

Becoming a Minister

This Handbook explores what it means to become a Minister within Churches of Christ in Victoria and Tasmania.



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WHAT IS “MINISTRY” IN CHURCHES OF CHRIST?

Are We All Called To Serve?

Central to Churches of Christ Vic/Tas (CCVT) is the New Testament practice of the priesthood of all believers and mutual ministry. The priesthood of all believers is where all committed followers of Christ are called through their baptism to live Christ’s priestly life of service and thanksgiving. [See for example, 1 Peter 2:9: ‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’] To put it in another way, from the CCVT’s Shared Values statement, “We value the unique contribution to ministry of each individual believer, and are committed to equipping believers (through, for example, the five-fold ministry pattern of Ephesians 4:11-16) and releasing them to participate in ministry and mission on the basis of their giftedness and capacity”.

This priesthood of all believers can exist because of Christ’s mediation between God and humanity. Our priesthood is the continuation of his priestly work, mediating between God and the world in acts of prayer and servant ministry in love of God and neighbour; and the offering of worship to God.

What About Ministers?

While all the people of God are commissioned through their baptism to share in this servant ministry, since earliest times the church has set some people apart with prayer and the laying on of hands to serve in specific ministries and contexts. These people are not necessarily differently gifted to those who are not specifically set aside but they are often trained to provide leadership within a local worshipping community. People who are set aside are encouraged to live in a certain way, in community, modelling and nurturing spiritual practices, providing servant leadership and oversight, teaching the stories of God and people and the world found in the Bible and being in mission and releasing mission beyond their gathered congregation. The setting aside of people for specific ministries is for the purpose of encouraging ministry in the whole body of Christ and ensuring the health of the Church.

“So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”
Ephesians 4:11-13

CCVT recognises that Ministers with a variety of gifts are needed and draws on the five-fold ministry from Ephesians 4:11 of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.

HOW DO CHURCHES OF CHRIST UNDERSTAND “CALLING” AND “ORDINATION”?

What Is “Calling”?

Calling is a difficult concept to define. It is Christ who sovereignly calls a person into ministry, through the witness of Holy Spirit. The local church discerns and affirms this calling and assists the facilitation of the time and place where the minister is to serve. This may include, locally, those set apart for certain ministries of leadership within a congregation (such as elders, deacons, or pastoral care workers).

What About “Ordination”?

Formal practices of ordination arise from the New Testament pattern of calling people to specific functions within the Church, marked by processes such as fasting, praying, and the laying on of hands. Acts 6:1-6 describes this process: those chosen to ‘wait on tables’ were selected by ‘the whole community’, after which the apostles prayed and laid their hands on them. Similarly, the calling of Saul and Barnabas to the proclamation of the word as missionaries included praying, fasting and the laying on of hands (Acts 13:1-3). On the basis of various similar descriptions, Alexander Campbell wrote: ‘All officers are to be formally and solemnly set apart by the imposition of the hands of the presbytery or eldership of the church. The whole community chooses – the seniors ordain. This is the apostolic tradition...’ [Campbell T, *The Christian System*, p.64.] This understanding of ordination obviously includes various ministries of leadership, including elders and deacons.

At a wider denominational level, ordination is recognition by the Church that one has been called to ministry as a specific way of life. The Council of Churches of Christ in Australia (CCCA) may confer it, at a large gathering such as the CCVT Celebration service, or in a local church. Either way, those who lay hands on the ordained represent the whole Church in the act of ordination.

The CCCA policy on Ordination specifies that only ministers that have been endorsed by their state body will be ordained. The requirements in the policy include:

- Being in a ministry within a Churches of Christ church, team or agency setting;
- Completing a recognised ministry training course of at least three years duration;
- Completing an acceptable discernment process;
- Undertaking a minimum period of two years relevant ministry experience; and
- Making a demonstrable commitment to ongoing professional development.

Ordination, then, is affirmation, blessing, and setting apart for a task of one who has been recognised by the discerning Church as having the necessary gifts and formation for that task. The worshipping community, in the power of the Holy Spirit, performs it. It does not confer any status or privilege, but rather, responsibility and accountability.

WHAT IS “ACCREDITATION” AND “ENDORSEMENT”?

What Is “Accreditation”?

Accreditation is the recognition that a Minister has met an appropriate level of personal, spiritual and leadership formation and is committed to regular external supervision and professional development. This facilitates ongoing development and accountability for Ministers who are recognised as ‘belonging’ within CCVT.

