

Entry into the Ministry of the UPCSA

A brief outline of the requirements and procedures involved in the preparation and selection of Students and Probationers for Ministry in the UPCSA.

– Prepared by Rev Eddie Germiquet (Ministry Secretary)

The full description of the process is to be found in the Manual of Faith and Order, Chapter 17 on the UPCSA web site (Go to Assembly tab, then choose Resources).

Any person, who believes that God is calling them into the Ministry, will need to have that call tested. Sometimes people “feel” called to the Ministry but the underlying reasons are not what they appear to be. God may well be calling a person, but not into the Ministry, it may be a calling to teaching or to serve in some other capacity (see 1 Cor. 12 for the list of gifts and forms of service). Some people feel that the Ministry will give them the recognition they deserve or want from other people. Others may feel that their lives will go better if they become Ministers because God will bless them as a reward for their dedication. Still others may feel that there is a tradition to maintain, that there should be a least one member of a family or of a church that has to be a Minister.

A person who wishes to be considered for the Ministry should have a Matric with University exemption. This is because we expect Ministers to be well trained academically. The demands of the Ministry mean that one has to be continually studying the scriptures and preparing new and fresh sermons for the following week. One has to preach the whole Word of God and not always focus on one’s pet subjects. A solid academic foundation is necessary so that one is able to answer people’s questions and guide them accurately as to what they need to believe. One also needs to be able to expose wrong teaching and to be able to instruct members as to why certain things taught by sects are wrong. Our recognized Universities in South Africa are: Pretoria University (preferred university) Stellenbosch, UNISA and the correspondence college Theological Education by Extension College (TEEC). This college offers both the Diploma as well as the BTh degree. A person who has not achieved a matric with exemption and who is now too old to return to school in order to upgrade, may be admitted by a University into a Diploma course. In Zambia our students can be trained at the Justo Mwale Theological College in Lusaka. United Theological College in Harare, Zimbabwe is also a training institution to which some of our students go.

In addition to the academic requirement, there is also the person’s involvement in the local congregation as well as conduct and character in private life that play an important role in confirming whether a person is called by God.

A person who feels called should join their Presbytery’s Fellowship of Vocation for at least one year. There the person will be exposed to many facets of the Ministry and will have time to evaluate their own calling while comparing it to some of the realities of the Ministry. If a person believes that he/she is ready to apply, that person should notify the Presbytery’s Ministry Convener who is the person responsible for the forwarding of the application (with all the necessary forms completed and documents supplied). Forms that appear to have been filled in carelessly or which do not have all the required documents create the impression that the person is not serious about their application

for the Ministry.

Once a year, a Selection Conference is held, to which a certain number (not all) applicants are invited. The purpose of the Selection Conference is to evaluate more precisely who appears to have a genuine Calling by God into the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. The need for a proper selection is also because the church does not have enough money to pay for everyone's studies. We need to be good stewards of the financial resources given to us. This money comes from all the congregations of the UPCSA which pay their assessments.

At the Selection Conference, some people are Selected to become students for the Ministry. They are therefore taken on as our recognized students. The church, where necessary, contributes a portion of their fees and living expenses (normally 60%). Some applicants are deferred by the Selection Conference, because they may be too young or immature or may be suitable but they still need to complete some upgrading of marks. Deferred usually means that a calling from God is visible but the time is not yet right. Other applicants are declined. This means that the Selection Conference does not believe that there is a calling from God to enter the Ordained Ministry. It does not mean that people who are declined are bad, or just not good enough for God. It means rather that the person's calling probably lies elsewhere. Those who are not selected should talk with their minister to see in which other areas they could offer their time and talent for God's service.

Some people wish to start their studies on their own, and at a later stage put in an application to be recognized. The Ministry Committee has no authority over people who are studying on their own, but it often happens that after obtaining a BA degree it is evident that they have many interesting subjects as part of their degree but not always the ones required for the Ministry. In such cases, applicants who already have a degree are asked to return to University and take some of the subjects that are missing. Any person studying on their own is welcome to contact the Ministry Secretary (Eddie Germiquet) and to discuss the subjects that they are thinking of registering for. The basic subjects to look for in preparing for the Ministry are: Biblical Studies (Old and New Testament), Systematic Theology, and Church History. As the Word of God (Bible) is the foundation and final authority for all our beliefs it is recommended that a person also considers one or both of the biblical languages (Greek for New Testament and Hebrew for the Old Testament). Without these languages one is always dependent on what others have written. Students should not just go for "easy credits". There is a great need for African biblical scholars.

Once academic studies are completed, a candidate moves on to become a Probationer. This is the time of preparation for the practical implications of the full-time Ministry. Probation is done in a church and normally lasts one year. An experienced supervisor is appointed by the Presbytery and whose task is to meet regularly with the Probationer and give guidance and offer exposure to all the facets of the Ministry (eg. how to conduct funerals, weddings, visits to people in hospital, helping people who are bereaved, how to run Session meetings etc.). At the completion of the year of probation the Ministry Committee issues a "Ministry Certificate" to all the Probationers who it believes are adequately prepared for the Ministry. However, it needs to be remembered that neither a Student for the Ministry nor a Probationer is guaranteed entry into the Ministry. Ordination normally only takes place when a congregation recognizes in a probationer the qualities and character which comes from God. Ordination to the Ministry is done by the Presbytery. Before ordination the Presbytery needs to conduct its own evaluation of the candidate and satisfy itself that it can proceed, in all integrity, to

ordain the person to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament.

Youth Pastor is a term that has started to be used by some churches to designate a person who is normally responsible for the youth of that particular congregation. It is normally a private arrangement between the congregation and a person gifted in working with young people. Some Youth Pastors have some training others very little. The UPCSA only ordains people to the Ministry of Word and Sacrament. It does not ordain anyone to the Ministry of Youth Pastors. There is however nothing preventing an ordained minister from focusing his/her ministry on the youth.

Lay Preachers are Elders who have been recognized as being gifted in preaching. They should be trained in the preparation and delivery of sermons. They can help in the church by preaching where they are asked to lead a service. Lay Preachers are normally not given the authority to dispense the sacraments.

Any question or comment can be addressed to: Rev. Eddie Germiquet

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