

Educational Pathways for Certified Candidates for Ministry

Overview

In The Presbyterian Church in Canada, ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments and designation to the Order of Diaconal Ministries signify the church's confirmation of Christ's call to the individual to these forms of Christian service. Ordination or designation takes place when the individual has completed successfully the church's candidacy process and has been offered and has accepted a call to a particular ministry.

Lay persons qualify to seek a position as an ordained or diaconal minister through completion of the church's candidacy process. Certified candidates for ministry are members of a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada who engage with the church in preparation for and discernment of their calling. Certification places them under the care of the presbytery to which the congregation belongs.

The primary resource detailing the church's candidacy procedures is *Candidacy Process of Preparation and Discernment for Ministries of The Presbyterian Church in Canada*.

<https://presbyterian.ca/downloads/34210/>

The standard educational pathway for ordained or diaconal ministry in this denomination is a university undergraduate degree followed by a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree from a theological college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. Candidates apply for admission to The Presbyterian Church in Canada college of their choice, submitting required documents and observing deadlines as outlined in the college admission procedures.

Certified candidates for ministry may apply for an alternative educational pathway under certain specific circumstances:

- No university undergraduate degree and 35 – 59 years of age:

The applicant may have studied at a post-secondary level, but without earning a university undergraduate degree. The assigned program of study, referred to as a General Assembly Special Course, includes university undergraduate Arts courses, to be completed with a minimum B average, followed by courses in the M.Div. program of a college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In some case, an applicant's previous post-secondary studies may count towards the Arts requirement.

- M.Div. degree and university undergraduate degree:

The applicant has earned a university undergraduate degree and an M.Div. degree. The M.Div. degree was completed with a minimum B average in a college outside The Presbyterian Church in Canada that is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (or equivalent outside North America). The candidate has been a member of a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada for at least the two years preceding the application. The assigned program of study includes courses in the M.Div. program of a college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada.

Application for these alternative educational pathways, through the Committee on Education and Reception, requires endorsement of the application by the certifying presbytery. When the committee approves an application, it recommends to the General Assembly a course of study and any other

conditions to be met before the presbytery is permitted to examine the candidate for certification for ordination/designation. Adoption of the committee's recommendation by the General Assembly assigns the course of study and additional conditions as noted. Candidates then choose appropriate courses to fulfill the church's requirements in consultation with the faculty of a college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, after successful application to the college for admission.

About University Undergraduate Degrees

In Canada, a university undergraduate degree is a baccalaureate degree from an institution approved by a Canadian provincial quality assurance agency. The educational programs of all Canadian universities are subject to the provincially mandated quality assurance mechanisms, and the school is permitted to use the word "university" in its name.

In Canada, theology degrees are generally exempt from the provincially mandated quality assurance mechanisms, and degrees from many bible colleges do not qualify as university undergraduate degrees. Candidates and certifying presbyteries uncertain about the status of a school or program of study are advised to consult with the Committee on Education and Reception before enrolment.

For Candidates with no University Undergraduate Degree and 35 – 59 years of age

These candidates apply for a General Assembly Special Course. Application is appropriate when all the following statements are true.

The individual:

- is a member of a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada (for at least the previous year)
- is a certified candidate for ministry of the presbytery to which the congregation belongs
- has attained the age of 35 years or older at first certification, and is 59 years or younger at the time of application
- has not earned a university undergraduate degree
- provides academic transcripts
- arranges for confidential references
- is prepared to come to Presbyterian Church in Canada offices in Toronto, Ontario, for a personal interview with the Committee on Education and Reception or to participate in an interview in a presbytery closer to home when such arrangements can be made, and in all cases to cover the cost of their own travel and accommodation expenses
- has received endorsement of the application by the certifying presbytery (indicating presbytery agreement that the candidate should be permitted to pursue this educational pathway)
- is aware that not all applications are approved and that, in all cases, the committee refrains from giving reasons for its decisions concerning applications
- is prepared to engage in the church's candidacy process without any guarantee of eventual ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacraments or designation to the Order of Diaconal Ministries

For M.Div. Graduates of Other Theological Colleges

These candidates apply for eligibility to be examined for certification for ordination/designation. When an application is approved, the General Assembly specifies the conditions that the candidate must fulfill, including completion of studies assigned in a college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, before the presbytery is permitted to examine the candidate for certification for ordination/designation. Application is appropriate when all the following statements are true.