CCVT believes that we will be doing better at developing Leaders, when each Minister, supported by their Community (church or agency), is accredited by CCVT for the role they fulfil. Accreditation includes a commitment by Ministers, again supported by their Community, to lifelong learning. This is expressed through a range of personal and professional development options, including ongoing external supervision and accountability.

This is part of CCVT’s commitment to being a safe place for all people who engage with us, as outlined in the CCVT Safe Places Policy.

Once a person is in a relevant ministry position, their affiliated church or agency will assist them in applying for accreditation. More information can be found on the CCVT website: www.churchesofchrist.org.au

What Is “Endorsement”?

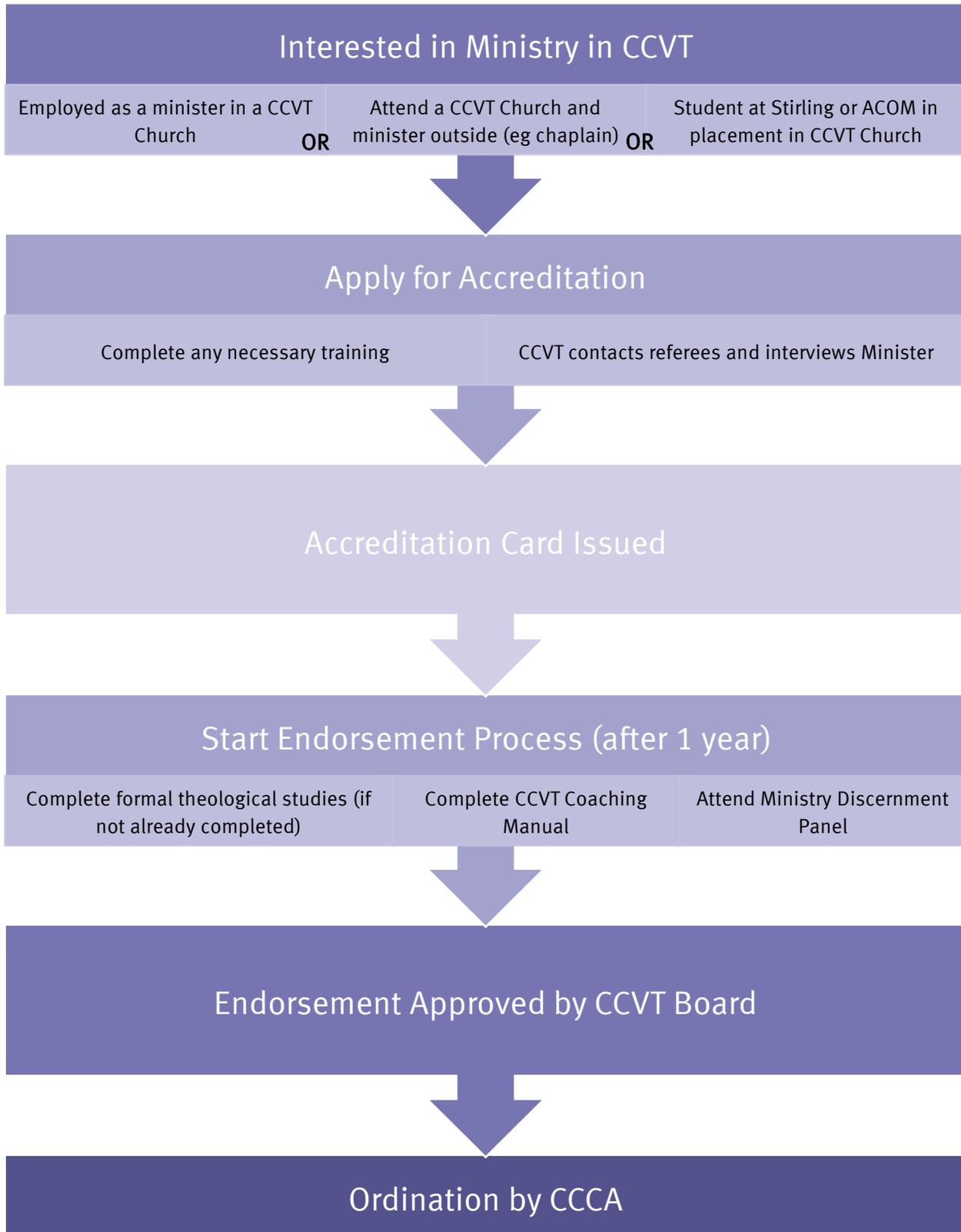
Endorsement is the recognition that a Minister has engaged in formal theological studies and is appropriately equipped and formed for professional ministry in CCVT. The theological studies and ministry experience required by endorsement gives CCVT and its Affiliates additional confidence in the quality of their Ministers. It is a significant achievement on the part of Ministers themselves, and a pre-requisite for ordination by CCCA.

