

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

RESEARCH REPORT



A resource of the MESA Ministry Team

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Founded on covenantal values, the United Church of Christ continually aims to embody and share practices of covenant interdependently, recognizing always that the spirit of God will take a variety of expressions but that our polity functions best when we are able to see how each piece connects to the bigger whole of Christ's church.

This research on the state of Committees on Ministry is a ground-breaking exploration of similarities and differences in COM practices throughout the denomination. As collaborative conversations between committees across the lines of associations and conferences rise, it is important to recognize how COMs currently function in the UCC and to establish a basic understanding of those practices in order to name changing processes and emerging trends.

This research project had three specific goals:

- 1: To provide a comprehensive overview of Committee on Ministry work for the United Church of Christ, including patterns and trends.
- 2: To give context for the work of the Habakkuk Group as they discern the next iteration of the Manual on Ministry.
- 3: To assist the MESA team in producing necessary resources to support conference staff and strengthen the ministry of COMs.

UCC COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY RESEARCH REPORT

GENERAL OVERVIEW

- 38 Conferences
- 172 Associations (including conferences acting as associations)
- 1 non-geographic conference (Calvin Synod)
- 1 non-geographic association (Native Hawaiians)
- 1 association COM shared across two conferences (Vermont-New Hampshire)
- approximately 173 total Committees on Ministry including permanent subcommittees, super committees of conferences, and conferences acting as associations

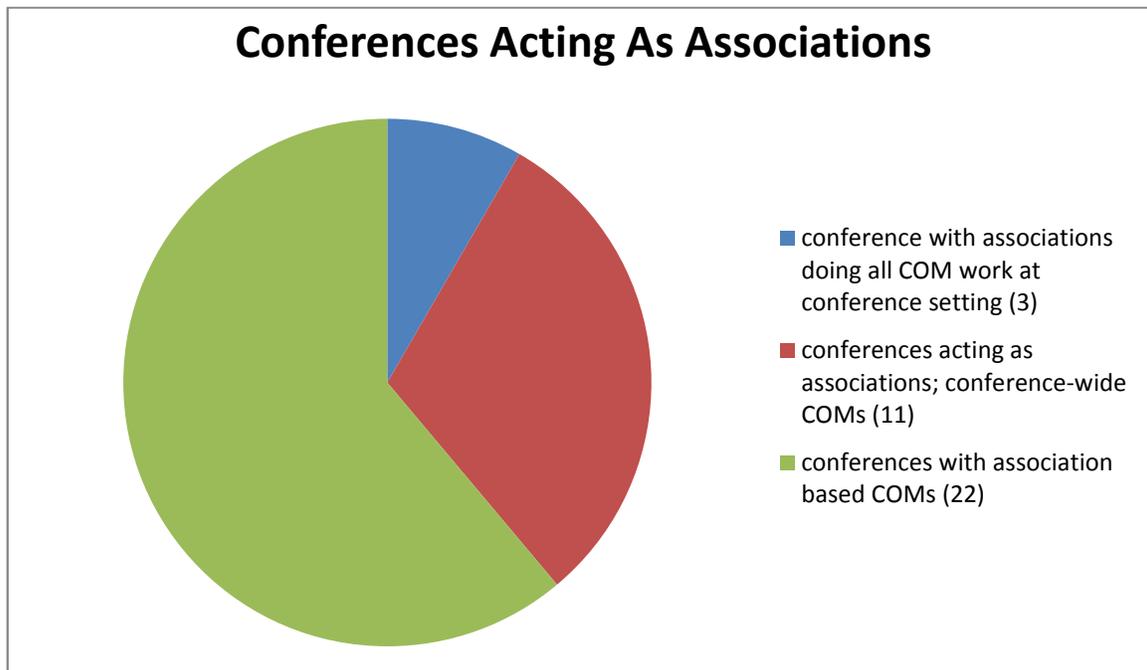
REPORT INDEX

General Overview	page 1
Committee on Ministry Structures and Delegation of Authority	pages 4 – 7
Conferences Acting as Associations	
Collaboration within Association-based COMs	
Permanent Separate Association COM Sub-committees	
Graphic Representation	
Committee on Ministry Names	page 7
Frequency of Committee on Ministry Meetings	page 8
Committee on Ministry Membership	page 8 – 9
Committee on Ministry Size	
Committee on Ministry Terms	
Ministerial Standing Requirements	page 9
Member in Discernment Requirements	page 9 – 10
Fitness Review Appeals & Reporting	page 11
Materials in Addition to the Manual on Ministry	page 11 – 12
COM Role with Search & Call	page 12 – 13
COM Role with Local Congregations	page 13 – 14
Decisions Regarding Ministerial Authorization	page 14 – 15
Recordkeeping	page 15 – 16
Committee on Ministry Training	page 16 – 17
General Perceptions of COM work	page 17 – 21
Research Methodology	page 21
Closing Reflections	page 22 – 23

COM STRUCTURES & DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

CONFERENCES ACTING AS ASSOCIATIONS

Fourteen of the 38 conferences (or over 1/3 of the conferences) act as associations or hold all COM responsibilities at the conference setting.



Conferences acting as Associations (meaning one unified association that is the same as the conference): Florida, Illinois South, Kansas-Oklahoma, Minnesota, Montana Northern Wyoming, Northern Plains, Pacific Northwest, Penn Northeast, Rhode Island, Southeast, Southwest ¹

Calvin Synod, Central Pacific and Northern California Nevada Conferences hold **all** of their Committee on Ministry functions in a conference-wide committee even though they retain separate associations.

Of the 14 conferences functioning as associations or holding all of COM work at the conference setting, 4 of them (Calvin Synod, Northern Plains, Montana Northern Wyoming, Rhode Island) do not break into subcommittees.

Of the remaining 10 conferences that act as an association or hold all COM work at the conference setting, all break into permanent standing subcommittees:

¹ Although it primarily functions as a Conference acting as an Association, South Dakota is not included in this list because the Dakota Association operates outside of the Conference as Association structure.