The individual:

- is a member of a congregation of The Presbyterian Church in Canada (for at least the previous two years)
- is a certified candidate for ministry of the presbytery to which the congregation belongs
- holds a university undergraduate degree
- holds a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) degree, with a minimum B average, from a North American seminary accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), or from a seminary outside North America with equivalent accreditation
- provides academic transcripts
- arranges for confidential references
- is prepared to come to Presbyterian Church in Canada offices in Toronto, Ontario, for a personal interview with the Committee on Education and Reception or to participate in an interview in a presbytery closer to home when such arrangements can be made, and in all cases to cover the cost of their own travel and accommodation expenses
- has received endorsement of the application by the certifying presbytery (indicating presbytery agreement that the candidate should be permitted to pursue this educational pathway)
- is aware that not all applications are approved and that, in all cases, the committee refrains from giving reasons for its decisions concerning applications
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Application Procedures

1. Contact the Committee on Education and Reception requesting an application form.

To communicate with the committee through its secretary, contact Ministry and Church Vocations, the department of the Life and Mission Agency that administers the committee's work. You will be asked first to complete a short enquirer form providing personal details. This equips the committee to forward information that is pertinent to the candidate's situation, and if appropriate, to forward an application form.

Requests for applications may be made as follows:

Ministry and Church Vocations
c/o Marjorie Copeland, Administrative Assistant
Email address: MCopeland@presbyterian.ca
Telephone: 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111, ext. 263

2. Complete and submit the application form.

3. Observe the application deadlines.

These deadlines depend on whether the Committee on Education and Reception will review the application at its spring or autumn meeting and the location of the applicant's personal interview with the committee. Most interviews take place at Presbyterian Church in Canada offices in Toronto, Ontario, during the committee's meetings. Under some circumstances, applicants living in Canada may have the option of an interview closer to home.

For the Committee's Spring Meeting:

March 30: for interviews at Presbyterian Church Offices in Toronto, Ontario

February 28: for interviews at other locations (when arrangements can be made)

For the Committee's Autumn Meeting:

September 30: for interviews at Presbyterian Church Offices in Toronto, Ontario,

September 1: for interviews at other locations (when arrangements can be made)

4. Arrange for documents to be prepared and forwarded directly by others.

Academic transcripts for all post-secondary education are required. These are original documents bearing the school's official seal, signature and/or watermark. Photocopies, scanned or faxed documents will not be accepted. Transcripts detail the student's academic record: program of study and basis of admission, courses attempted, grades earned, degrees granted, all with appropriate dates. Diplomas or program certificates are not required and will not be accepted.

Three **confidential references** are required. Applicants are advised to choose reference authors who can write knowledgeably about them and their work over the years. Reference writers are asked to complete the form provided and forward it directly to the Committee on Education and Reception. Information from references will not be disclosed to the applicant.

The same references submitted to the Committee on Education and Reception can be used also for the guidance conference, with the permission of the reference authors. Candidates are advised to ask their reference writers to indicate their permission on the reference form.

Presbytery endorsement of an application conveys presbytery agreement that the candidate should be permitted to pursue this educational pathway. Typically, presbytery clerks forward an extract of the presbytery's minutes, along with the report of the Student Certification Committee supporting the recommendation for presbytery endorsement.

5. Confirm your interview appointment.

Once the application file is complete and you have been offered an interview appointment with the Committee on Education and Reception, let the committee know that you plan to attend the interview.

The committee conducts its work in English. If you require a translator for your interview, be sure to let the committee know early in your application process. The committee will endeavour to provide the services of a translator.

Make your travel and accommodation arrangements. Applicants are responsible for their own arrangements and costs.

6. Attend the interview.

Be prepared to discuss the various aspects of your life touched upon in your application materials, and any other matters pertinent to your desire to enter the ordained or diaconal ministry of The Presbyterian Church in Canada. The interview will be approximately 45 – 60 minutes in length.

7. Await the committee's response.

After the interview, within a period of two weeks, the committee informs candidates by mail of the recommendation that the committee plans to present to the General Assembly about the application. The certifying presbytery receives this notification as well.

The church's decision about an application is made by the General Assembly, on recommendation of the committee. Until a recommendation is adopted by the General Assembly, the outcome of the application cannot be known. Applicants are not expected to attend the General Assembly.

8. Presbyteries with questions or concerns

Endorsing presbyteries with questions or concerns about the recommendation that the Committee on Education and Reception plans to present to the General Assembly may contact the committee through its Secretary, requesting consultation by teleconference. Although the committee does not give reasons for its decisions at any time, communication with representatives of the presbytery sometimes provides the committee with new information and may lead to a change in the committee's decision.

The Committee on Education and Reception reviews its decision about an application only at the request of the endorsing presbytery. A request from an applicant to the Committee on Education and Reception does not initiate a review.