Seeking Endorsement is particularly important when the call to ministry includes a sense of call to minister beyond the boundaries of any one congregation.

CCVT recognises that there are a growing number of ministry contexts that are outside the traditional congregation. Ministers can be Endorsed for Specialised Ministry when their training and formation has been undertaken with a particular ministry context in mind. Examples have included Urban Neighbours of Hope (UNOH) and various chaplaincy roles, although people undertaking these ministries can also seek Endorsement.

A Minister can enter Endorsement once they have been Accredited for one year. More information can be found on the CCVT website: www.churchesofchrist.org.au.

ACCREDITATION AND ENDORSEMENT PROCESS IN CCVT



AM I PERSONALLY READY FOR MINISTRY?

“Am I ready?” is a vital question for every person who would seek to be serving God in ministry to answer. This is even more so for those who are responding to a call to serve God in a specialised and recognised capacity within a local worshipping community. The responsibility of pastoral ministry and leadership is great and not to be approached lightly. Anyone who seeks this position has a duty to themselves and to the community in which they will be ministering to consider this question – Am I ready for ministry?

So how can you answer a question like this? What is a helpful guide? To begin with it must be recognised that it's not about having arrived or being completely ready! After all is anyone ever completely ready? It is about being committed to the journey of personal and spiritual formation. It is about being open to God shaping you and preparing you for the ministry to which you are sensing God's call.

The following six key questions are important to consider if you are thinking about serving God as a Minister in a local worshipping community. Our encouragement to you is to reflect on these qualities as honestly as possible and work through the reflection questions. You could also work through these questions with a spiritual mentor or a trusted church leader, inviting them to reflect back to you their observations on how you are going on this journey.

Six Key Questions

1. Am I In A Growing and Disciplined Relationship With Christ As Lord?

In order to lead and minister to a community of faith the minister must be committed to pursuing a real and growing relationship with Christ as Lord. This is characterised by an intentional pursuit of spiritual disciplines including prayer, meditation and the reading and studying of the Scriptures for personal growth. So ask yourself... Am I developing a prayerful disposition? Do I have an abiding sense of God's presence? Would I be characterised as a person of growing contemplative posture?

2. How Do I Show Forth The Fruit Of The Spirit?

While spiritual growth is a natural outworking of the indwelling Spirit within us, we are still called to 'put on Christ' and in doing so to discipline ourselves for godliness. One way to do this is to allow the Holy Spirit to act within us; to foster His life within us. The outcome of Christ living within us through the Spirit is fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). There must be direct and personal interaction with Christ by the Spirit if the fruit of the Spirit is to be seen in us. So ask yourself...Am I seeking to 'put on Christ' and develop the fruit of the Spirit in my life? Do those around me see the fruit of the Spirit in my life?

3. How Do I Demonstrate Calling and Passion For Ministry?

The person who is ready for ministry has already demonstrated within their own community of faith a deep sense of calling and passion for ministry. They are not just involved in ministry within their community but are recognised as a person who has leadership and pastoral gifts and abilities and are exercising these for the building up of the community. They are a person of high standing within their community. So ask yourself... Am I currently, or have recently been, involved in leadership and pastoral ministry in my local worshipping community? Has my community of faith affirmed in me the gifts and abilities necessary for ministry within a local worshipping community?

4. Do Others See In Me A Spirit Of Humility?

'Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' When Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 5:3 he was referring to a quality of spirit that is seeking to put aside ego and self-promotion. It's a commitment to discovering one's own human limitations and then gratefulness for finding God's grace and adequacy. It is often the by-product of an experience of brokenness. In other words, we can't manufacture this "poverty of spirit". Rather it's an attitude that one applies to life and relationships and is grown slowly, and is something we learn through difficult life experiences which result in a kind of purification of the soul, when all of self has been totally forfeited in preference for God. A soul that is growing into this characteristic is committed to taking up their cross and following Christ. They are beginning to live, lead and minister to others ego free, in complete reliance on God. So ask yourself... Am I secure in my own personhood? Do I know the grace of God? Would the people around me characterise me as being on this journey and as being 'Poor in Spirit'? Do I have a deep trust in God?