- Central Pacific: Committee on Ministry / MID subcommittee
- Florida: 4 regional subcommittees
- Illinois South: Committee on Preparation/ Committee on Church/ Committee on Authorization
- Kansas-Oklahoma: Committee on Discernment / Committee on Authorization / Committee on Church (not currently functioning)
- Minnesota: Committee on Discernment/ Committee on Authorization / Committee on Covenant
- Northern California: Committee on Authorization (MIDs) / Committee on Standing / Committee on Church (not currently functioning)
- Pacific Northwest: geographically split east / west
- Penn Northeast: Church and Ministry- ordained ministers / MID for Ordination / MID for License or Commissioning / Licensed Committee
- Southeast: MID Committee / Scholarship Committee/ Psychological Assessment Committee / Support and Nurture Committee/ Privilege of Call and Dual Standing Committee
- Southwest: Committee on Church and Ministry A (Ministerial Authorization) / Committee on Church and Ministry B (relationships with local churches)

Collaboration within Association-based COMs

There are 22 conferences who work with association-based Committees on Ministry. Ten of the conferences working **with** an association-based COM structure have chairs or representatives of their COMs meet regularly (ranging from annually to bi-monthly) to talk about COM matters. Most often these conference-wide gatherings of committee members from various COMs meet to discuss conference compensation guidelines, training for clergy and/or COM members, and boundary training requirements.

Of the conferences who have independent association Committees on Ministry, several have cooperative conference-wide committees (in the tally of total COMs cooperative conference-wide committees are referred to as super committees):

- Iowa: 5 of their 6 associations do fitness reviews together
- Massachusetts: all 11 associations do fitness reviews together, 4 of the 11 do MIDs together
- New Hampshire: all 7 associations do fitness reviews together
- Penn Southeast: 4 of their 7 associations do fitness reviews together
- Vermont: 5 of their 8 associations do all of their COM work together

Several other conferences with association-based COMs hold conference-wide Response Team pools.

Permanent Separate Association COM Sub-committees

Of the COMs working **within** associations, roughly 8 or 0.5% divide into permanent separate committees that **do not** formally meet together. Examples of the permanent separate association sub-committee breakdowns include:

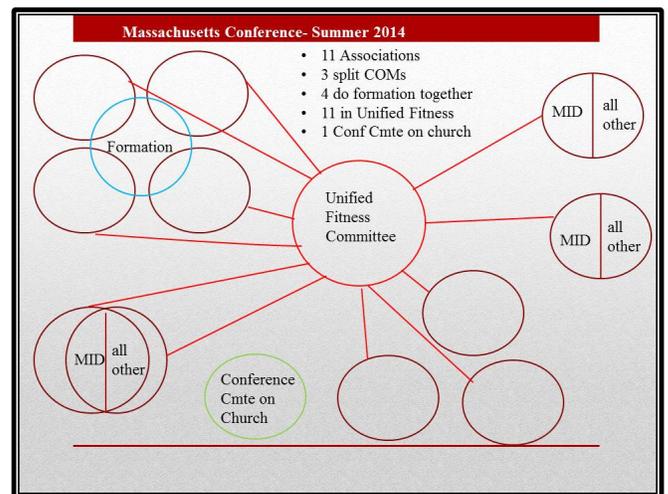
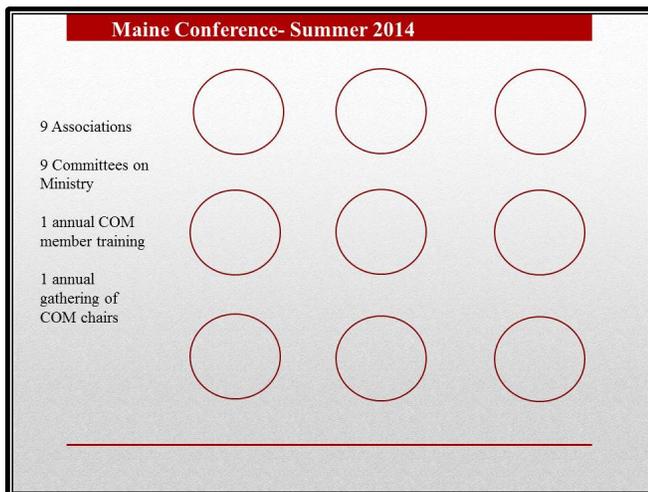
- Central Atlantic: *New Jersey Association* - Pre Ordination and Post Ordination
- Massachusetts: *Andover/Essex Association* - Committee on Formation and Committee on Standing

- Massachusetts: Metro Boston Association - Committee on Ministry with MIDs and Committee on Ministerial Standing
- Missouri Mid-South: St Louis Association - Committee on Oversight and Committee on Preparation
- Ohio: Central Southeast Association - Department for Preparation for Authorized Ministry and Department for Church and Authorized Ministry
- Penn Central: Lancaster Association - Church and Ministry Committee on Ministerial Review and Church and Ministry Committee for MIDs
- Southern California: Eastern Association - Section A (MIDs) and Section B (everything else)
- New York: Metro NY Association - Committee on Ordination and Standing, Committee on Congregational Development and Committee Spiritual Life and Development

