a supervisory relationship with any of the staff at the church and is or is not eligible for office support. The community minister and the parish minister (or ministers) should maintain a collegial relationship following the guidelines of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association

(UUMA). In case of conflict with any church staff, issues should be taken to the Committee on Ministry and parish minister. In case of conflict between the community minister and parish minister, assistance should be sought from a UUMA Good Offices person or the UUA's district staff.

5. **Support provided by the congregation** – The agreement should list the non-monetary benefits the church will provide the community minister. These may include use of an office in the church, receiving mail at the church, identification on church letterhead, having the opportunity to officiate at rights of passage ceremonies for persons who are not members of the congregation, etc. The congregation also provides members for the community minister's Committee on Ministry (see "Providing a Committee on Ministry" below).

6. **Expectation of church members with the community minister's agency** – One of the goals of having an affiliated community ministry is the opportunity for church members to engage in a ministry beyond the walls of their own congregation. This is more or less feasible, depending upon the specific community ministry. If the community minister is working at a service agency (i.e. a homeless shelter, tutoring program), church members may be invited to volunteer at the agency, to take on special projects related to the ministry, or offer an annual fundraiser or sharing of the plate from worship. Some community ministers work in settings not open to such engagement such as a private practice providing pastoral psychotherapy. Where there is the opportunity and expectation of engagement by the congregation in the community ministry, this should be articulated in the agreement.

7. **Recognition of the community minister's work as ministry** – The MFC expects congregations who are affiliating with a community minister to recognize the work the minister is engaged in as a ministry. In most cases it will be easy to determine that the community minister is performing ministry. Some very clear examples include hospital chaplains, campus ministers, pastoral therapists, spiritual directors, or directors of a hospice center or other agency providing pastoral support. Other examples are less clear: working as a fundraiser in a non-profit organization, for a liberal publishing house, or as a university recruiter. One question to consider, although not the ultimate determining factor, is whether or not the employer accepts the individual as a minister in the role. When uncertain, the congregation can look to the MFC rules and policies [see appendix] or contact the Ministerial Development Director at the UUA for guidance. It is the MFC's responsibility to make the final determination as to whether or not a minister's work is eligible for renewal of fellowship.

8. **Regular review and renewal of the affiliation agreement** – Affiliation agreements should not be frozen documents, but should be revisited at least annually to make sure the terms are still beneficial for all involved. This can be done with the Committee on Ministry as part of the annual evaluation for renewal of fellowship, or with a different body, such as the Board, at another time. The agreement should state when it will be reviewed and by whom.

Remember that an affiliation agreement is not the same as a Letter of Agreement or contract with your parish minister. The most important aspect of the affiliation agreement is that the

community minister and the congregation feel it is just and mutually beneficial for all concerned. [See the Appendix for sample Affiliation Agreements]

### **Providing a Committee on Ministry**

The Committee on Ministry (COM) is the community minister's primary means of accountability to the UUA's member congregations in general, and a vital link with the minister's specific affiliating congregation. Community ministers in Preliminary Fellowship must have their fellowship renewed three times by the MFC before they will receive Final Fellowship. Among other requirements, each renewal application must include an evaluation from the community minister's COM. COM evaluations are a crucial part of the renewal process for community ministers, making it possible for the MFC to evaluate their work, not just as ministers serving in a particular setting, but as Unitarian Universalists providing ministry in the name of our faith tradition.

The COM is composed of members of the affiliating congregation and individuals connected to the community minister's agency or other place of employment. For example, a hospital chaplain's COM will include nurses, doctors or staff from the hospital who are familiar with the minister's work (although generally not the supervisor), along with members of the affiliating congregation. In an ideal situation, the COM will include one or more individuals who are both members of the church and work or volunteer at the community minister's agency.

In cases where the community minister is self employed and there is no agency to provide members for the COM, the minister will consult with the Ministerial Development Director about how to form an appropriate COM for the particular situation.

The COM meets regularly with the community minister to offer feedback and support, help the minister reflect on what it means to minister as a UU in the wider community, and consider professional development needs and opportunities. The COM also helps the congregation to be aware of and, where appropriate, participate in the ministry. The COM journeys with the community minister, participating in the minister's vision, and providing a crucial link between the minister and the congregation.

The Committee on Ministry should:

- Be composed of about 5 people with representation from the affiliating congregation and the community minister's agency or other place of employment;
- Meet regularly with the community minister (at least every 6 weeks);
- Help the minister to:
  1. Articulate what it means to be a UU minister working in a community setting;
  2. Balance work responsibilities, congregational involvement, family/personal life, and spiritual renewal;
  3. Create an appropriate, non-exploitative, and collegial role in the congregation;



4. Raise awareness within the congregation about the relevant social concerns implicated in the community minister's work;
  5. Connect the congregation to the community served by the minister (where appropriate), and
  6. Identify continuing education and professional development needs of the community minister.
- Collectively complete one annual evaluation form for renewal of fellowship. [most recent forms and due dates: <http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialfellowship>]

Although community ministers are not required to continue congregational affiliation, meet with a COM, or submit annual evaluations to the MFC after being granted Final Fellowship, most community ministers find their congregational affiliation and COM to be sources of important connection and support. Ministerial credentials for delegate status at General Assembly are granted through congregational affiliation. Many congregations find that affiliation and the work of the COM provide a viable way to maintain close connection with the community minister and to extend the congregation's own ministry. It is hoped that congregational affiliation and an active COM will be continued for all community ministers.