5. Am I Socially and Self-Aware?

The person who is personally ready for ministry has a growing social and self-awareness. They are others-focused, respecting the individual uniqueness of each person. They possess a deep love for journeying with people rather than a desire to fix them. They are positive and optimistic in their outlook, able to empathise yet retain a strong sense of self-awareness. They have a growing ability to discern the needs of people and the condition of their hearts and are confident in guiding deeper connections with God and others. They are good listeners to God, self and others and know the importance of confidentiality. So ask yourself... Am I characterised by these qualities? Do people trust me with confidential information? Am I comfortable with myself?

6. Do I Demonstrate Commitment To Accountability and Mentoring?

It is important for those seeking to lead and minister to a local worshipping community to have a commitment to accountability and supervision. There is no place in ministry for those who operate in isolation and rely only on themselves for personal and spiritual growth and professional development. Ministry needs to be a shared experience, one which seeks the input and advice of others for clarity, wisdom and direction. There are many obstacles and pitfalls that can derail you; being committed to accountability and supervision will help you to navigate through and ensure a healthy life and ministry balance and provide protection from temptation. So ask yourself... Do I value accountability? Am I open and honest with those who I have asked to keep me accountable? Is having a mentor a value for me? Do I have a hidden side of my life that needs to be dealt with?

Remember, it's not about having arrived or being absolutely ready personally for ministry, there always needs to be room for growth and more learning. It's about being committed to the journey of personal and spiritual formation; God in us, refining and shaping us into His likeness.

WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE MINISTER?

What Were My Ministers Like?

Think about the people who have been your ministers. Interestingly, you are likely to remember clearly the names of ministers from a long time ago even though you have forgotten many other names from the past. What were the qualities that you admired in these ministers? Was it their biblical knowledge, their relationship with God, their pastoral sensitivity, the way they made the Gospel relevant to your life, or their contemplative spirituality? These are some of the qualities of effective ministers along with the characteristics outlined in the previous section.

Some of these qualities are learnt in the academy while others are formed in the worshipping community. These two aspects are discussed below, but keep in mind the one constant is that the learning and formation is always ongoing. The “are we there yet” question is always answered in the negative.

What Will I Learn At College?

Academic learning has long been a requirement for professional ministry in most settings. The areas of study that are recommended for Endorsement are:

- Biblical Studies (Old and New Testament, Gospel and Pauline tradition);
- Theology (Christology, Ecclesiology, Church History and Churches of Christ Identity); and
- Ministry (ethics, mission of the church, spirituality, preaching and worship, practical ministry, leadership, congregational transformation, pastoral care, and theological reflection).

Christian colleges provide courses for undergraduates and graduates that encompass all these disciplines, although it is competency in each subject area, not the completion of a particular course that is required by Churches of Christ for Endorsement as a minister.

How Will My Local Church Equip Me?

Formation in the worshipping community is a multifaceted experience essential for the development of effective, healthy ministry. Here, a minister-in-training receives support and direction (usually from an experienced minister) after the style of an apprenticeship. Tasks are set, modelled, and instructions given: “do this like this”. Attached to this training is a program of supervised field education run by the Christian college with which the trainee is studying. This supervised field education is designed to help the trainee integrate their studies with their experience of ministry. The focus is personal growth and intentional professional development. The trainee is encouraged to set goals and objectives and monitor them. Acts of ministry are discussed in peer groups, feedback groups, and with a supervisor or mentor to develop the arts of self-evaluation and theological reflection.

What Do You Mean By Self-Evaluation and Theological Reflection?

These two arts are crucial for sustainable, effective ministry. Self-evaluation of one's ministry leads to greater self-understanding and continuous improvement. Theological reflection occurs with the consideration of questions like “how did that act of ministry fit with the way I think about God?” or “where does that act of ministry fit with the story of Jesus in the New Testament?” The more one becomes practised in answering questions like these about

their own life and ministry, the more adept one becomes in helping others discover the meaning of the Gospel for their own lives. This is an immensely valuable gift that effective ministers bring to the community.

How Long Does Training For Endorsed Ministry Take?