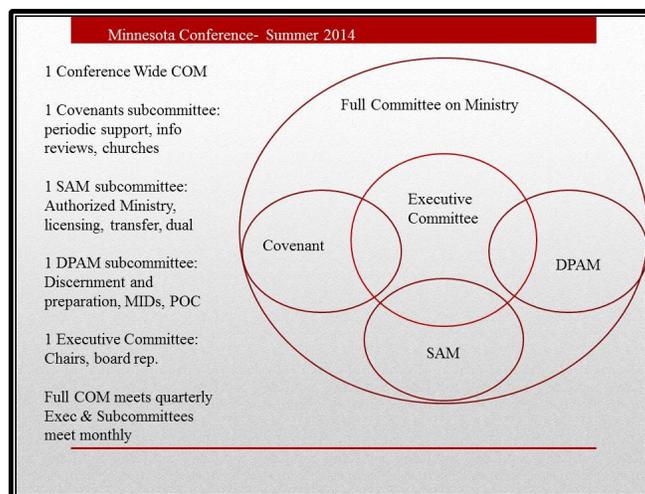
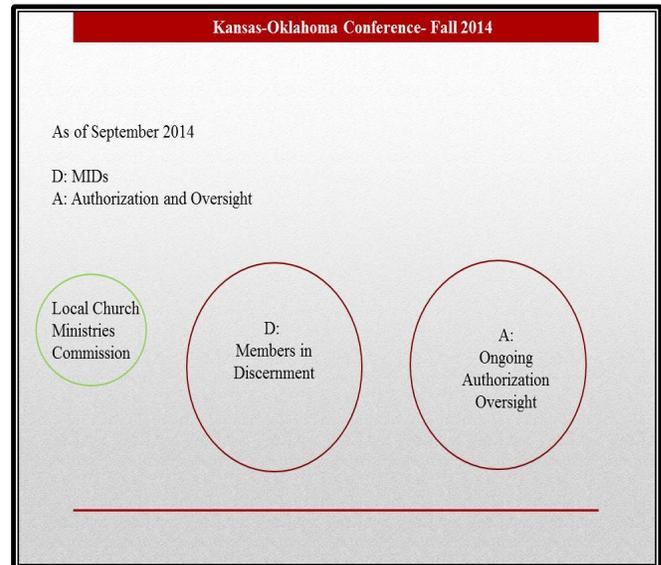
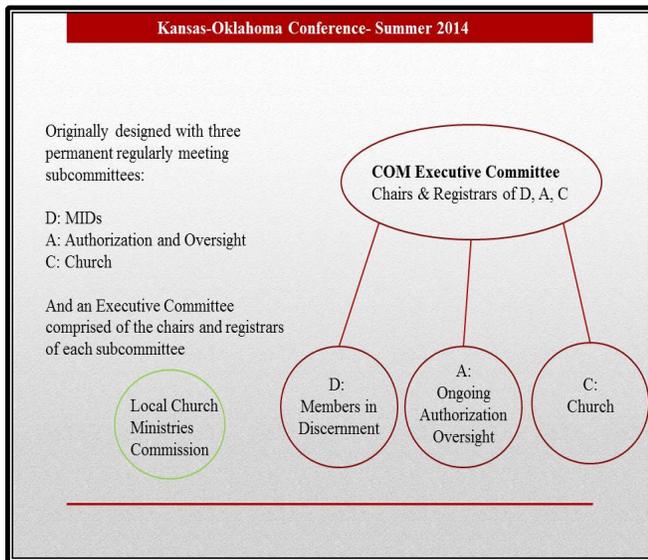
Graphic Representation

During the initial phase of research, graphical representations were developed to capture the Committee on Ministry structures of two conferences with association-based COMs (Maine and Massachusetts) and two conferences acting as associations (Kansas-Oklahoma and Minnesota). These graphical representations are designed to capture the essence of COM work during a particular window of time: Summer 2014. Changes have been made to these structures since the date of initial research; one such change is noted in the Kansas-Oklahoma image.

Conferences with Association-Based COMs



Conferences Acting as Associations



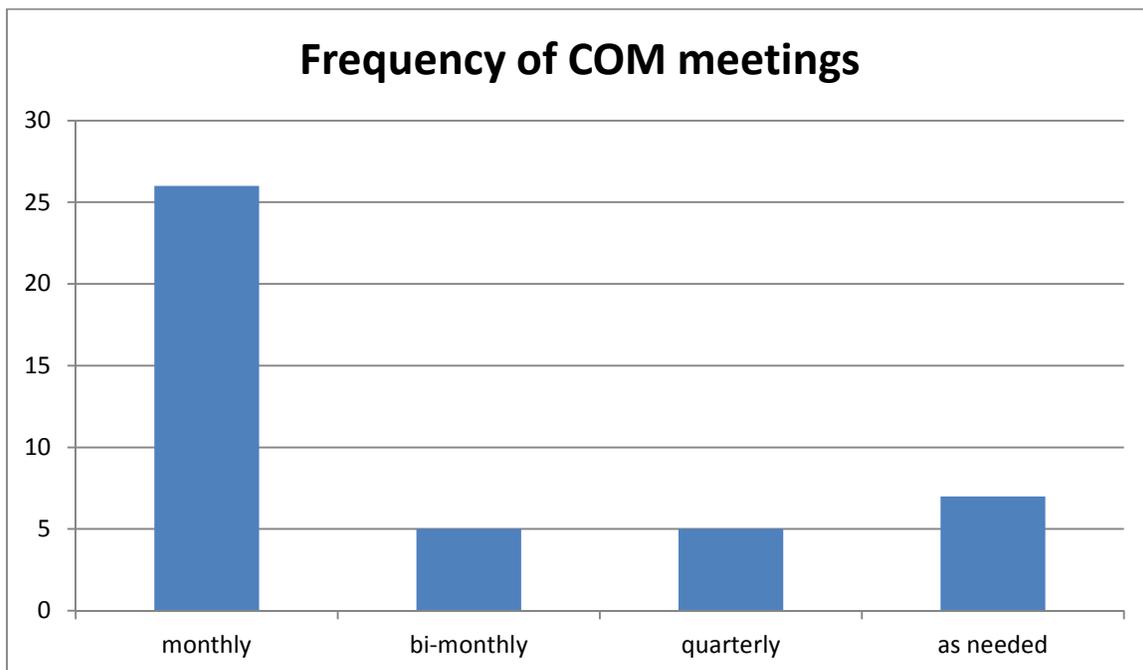
COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY NAMES

The formal names of “Committees on Ministry” are fairly evenly split between “Committees on Ministry” and “Committees on Church and Ministry” or a close variation of each. The names of subcommittees vary drastically as evidenced in this report.

² In this report, the term “Committee on Ministry” or “COM” is used because it is the term used in the UCC Constitution and Bylaws.

FREQUENCY OF COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY MEETINGS

Twenty-six of the conferences reported that the majority of their COMs meet monthly, perhaps with a month off during the summer. Five conferences reported that at least one of their COMs meets every other month. Five conferences reported that their COMs meet quarterly; both Montana Northern-Wyoming and Central Pacific said that their quarterly meetings last two days. One association COM meets twice a year. A handful of conferences have regularly-meeting subcommittees but only bring the whole committee together once or twice per year. Seven conferences said that they have at least one association COM that only meets as necessary.



COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY MEMBERSHIP

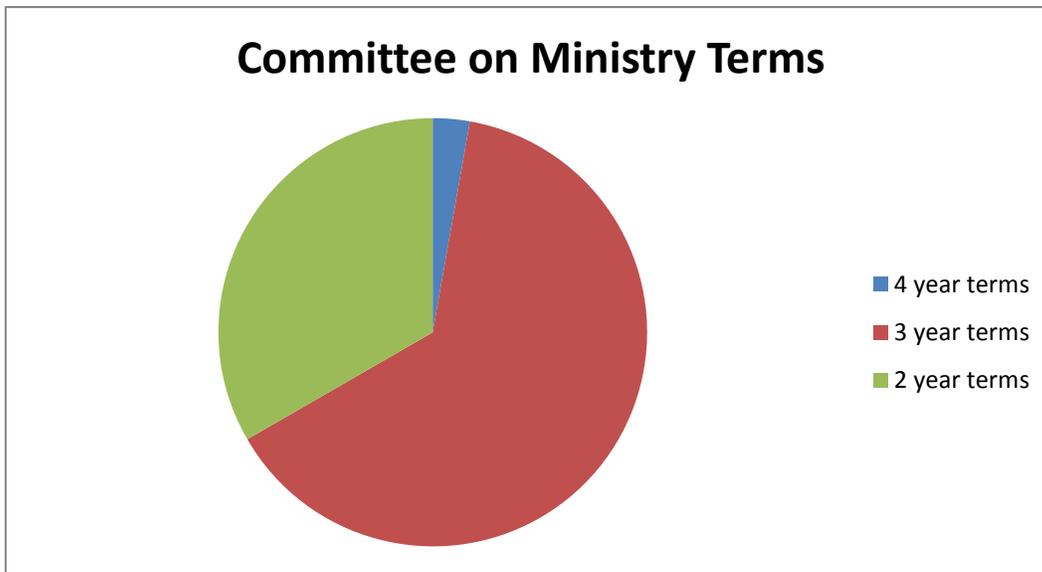
Committee on Ministry Size

The average number of Committee members is 12. Six COMs have 20 or more members (highest is 30), and 6 COMs have 6 or fewer members (lowest is 2).

Committee on Ministry Terms

Sixty-four percent of Committee on Ministry terms are 3-year terms (renewable). Twenty-nine percent are 2-year terms (renewable). One conference (Florida) has 4-year terms.³ Due to the possibility of renewals (three times for two-year terms, twice for three-year terms), the average COM member can serve 6 consecutive years on the Committee.

³ Not all registrars have term limits.



MINISTERIAL STANDING REQUIREMENTS

Required Boundary Training

Only 3 conferences (Hawaii, Southeast and Southern) have at least one association that **does not** require boundary training.⁴

Required Continuing Education

Nine conferences (Indiana-Kentucky, Illinois, Illinois South, Iowa, Maine, Nebraska, Northern California, Northern Plains, Penn West) have at least one Association that **requires** continuing education. The largest concern is how to track ministers' continuing education.⁵ Some associations require continuing education for their licensed ministers but not for their ordained ministers.

MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT REQUIREMENTS

Thirty of the conferences responded to the question, "What requirements do you have for Members in Discernment?" In answering, most referred to these requirements specifically for MIDs seeking ordination.

Of the 30 respondents, 15 reported that Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) was required. An additional 6 said CPE requirements were determined case by case.

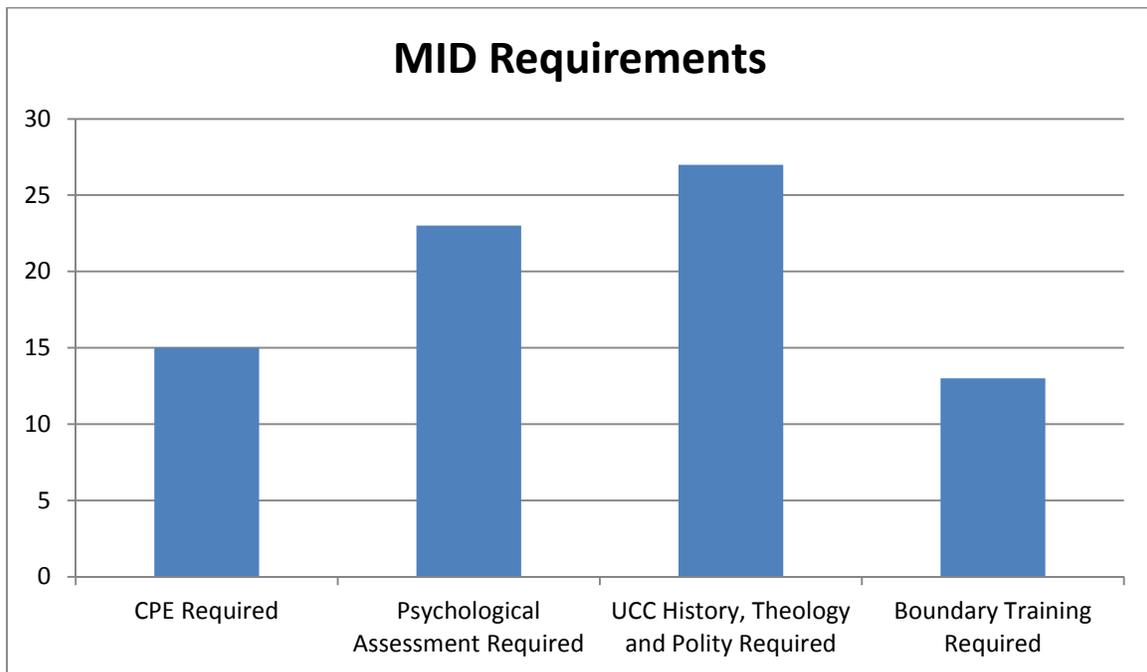
Of the 30 respondents, 23 reported that psychological assessments (usually through a Ministry Development Center) were required. Four stated that psychological assessments were determined case by case. Three said they do not require psychological evaluations.

⁴ Several of these associations have revisited this decision since the publication of this report.