### **Covenant and Collegial Relationships**

The community minister, senior minister(s) and other ministers in the congregation are urged to develop a covenant establishing the appropriate collegial relationships among them. This covenant should be a written document outlining expectations, roles, responsibilities and the proper process for dealing with conflict. The covenant may be negotiated and included as part of the affiliation agreement, or be a separate document. A sample covenant is included in the appendix.

Covenants will vary depending upon the relationship between the community minister and parish minister(s), the community minister's previous relationship with the congregation, and the parameters of the community ministry. For example, a community minister who lives and works far from the congregation will have a very different relationship with the parish minister(s) than one who has an office in the church and offers paid services (i.e. counseling or spiritual direction) to members of the congregation. A community minister whose spouse and children participate in the life of the congregation will have a different relationship than one who is single and/or childless. A covenant clarifies each minister's role within the congregation, describes the ministers' collegial expectations, and holds the community minister accountable to the parish minister's vision for the congregation.

### **Ministerial Transitions and Community Ministers**

Times of ministerial transition can be stressful for all concerned. Because the community minister's relationship with the congregation is not as primary as that of the parish minister(s), the departure of a parish minister can be a particularly vulnerable time for a community minister.

The congregation should help potential candidates for the parish ministry know of the community minister and the ministry served in the community through the search process, beginning with the search packet. Include a section on the community ministry and its role within the congregation, and have the community minister write a personal introduction. When a candidate is selected and candidating week is underway, the community minister and the candidate need time together to discuss their future relationship. Once a new parish minister is in place (whether interim or settled), a new covenant needs to be created. The new parish minister should attempt to maintain the affiliation agreement, especially with a community minister in Preliminary Fellowship as progression toward Final Fellowship depends upon congregational affiliation. If it is impossible to maintain the affiliation agreement, ample notice should be given to the community minister.

If the community minister's employment is terminated or the minister relocates, it may be appropriate for the congregation and community minister to terminate their affiliation agreement. The congregation and parish minister(s) can be helpful by offering letters of recommendation and assistance in securing future professional work and affiliation with another congregation.

## Frequently Asked Questions

*Who decides what is ministry?*

While a congregation is asked to recognize the work of the community minister as a ministry, it is the MFC who makes the final determination as to whether or not it qualifies for renewal of fellowship. The MFC requires that the work be at least ½ time, compensated, and uses traditional ministry skills such as preaching, teaching, public witness, administration and pastoral care. For additional information, please see the MFC's policies at <http://www.uua.org/documents/mfc/policies.pdf>.

*Are we required to affiliate with a community minister?*

No, the UUA cannot require a congregation to affiliate with a community minister. Community ministers, however, are required to affiliate with a congregation while they are in Preliminary Fellowship. This requirement is set forth by the rules and policies of the MFC. While not required, most congregations find affiliation with a community minister to be an enriching experience.

*Does the congregation or governing board vote to affiliate with a community minister?*

Each congregation has its own by-laws with which it must comply. For most congregations, a vote of the governing board is sufficient to affiliate since affiliation is very different from calling a parish minister, necessitating a different process.

*Are we hiring a minister?*

In most cases, no. Affiliating with a community minister means that you are developing a special relationship with a minister working outside the congregation. As part of the affiliation agreement, the congregation may agree to compensate the minister for some work performed within the congregation such as guest preaching, pastoral summer coverage, consulting with a lay committee, etc. The minister may also agree to do some work within the congregation without remuneration such as an annual training of pastoral associates, an annual sermon, and/or teaching a religious education class. In rare situations an affiliated community minister may be hired part time within the congregation for a specific ministry position, such as ¼ time membership coordinator, while also engaged in a community ministry outside the congregation. For those in the renewal process, attaining Final Fellowship with a specialty in community ministry requires ministerial work of at least ½ time in a non-parish setting.

*Can a congregation have more than one affiliated minister?*

Yes, as long as it is of benefit to all concerned and there is a covenant between all parish and community ministers involved, there is no reason why a congregation cannot affiliate with more than one minister.

*Do ministers in Final Fellowship have to affiliate with a congregation?*

While ministers in Final Fellowship are not required to affiliate with a congregation, it is recommended and encouraged by the UUA, Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association (UUMA) and professional organization Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministries (UUSCM) that all community ministers maintain an affiliation with a congregation. Many congregations, community and parish-based ministers find it valuable to maintain affiliated relationships even after a minister is in Final Fellowship. Ministers in Final Fellowship are not required to meet with a Committee on Ministry, although many do as they find it enriching and supportive to their ministry and to aid in the congregation's connection with their ministry. Ministers in Final Fellowship are not required to submit evaluations to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee or fulfill the half-time compensation requirement. Only those community ministers who are affiliated with a congregation receive ministerial credentials to be a delegate at the UUA's General Assembly.