Becoming an accredited minister can be fairly quick, taking less than a year depending on the ability of the minister to complete the 5 training workshops. Then there is a year between becoming accredited and starting the Endorsement process. It can then take at least another year or two to become Endorsed, depending on how much study has been undertaken and how long it takes for the minister to work through the CCVT Coaching Manual. However, people seeking accreditation and endorsement for ministry by Churches of Christ present with a variety of life experiences, education and ministry backgrounds. This is taken into account by Churches of Christ Vic/Tas when a program of training is designed for each candidate. In addition, the ministry setting the candidate feels called to is also considered when formulating the components of learning and formation. If the process works well, and it usually does, the resulting endorsement by CCVT for ministry acknowledges what has already occurred in the life of the candidate.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF MY CHURCH?

Am I Listening To My Church Family?

Jesus' ministry is always done in community or the 'body of Christ' as Paul describes it in 1 Corinthians 12. None of us will ever have the gifts or the energy to complete the ministry of Jesus. 'To each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it... so that the body of Christ may be built up' (Eph 4).

For effective ministry, worshipping communities call, authorise and send ministers and pastoral and missional leaders. It is also worshipping communities that place a high value on the vocation of ministry. Further, many worshipping communities take on a responsibility to form candidates for ministry. The community of faith is responsible for the nurture of those it calls and sets aside for ministry. It follows that one must be embedded in, and recognised by, a worshipping community to be Endorsed as a minister.

What Does The Broader Church Family Say?

In Australian Churches of Christ, the responsibility for endorsing ministers is given to state conferences by their affiliated worshipping communities. CCVT endorses people for ministry on the recommendations that come from ministry discernment panels. These panels may include both endorsed Ministers and lay leaders. The panels convened when the candidate has fulfilled all requirements for interviews and discussion together with the candidate around assessments prepared by the candidate and the candidate's worshipping community and supervisor. It is a rigorous process.

What Leadership Capacities Is Churches Of Christ Looking For?

CCVT has outlined the leadership qualities that are sought through the leadership indicators, see churchesofchrist.org.au/leadership/leadership-indicators.

In addition the ministry discernment panel evaluates the candidates capacity for ministry through questions like:

- Is there personal awareness and insight?
- Does the candidate demonstrate commitment to ministry and the ethos of Churches of Christ?
- Is there a capacity to lead, inspire and implement mission and ministry goals?
- Does the candidate show an understanding of scripture and ability to share insights with others?
- Do they show integration between their own spirituality, learning and life?
- Is there an understanding of the process of change and conflict resolution skills?
- Have they mastered the ability to relate with people pastorally?
- Is there an awareness of boundary issues and the limits of their skills?
- Do they show adequate self-organisation and management?
- Is there a commitment to learning and ongoing professional development?
- Do they honestly reflect with others on their strengths and weaknesses?
- Are they aware of the potential impact of vocational ministry on their identity and relationships?
- Is there proficiency with communication skills in interpersonal relations and public discourse?

The process is conducted carefully and prayerfully. Candidates find that gifts for ministry are identified and strengthened, learning tasks are identified, and spiritual growth is enhanced. It is a searching and intensely personal review, yet it is not a test but an opportunity for candidates and CCVT to discern the voice of God through the wider Churches of Christ community of faith.

Am I Engaged With My Local Church?

The role of the local church community in leadership development and ministry formation is significant and important. The process of developing effective leaders and candidates for pastoral ministry begins within the local congregation where there is a culture of and process for developing mature believers. The characteristics of mature and healthy believers are based on the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:37-39. These characteristics can be summarised by maturity in loving God, loving one another and a commitment to personal spiritual growth.

Leadership qualities and potential for vocational ministry are often displayed as congregational members participate in various ministries within the local church. The intentional involvement of potential leaders in specific ministries within the congregation or as small group leaders can foster leadership qualities and assist an understanding of what vocational ministry is all about.

Although we expect everyone to become a mature believer, God does not call everyone into vocational ministry or to be a team or pastoral leader. Potential ministerial candidates may feel an internal drive to move into ministry, or seek ministry as a vocation because they have experienced the love of God through another and want to do likewise. Whatever the initial incentive to explore leadership and ministry as a vocation, the local congregation has an important role in helping the individual to explore and test this calling.

How Can Local Churches Identify Potential Ministry Candidates?

Local congregations have an ideal opportunity to identify, support and nurture those who wish to enter training for ministry. The provision of a loving, supportive and praying community will foster confidence and help the spark of calling grow and ignite into a passion that will lead to training and formation for ministry.