⁵ The UCC's Data Hub now allows for tracking of standing requirements including boundary training and continuing education.

Nine of the 30 responding conferences stated that field placement was a requirement for Ordination; several made assumptions that field placement happened as part of seminary education.

Twenty-seven of the 30 conferences reported that a UCC History, Theology and Polity course was required for Members in Discernment; two of the 30 conferences said they assumed MIDs took this course in seminary.



Additionally:

- 13 conferences said boundary training was required for all MIDs.
- 2 conferences require a social justice project
- 5 conferences mentioned requiring criminal background checks for MIDs.
- 2 conferences mentioned a robust mentoring program requirement
- 1 conference requires a Masters of Divinity for ordination⁶
- 1 conference requires a MID Portfolio
- 2 conferences mentioned requiring a UCC Ministerial Profile as part of the discernment process
- 1 conference said spiritual direction was required on a case by case basis

⁶ An exception has been made for a person with a Masters of Arts in Religion degree.

FITNESS REVIEW APPEALS & REPORTING

The most common answer to the question, “Who hears the appeal of a fitness review?” was “I’m not sure”. The second highest answer was the Conference Board of Directors (for COMs operating at a conference level) or Association Executive Committees (for COMs operating at an association level). Several reported that appeals go either directly to an Ecclesiastical Council or could go to an EC after review by an executive committee. Other reported practices included ad hoc committees to hear fitness review appeals, appeals heard by the same committee that adjudicated the matter, or another subcommittee of the COM.

Reporting of disciplinary outcomes of fitness reviews ranged dramatically. Most conferences reported sending in the results to MESA. Some have official policies where all authorized ministers and congregations in the conference receive written notification of disciplinary actions, some include the COM actions in association or conference annual reports, others do not share the information beyond the committee doing the adjudication.⁷

MATERIALS IN ADDITION TO THE MANUAL ON MINISTRY

During the course of this research, approximately 95 documents were collected from 19 different conferences. These materials are formally adopted policies and procedures in their setting in addition to the Manual on Ministry.

Over 95 conference/association policies exist in addition to Manual on Ministry.

A clear 50% of the submitted materials were guidelines for the Member in Discernment process. This trend is logical because the current version of the Manual on Ministry is dated from the year 2000, and the Ministry Issues Pronouncement in 2005 dramatically altered language and practices regarding those seeking a call to authorized ministry in the denomination.

Other trends in submitted materials included specific checklists for COMs to use corresponding to different aspects of the Manual on Ministry (e.g. ordination checklist, transfer of standing checklist, Privilege of Call checklist).

⁷ MESA strongly recommends that all Fitness Review Appeals are heard by the association or conference governing body. All appeals are to be related to process and not fitness determinations. All reports of disciplinary actions resulting from a fitness review should be shared with MESA and recorded in the annual meeting report of the Committee on Ministry. A separate document on [Recommended Fitness Review Appeals Process and Reporting](#) is available from MESA.

Three conferences (Northern California Nevada, Central Pacific, and Massachusetts) along with the Fox Valley Association in the Illinois Conference have cultures of creating specific resources as companions to each section of the Manual on Ministry.

Examples of formally adopted policies and procedures in addition to the Manual on Ministry, not related to ministerial authorization, include:

- Guidelines for Concluding a Pastorate: Central Pacific Conference
- Recognized Partner Minister Standing: Hawaii Conference
- Interim Ministry Manual: Fox Valley Association, Illinois Conference
- Guidelines for Retiring Clergy: Illinois South Conference
- Procedures for an Ecclesiastical Council: Minnesota Conference

The Calvin Synod continues to operate on the basis of the Evangelical and Reformed Church's Policies and Procedures.

COM ROLE WITH SEARCH & CALL

Each conference was asked to describe any connections that their Committee(s) on Ministry have with Search & Call processes. Examples included: reviewing profiles, reviewing call agreements, hosting 3- or 4-way covenant conversations, arranging neutral pulpits, staffing pastoral elections, or processing transfers of standing. The most common response was that all Search & Call-related activities were handled by conference staff.

call agreements

Twenty conferences specifically mentioned that their COMs review call agreements. Several specifically noted that the COM took the most time to review call agreements for MIDs “approved for ordination pending call”. In general most conferences who reviewed call agreements said that the process was fairly perfunctory because the agreements were already signed before COM review.

3- and 4-way covenants

Fifteen conferences specifically mentioned that their COMs engaged in 3- or 4-way covenant conversations. Many conferences noted that they hold standing for authorized ministers serving in specialized ministry settings but have not engaged in formalizing 4-way covenants.

transfer of standing

Fourteen conferences specifically mentioned that their COMs play an active role in transfer of ministerial standing. A minor subset of those interviewed said that all transfer of standing processes were done by conference staff.

exit interviews

Eleven conferences said that their COMs, or a representative from their COMs, did exit interviews with local pastors. The uses of exit interviews were inconsistent across the life of the church. Some conferences reported only doing exit interviews when the congregation was in conflict; others said that exit interviews were occasionally combined with Periodic Reviews.

installation services

All installation services included participation from the wider church, however, the initiator of the installation services varied greatly across the church. In some locations the COM coordinated installation services, in others the conference or the association. Rarely was the local church itself the initiator of installation services. Interviews revealed that conference staff or COM representatives were usually involved liturgically in installation services, and that if an offering was received during the service it would be designated for a Member in Discernment fund for the association/conference.

Some outlier Committee on Ministry practices involving Search & Call included the COM staffing pastoral elections, the COM reviewing Ministerial Profiles, the COM arranging neutral pulpits, or the COM approving Local Church Profiles. One COM requires meeting with potential candidates before they preach their candidating sermons. The pattern for COM involvement in matters related to Search & Call closely aligned with those regions of the UCC formerly part of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

COM ROLE WITH LOCAL CONGREGATIONS

Each conference was asked what the role was between their COMs and local churches. Examples provided included: maintaining standing, new church starts, or on-going relationship building. Much more telling than the statistics in this category were the narratives:

- “At the functioning level right now they don’t have time to be in relationship with churches - only in crisis for a situational support.”
- “This is a point of tension. COMs are ill-equipped to talk to new churches or affiliating congregations.”
- “We struggle with this.”
- “We tried but things have fallen apart.”
- “This just doesn’t happen.”
- “Our work with churches is hit or miss.”
- “We don’t do anything proactive with our churches.”
- “This is one area we do very poorly.”
- “There is not much energy or drive to visit each church.”