### **A Brief History of Unitarian Universalist Community Ministry**

Community ministry has been around for centuries, whether it has been called community-based ministry, specialized ministry, public ministry, social ministry, ministers-at-large, the larger ministry or another name. From the first days of Unitarian and Universalist history in America there has been some form of ministry that has taken place outside of a congregation. Joseph Tuckerman is often credited as the "father of community ministry" with his work providing services to the poor in the city of Boston in the early 19th century and his establishment of the Benevolent Fraternity of Unitarian churches. We can be certain that there were other ministers doing "invisible" ministry with the marginalized and oppressed from the earliest years that have been lost to our history. Our historians must continue to research the roles that our early community ministers played in the anti-slavery movement, women's rights, and more. For an in-depth study of the history of community ministry read Kathleen Parker's 2007 book *Sacred Service in Civic Space: Three Hundred Years of Community Ministry in Unitarian Universalism*.

In more recent years, the recognition and credentialing of community ministers within the UUA can be traced to the Proclamation of the Society for the Larger Ministry (SLM) - now the UU Society for Community Ministries (UUSCM) - following a meeting at Meadville Lombard Theological School in 1988. This document (see Resources) expressed the passion, scope, and over-arching vision of those called to ministry outside the walls of our churches. The tireless work of those involved in SLM and their allies resulted in the Unitarian Universalist 1991 General Assembly approving a category of community ministry as eligible for fellowship in addition to the already established categories of parish ministry and the ministry of religious education. The Ministerial Fellowship Committee was then charged with determining the requirements for this new credential.

In the first few years of community ministry fellowshiping, there was confusion amongst active ministers, seminarians, the Department of Ministry and the trustees of the UUA regarding what

should be the criteria for granting and maintaining a credential for community ministers and it was not clear how they should be in relationship with congregations. Questions were asked about the meaning of ordination and fellowshiping for this newly recognized ministry that was performed outside of a local congregation.

Over the first decade after the 1991 General Assembly, community ministers caucused together in the UU Society for Community Ministries (UUSCM, formerly SLM), the Community Ministry Focus Group of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, and the seminaries to understand and comply with new requirements and to advocate for their needs. In 2003 a Community Ministry Coalition was formed bringing together the Ministry and Professional Leadership Staff, UUSCM, the Community Ministry Focus Group (CMFG) of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association and the Community Ministry Center which had been the ministry of the late Reverend Jody Shipley, a longtime leader in community ministry advocacy. A result of this meeting was deeper discussions and open communication between community ministry leaders and institutional leaders, bringing the possibilities of community ministries for the future of Unitarian Universalism into clearer light, along with the need for support of those called to these ministries.

The Ministerial Fellowship Committee continued its own grappling with the concept of three categories of ministry and with much thought, consultation, and discussion decided to grant fellowship for “one” ministry and recognize a specialty in parish, religious education, or community ministry at the point of Final Fellowship following three successful years of evaluated ministry in the specific area. Until that time, all community ministers were required to be affiliated with a local congregation to keep their fellowship credential current. Now only those community ministers in Preliminary Fellowship are required to affiliate with a congregation. Although no longer required, many community ministers in Final Fellowship choose to maintain congregational affiliation for accountability, collegial relationships, credentials for General Assembly, and to sustain congregational involvement in their community ministries.

It is clear that the relationship between community ministers and congregations is not stagnant and continues to evolve. Affiliation is a work in progress, both in response to the rule changes by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and the greater understanding of community ministry as a viable and vital UU ministry which moves congregations outward to a larger vision of what church can or should be in the world.

## Appendix

Ministerial Fellowship Committee Rules & Policies

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialfellowship/62658.shtml>

Ministerial Fellowship Committee Affiliation Form

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialfellowship/15505.shtml>

Steps to CM Fellowship

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/ministerialfellowship/communityministers/index.shtml>

Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association Guidelines & Code of Professional Practice

<http://uuma.org/guidelines>

Unitarian Universalist Society for Community Ministry Code of Professional Practice

[http://www.uuscm.org/uploads/3/1/5/9/315989/code\\_of\\_professional\\_practice.pdf](http://www.uuscm.org/uploads/3/1/5/9/315989/code_of_professional_practice.pdf)

Sample Affiliation Agreements and Covenants

<http://www.uuscm.org/covenants.html>

1988 Community Ministry Covenant and Proclamation

[http://www.uuscm.org/uploads/3/1/5/9/315989/1988\\_proclamation.doc](http://www.uuscm.org/uploads/3/1/5/9/315989/1988_proclamation.doc)

## Further resources

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UU Society of Community Ministries (UUSCM) Website: [www.uuscm.org](http://www.uuscm.org)