9. Studies in a theological college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada

When candidates are ready to set up their academic program, they are advised to contact the college of their choice to learn how to apply for admission.

The Presbyterian Church in Canada has three theological colleges: Knox College in Toronto, Ontario; Presbyterian College in Montreal, Quebec; and Vancouver School of Theology in Vancouver, British Columbia. Each college has established its own admissions requirements, procedures and timelines, and makes decisions about admission of students on those terms, quite apart from the application process through the Committee on Education and Reception. When a candidate's application is approved and the General Assembly assigns educational studies in a college of The Presbyterian Church in Canada, this does not serve to enroll the candidate in a suitable program, nor does it accomplish or guarantee college admission. Candidates must apply to the college of their choice for admission.

Applicants are responsible for all their costs associated with the assigned studies.

On successful completion of the studies assigned by the General Assembly, the college provides the candidate with a certificate to this effect.

For M.Div. Graduates of Other Theological Colleges: additional procedures

10. Conditional nature of eligibility for examination for certification for ordination/designation

For M.Div. graduates of theological colleges outside The Presbyterian Church in Canada whose application for eligibility for examination for certification for ordination/designation is approved and who wish to proceed with the church's process, the next steps are to fulfill any conditions placed on their eligibility. Such conditions are introduced by the words "subject to" in the committee's recommendation to the General Assembly. A candidate is eligible to be examined for certification for ordination or designation when the General Assembly has approved the application and the candidate has fulfilled all assigned conditions.

11. Period for competent objections

Whenever the committee plans to recommend that the General Assembly approve an application, the recommendation contains the words "subject to no competent objections being submitted by a presbytery of this church by (date)." The names of the candidates and brief details of their educational, church and work history are circulated to the presbyteries in The Presbyterian Church in Canada to solicit information about the individual's personal or professional conduct that might be unknown to the Committee on Education and Reception. Presbyteries are given three months to forward "competent objections" to an application. If an objection is lodged, the committee notifies the candidate and the certifying presbytery that the condition has not been lifted; the possibility then exists that the outcome of the application might be changed. When no objection is lodged by the specified date, the condition is deemed to be lifted; in this case, no notification is sent to the candidate and the certifying presbytery.

Seeking a Call

The primary resource detailing the church's procedures for search, call and induction is *Calling a Minister: Guidelines for Presbyteries, Interim Moderators and Search Committees*.

<https://presbyterian.ca/downloads/34185/>

Before seeking a call in The Presbyterian Church in Canada, all certified candidates for ministry require permission from their presbytery and their college.

- The presbytery examines the candidate for certification for ordination/designation. If satisfied with the results of the examination, the presbytery certifies the candidate for ordination or designation, conditional upon graduation if this has not yet occurred. As soon as the candidate graduates with the college diploma, the condition is lifted, and the individual has standing as a certified candidate for ordination/designation.
- The college graduates the candidate, awarding the M.Div. degree or a certificate of completion of the educational requirements assigned by the General Assembly, along with the college diploma indicating the assessment of the college governing board that the candidate should be eligible for ministry in The Presbyterian Church in Canada. In some cases, the college grants its permission early, during the candidate's final semester of study. This is referred to as the "October 1 letter" for December graduates and the "February 1 letter" for May graduates. In each case, the college has discretion over granting the individual college permission to seek a call prior to graduation.

For candidates with the requisite permission who are ready to seek a call:

1. Contact Ministry and Church Vocations to request a personal profile form (in Microsoft Word):

Ministry and Church Vocations
c/o Marjorie Copeland, Administrative Assistant
Email address: MCopeland@presbyterian.ca
Telephone: 1-800-619-7301 or 416-441-1111, ext. 263

2. Complete your personal profile and begin to circulate it to interim moderators of congregations that interest you. Forward a copy to Ministry and Church Vocations for assistance in circulating your profile, if desired.

For a list of interim moderators and ministry opportunities: <https://presbyterian.ca/vacancies>

Candidates living more than easy driving distance from the congregations where they intend to apply are advised to prepare a CD or DVD of themselves leading a service of worship.

3. When a congregation extends a call to the candidate with the approval of the congregation's presbytery, and when subsequently the candidate's presbytery also approves the call and the candidate accepts it, then the candidate is ordained and inducted (or designated and recognized, for diaconal candidates). The new minister's name is placed on the constituent roll of the presbytery.

For Further Clarification

Rev. Tim Purvis

Secretary, Committee on Education and Reception:

Toll-free: 1-800-619-7301, ext. 264
Email: tpurvis@presbyterian.ca