Only 6 conferences said they have at least one association COM or a conference-wide COM that has a functioning subcommittee that works specifically with local churches. Of these, Illinois Conference, New York Conference and Southwest Conference appear to have the most robust COM work with local congregations. A handful of additional conferences mentioned having COM subcommittees working with local churches at some point but they are no longer functioning.



Interestingly, 19 conferences mentioned that they have separate conference-wide (or rarely, association-based) committees that work with local congregations, including new church starts, congregational vitality or affiliating congregations. The committees had little or no direct relationship with COMs. Several mentioned specific roles for the Conference Board of Directors in working with new ministries.

The most common reason mentioned for a COM to be working with a local congregation was if there was a conflict in the church. The second most common response was that the COM receives and maintains standing for local churches; mention was made of the Manual on Church but its use was rare. One Conference said that their COM intentionally works with local churches to form Discernment Committees with their congregation members who are MIDs.

DECISIONS REGARDING MINISTERIAL AUTHORIZATION

All Committees on Ministry reported taking seriously their role in discerning and assessing Members in Discernment. All COMs took an active role in making a determination if a particular MID was ready to be approved for authorization (ordination, licensing, commissioning).

75% of conferences/associations use Ecclesiastical Councils for ordinations

Of the 36 conferences responding, 27 conferences or 75% said that conference- or association-wide Ecclesiastical Councils were held in order to approve a MID for ordination pending call.

Of the remaining 9 conferences:

- in 3, the COM makes the determination for authorization for ordination
- in 2, the process varies between associations; in one of these associations it is the association Board of Directors who approves MIDs for ordination pending call
- 1 holds closed ordination examination panels to approve authorization for ordination
- 1 the COM is called into session as the Ecclesiastical Council
- in 1, the conference Board of Directors approves ordination pending call
- 1 has the candidates, once approved by the COM, stand before the conference annual meeting for a vote of all delegates

Of the 31 conferences reporting on their process for approving licensure, 30 reported that the Committee on Ministry was empowered to approve authorization for licensing. Only one association required Ecclesiastical Councils for licensed ministers.

< 1% of conferences/associations use ecclesiastical councils for licensure

There was significantly less consistency on the process for approving authorization for commissioned ministers. Several conferences noted that they do not have any commissioned ministers.

Of the 26 conferences reporting:

- 10 said that Ecclesiastical Councils were required for commissioning
- 14 said that the COM had the authority to commission
- 1 conference uses closed examination panels
- 1 conference indicated that either an Ecclesiastical Council was required or COMs could approve depending on which association within the conference

Insufficient data was collected to determine whether Privilege of Call requires an Ecclesiastical Council across the United Church of Christ.

RECORDKEEPING

Ministers' Records

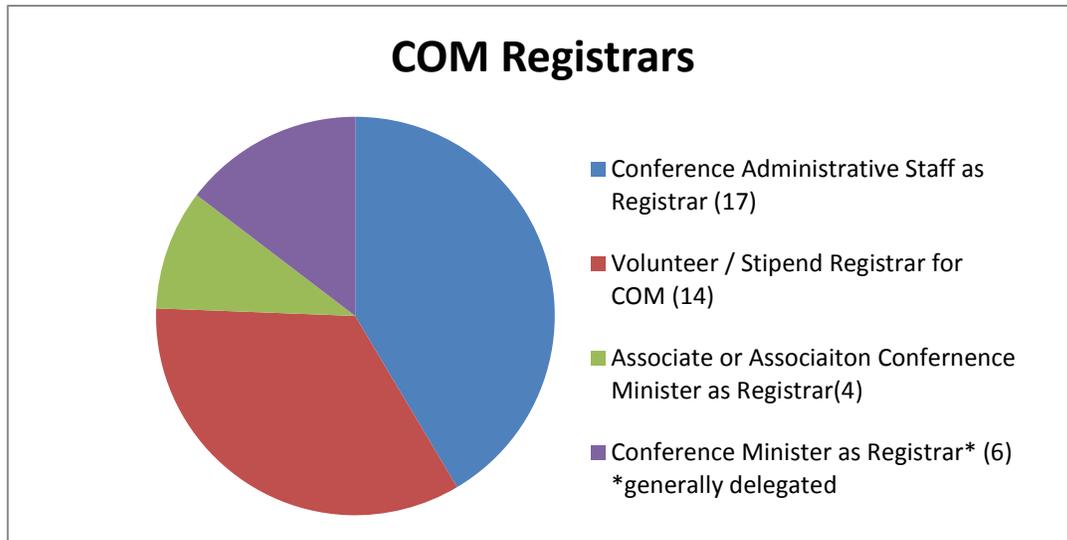
- 17 of the conferences reported that ministerial records are stored only in the conference office.
- 5 conferences reported that they have duplicate records stored with the conference office and with the Committee on Ministry.
- 6 conferences reported that their ministers' files were stored *either* in the conference office or in a separate association office.
- 2 conferences reported that their ministers' files were only kept in separate association offices.
- 8 conferences reported that ministers' files were in some combination of registrars' homes, COM chairs' churches, associations, or possibly a few in the conference office.
- Even if ministers' files were generally stored elsewhere, most conferences still reported keeping fitness review files in the conference office.

Registrars

There was a great variety of responses provided regarding the record keeping functions of Committees on Ministry. Six conferences (Calvin Synod, Hawaii, Illinois South, Northern California, Pacific Northwest, and Penn Northeast) noted that officially the Conference Minister serves as registrar but delegates at least part of those responsibilities to a conference administrator; those tallies are included in the totals below. Four conferences (Southern, Ohio, Southern California, and Illinois) said that in at least some of their associations the ACM or Association Minister serves as the official registrar.

Seventeen of the conferences reported that a conference administrator serves as the registrar for their Committees on Ministry. Of these 17, they may or may not have a separate member of the COM taking minutes at the meeting. There were 9 conferences reporting that there is a volunteer within the COM that serves as a secretary / scribe / clerk taking minutes for the meetings and is occasionally responsible for reporting ministerial changes to the conference office.

Fourteen conferences reported having official association or conference registrars who were not part of association / conference staff. Some non-staff registrars are strictly volunteer while others receive a stipend. Several conferences mentioned that training for these registrars takes place one-on-one with conference staff. Two conferences (Connecticut and New Hampshire) appear to have the most robust trainings for registrars.



UCC Data Hub

Regardless of how records were kept in Committees on Ministry, the vast majority of conferences utilize a member of the conference administrative staff to input changes into the UCC Data Hub. Twenty-nine conferences reported that *only* conference administrators inputted ministerial changes to the Data Hub. Five conferences (Illinois, Illinois South, Ohio, Calvin Synod and Southern) reported that either a conference administrator or a CM/ACM entered changes. Three conferences (Maine, Ohio, and South Central) reported that either an association registrar or conference administrator entered changes. And three conferences (Nebraska, Rhode Island, and Rocky Mountain) reported that all changes to the Data Hub were inputted by volunteer registrars.

COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY TRAINING

Twenty-four conferences responded to the question “How are COMs trained?” with “**on the job training**” or a similar phrase. Within these 24 conferences, several mentioned that when coming to an area of work unfamiliar to the Committee, the CM or ACM staffing the COM would offer wisdom or interpretation of the Manual on Ministry.

1/3 of conferences offer an orientation to new COM members

Thirteen conferences said that some form of initial orientation took place for incoming COM members. These training ranged from providing a copy of the Manual on Ministry to full day orientations as part of an annual meeting.

1/3 of conferences offer an annual training retreat for COM members

Thirteen conferences said that they host annual trainings for their COM members. Most often these are annual gatherings of all of the COM members from across the associations. Conferences located in the Mid-Atlantic States mentioned attending the annual COM day at Lancaster Theological Seminary; conferences in New England mentioned trainings for COMs open to Committees across these conferences. Two other conferences said that they hold conference wide trainings but not every year.

Three conferences (Massachusetts, Hawaii and Pacific Northwest) specifically mentioned assigning reading assignments from MOM or other resources prior to COM meetings when they know specific items are on the agenda.

Three locations (the Chicago Metro Association, Vermont Conference, and the Southwest Conference) said that they set aside specific COM meetings not to meet with MIDs or Authorized Ministers but rather for development of the COM.

At least a dozen conferences specifically mentioned bringing in MESA to provide training for their Committees on Ministry.

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF COM WORK

Each person interviewed⁸ was asked to respond to three open ended questions:

“Overall, how are the COMs functioning in your setting?”

“What would you do to improve COM work in your setting?”

“What else is there to say about your conference in regards to COM work?”

Because the responses were qualitative rather than quantitative, a sampling of the interviewee comments is collected below.⁹

“Overall, how are the COMs functioning in your setting?”

- They take their work seriously
- They need clarity
- COM work should not be driven by the Conference Minister
- They take the work seriously but perhaps with too much autonomy

⁸ Research methodology described on page 23 of this report shows that the majority of those responding were conference ministers or area/associate conference ministers.

⁹ Repetition was included in these responses to demonstrate trends

- We have some dysfunctional COMs
- The conference staff are vital in the success of COMs
- In a grading scale our COMs are at a C+ or B-
- They need to remember that they are doing this work on behalf of the whole church
- They need to learn to say “no”
- This is complex work
- COMs can be used as a power base
- The overuse of autonomy can be problematic
- We have inconsistent functionality across our association COMs
- Our new conference-wide COM is showing great promise
- Our COM says “yes” too often
- Most of our COM members are over 60 years old
- We are inconsistent across our associations
- We need to remember that this work is for the whole UCC
- COMs work demands a great deal from volunteers
- We need clarity on what are staff versus COM responsibilities
- It’s awkward when the COM only meets twice a year, things get delayed
- Our COM members are faithful; there is so much to do
- Scheduling is difficult to meet with all of our MIDs and ministers
- Our COM is staff-driven
- Fitness Reviews take an emotional toll on the COM members
- More often than not, I leave impressed with the decisions of our COM
- The best leadership in our conference is in our COMs
- It’s a blessing that we are a conference acting as an association
- On a scale of 1-10, our COM gets a 2
- We have long backups and heavy agendas
- The key to a successful COM is the chairperson
- We need to pay more attention to our isolated clergy
- Our COM is one of the best in the denomination
- Our COM used to be a 2 (on a scale of 1-10); now they are a 6 or a 7
- We have inconsistent capacity across our associations
- The COM does good work but I worry about objectivity in some of the small associations
- Our COMs do excellent work

“What would you do to improve COM work in your setting?”

- I'd want more uniformity
- Regionalization
- Boundary trainings
- Better reporting practices
- We need to do Periodic Reviews
- I'd like to see a process for evaluating ministerial competency post-authorization, not fitness reviews, but whether someone is still competent in ministry
- Better training for COMs
- Move to one COM for the conference
- I'd like to have more case studies to use with our COMs
- I'd like to improve the perception that our COMs are scary, that they are gatekeepers
- I'd like for our Ecclesiastical Councils not to be rubberstamps, the process should be holy not full of hoops
- We need to improve our documentation
- It would be nice to have videos to use for COM trainings
- I'd improve the consistency our COMs
- We need to base our work more on the resources we have rather than being personality-based in our decisions
- I'd like to see us work more with the nominating committees on getting good COM members
- We need to offer training for local churches who have MIDs
- I'd like to see biblical resources on confidentiality
- We need to understand our core standards
- We spend way too much time in meetings
- We would improve our record storage
- I'd like to see better training of our COM
- Having a conference-wide COM
- I'd have us not drag our conversations in the COM from month to month with no resolution
- We need to do better at COM trainings and capacity building
- More training
- We need to start doing Periodic Reviews
- We don't know what to do with Commissioned ministers
- I'd like for us to have a conference-wide committee
- We need better trainings and a common vocabulary
- We need to do Periodic Reviews
- I'd like to see Continuing Education required
- We need to do Periodic Reviews and Information Reviews with our Authorized Ministers
- I'd like to move to one COM for the Conference
- We need to build up the capacity of the lay members on the COM

- I'd change our geography
- We need to find a balance between humanity and the rules
- We need a complete restructure of our COM work
- We have over 30 people on the COM with near-lifetime appointments, that's not good.
- I'd like to see Fitness Reviews regionalized
- We need to take in the materials and resources produced by the wider church and use them in our COMs
- I would want a conference-wide COM
- We need to do Periodic Reviews
- I'd add an orientation for new COM members

“What else is there to say about your conference in regards to COM work?”

- We're trying to figure out how to use technology appropriately with COMs (training and record-keeping)
- Our geography is a concern
- COM work is becoming increasingly complex
- We need to get better at saying “no”
- We have unique ecumenical relationships with partner denominations
- I'd love for us to have UCC history and polity trainings for our COM members
- We've discovered that our lay members are very uncomfortable in our COMs
- I'd like to see us to move away from being gatekeepers to being discerners
- I hope the new version of MOM will give us the skills to have difficult conversations
- MOM is our most clear connection to the wider church
- I wish we had an online forum for conference staff
- We have diminishing staff capacity
- We need help with what to do with licensed ministers (and MIDs seeking licensure)
- We need a better way to share best practices
- We need more uniform practices across the church
- Our geography hinders us
- I'd like to see general overviews for each section of MOM
- MOM is our most common vocabulary
- I'd like to see all authorized ministers trained on the new version of MOM, not just COMs trained
- I'd like to at least have us bring our COM chairs together on a regular basis
- We need clarity on commissioned ministry
- We're exploring creative staffing models
- We need to address the large numbers of part-time pastors
- I'm interested in having a unified Fitness Review Committee for our conference
- Technology can be good and not good, need to find the balance

- I'd like to see a tool that helps us to prioritize the COM workload
- Having one conference-wide committee with strong subcommittees has been the key to our success
- We eat meals together often, the fellowship is invaluable
- Our COMs need help living with nuance, not everything is black and white
- I really appreciate the MESA Memo and COMma
- The volume of COM work is daunting
- We've had a few ordinations through multiple paths that have been very successful
- We do not use Leave of Absence at all in our conference
- This work is not one-size fits all
- We need to build trust overall within the conference
- We work very closely with our regional theological education program for licensed ministers
- We love the MID Journaling the Journey

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The inspiration for this research project came from a joint meeting of representatives from across the Ohio Association Committees on Ministry who asked for a report on how COM work was structured in other conferences/associations. A brief overview was provided to this gathering but the need for greater research was evident.

A general list of questions was established and refined by the Rev. Holly MillerShank, Team Leader for the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team. Rev. MillerShank conducted 36 separate phone interviews. Twenty-five interviews took place with Conference Ministers, and 15 took place with Area or Association Conference Ministers. Several of the phone interviews were conference calls with more than one ACM. One phone interview was conducted with a COM chair. All five of the Association Ministers in Ohio submitted written reports as did one ACM and two Conference Ministers from other regions.

This research was designed to capture a moment in time: *July to September 2014*. Several interviewees mentioned upcoming potential changes to their COM work, however what was recorded was how COMs were functioning at the time of the actual interview.

This work strove to honor the nuances of each ministry setting. Because of the significant structural and procedural differences across not only conferences but also associations within conferences, some generalization was necessary to complete this report.

The hopes for this research are three-fold: (1) To provide a comprehensive overview of Committee on Ministry work for the United Church of Christ, including patterns and trends. (2) To give context for the work of the Habakkuk Group as they discern the next iteration of the Manual on Ministry. (3) To assist the MESA Ministry Team in producing necessary resources to support conference staff and strengthen the ministry of COMs.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

- Associations/conferences recognize and honor the importance of Committee on Ministry work, however the inconsistency across settings is apparent. There was a strong recognition throughout this project that increased consistency and excellence is desired in our COMs.
- Significant attention needs to be given to the role and nature of Commissioned Ministry.
- Resources need to be provided on theological understandings of Ecclesiastical Councils and sharing of best practices regarding Ecclesiastical Councils.
- Further research needs to be gathered on the use of Information Reviews and Periodic Reviews across the church. In general the research suggested that Periodic Reviews were not being done with Authorized Ministers.
- When in use, 4-way covenants were referred to as beneficial, however it was clear that 4-way covenants are not being used for all authorized ministers in specialized ministry settings.¹⁰
- The use of the *Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers* and of “Member in Discernment” terminology was robust across all association/conference COMs. The volume of MID policies used in addition to Manual on Ministry is an indication that COMs are taking their role in the formation of authorized ministers with seriousness and intentionality.
- Additional research is needed to assess how Dual Standing, Privilege of Call and Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing functions across COMs.
- COMs would benefit from resources describing congregational standing. The vast majority of work with congregations, however, takes place outside of Committees on Ministry, so materials developed regarding church revitalization, affiliation, and new church starts should be geared to these separate committees.
- Development of training materials / sharing of best practices with registrars would be beneficial.
- Overall, increased training and capacity building is desired for COMs. MESA is prepared, willing and able to provide such trainings at the invitation of conference staff. Opportunities for regionalization of COM trainings appear to be growing and will aid in the consistency across settings.
- The existence of the Manual on Ministry was affirmed throughout the interview process and the research collected and shared in this document will prove instrumental in the MOM re-visioning process.



¹⁰ The UCC Data Hub now has a separate tab to record 4-way covenants

I, Rev. Holly MillerShank, author of this report, want to close by thanking all of the conference staff who took the time to be interviewed for this project. I pray that I was able to convey with simplicity and depth the complex nature of Committee on Ministry work in the United Church of Christ.

Finally, throughout this process I felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and desire to faithfully and effectively serve the church of Jesus Christ undergirding the work of all association/conference staff and the Committees on Ministry across the United Church of Christ.

Rev. Holly MillerShank
Minister and Team Leader
Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization
Local Church Ministries
United Church of Christ

**This work is supported by your generous gifts to
Our Church's Wider Mission
and the Strengthen the Church Offering.**



Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

2 Timothy 1:13-14