The process of helping individuals discern their call and gifts for ministry is usually a gradual process and is enhanced when ministers or leaders from within the local congregation work with and encourage the individual to develop and grow in Christian maturity. In some instances, a person may believe they are suited for ministry as a vocation but may lack both the insight and or the capacity to engage in self-reflection, both important skills necessary for the discernment of gifts and abilities that will be nurtured in ministry training. In this situation it can be helpful if a supportive and trusted friend, mentor or minister could walk with and help to be focused and honest with the individual about personal characteristics that require further attention before entering the process of ministry formation

Local congregations can be instrumental in fostering awareness of ministry training opportunities and life-learning theological subjects offered by educational facilities. If theological training and ongoing education is seen as important and relevant to church leaders and the church community in general, it is likely it will also have significance in the lives of both young and more mature people from that congregation.

How Can The Local Church Support Ministry Candidates?

Once on the path of training and preparation for ministry, candidates need the interest, love, support and in some instances financial support of their local church community. This may be demonstrated by ongoing inclusion in local church activities, (with sensitivity to the workload and study commitments), to enable a balance of study, fellowship, personal spiritual growth and leisure. As every situation is unique it may be beneficial for a known and trusted support person from the local church community to maintain an intentional support relationship for encouragement and as a prayer warrior, for those participating in ministry formation.

The local church has a significant role in the formation of ministerial candidates by offering opportunities for student ministers to participate in healthy local church ministries. Church leaders (ministers, elders and boards) are encouraged to consider and plan opportunities for field experience and supervision of ministry students and to participate in supervised field experience processes developed by and in collaboration with the academic setting.

As one of the strengths of our Movement is the priesthood of all believers where local congregations intentionally encourage all who follow Christ to be ministers, it is vital that the local community intentionally recognises, encourages and develops vocational ministers from within their midst. Potential ministers who commit themselves to the journey of ministry formation need to know they are encouraged and supported by their local church throughout the process. With this support they will have the best opportunity to grow in their personal and spiritual development and gain most from ministerial education.

PATHWAYS INTO MINISTRY

People come into ministry from a variety of different backgrounds. Each story brings its own experiences and opportunities for learning. Our desire is to ensure that each candidate is best prepared for ministry. How does your story compare to these examples?

“I’m A Theological Student.”

Naomi is a theology student. She picked a combined Monash Arts and Theology double degree, because it looked interesting. Though she has a faith she has never thought about vocational ministry. She has always found her parents’ traditional church insufferably boring and imagines working with some sort of aid agency after she finishes study. As she studies the scriptures she is captivated by the story of Jesus and the power of faith in community for those of her generation. She’d like to be a part of that but is unsure about how that might work out. She signs up for supervised field education with mixed feelings of enthusiasm and apprehension as to where it all might lead. As part of supervised field education she becomes accredited with CCVT and starts exploring other areas of ministry...

“I’ve Been Leading My Youth Group.”

Jack has grown up in the church – a dyed in the wool Church of Christ kid who has been to every State Youth Games since he got to high school. He was baptised in year seven and he’s been a youth leader from year twelve! His Uncle and Grandma were ministers! He’s just finished school, and has eagerly signed up to study theology. He’s always been in the one placid church in the same comfortable suburb, and pictures ministry as pretty much what the ministers at this church have always done well. When he does supervised field education he becomes accredited and experiences ministry in a church that’s very different to the one he grew up in...

“I’ve Had A Great Gap-Year Well, Gap-Years!”

Mike has had a ball since he finished school, having the best ever gap years! He’s done Year in the Son, done a couple of years overseas in the UK, done a couple of ACOM units, joined a Pentecostal church, transferred his course to Harvest College, deferred third year to become a youth pastor, whilst working part time at Jay Jays. Now in his late twenties, he is engaged, has finished up his youth work and wants to train as a minister. His fiancée and his mates are part of the local Church of Christ, which seems very stable but less exhilarating than where he’s been. They all advise him that this would be the more mature option, and he doesn’t have any issues with that, so he picks up the phone and finds out more about theological study...

“I’ve Been A Minister In Another State and In Another Denomination.”

Jillian is the minister of the Baptist Church in a Brisbane suburb. She’s done all her formation and is an ordained Baptist minister. She’s clocked up ten years, five in each of her two congregations. She’s just applied for a role in a Church of Christ in rural Victoria and been called to start in three months. All her research tells her that there is not too much different between the two movements, and she would like to be accountable to her new “family” so she completes and accreditation application form and asks for her ordination to be transferred...

“We’ve Been Years As Missionaries Doing Cross-Cultural Work.”

Alice and Bruce have been in ministry for thirty-five years. After ten years as high school teachers, they with their family did a further year at a bible school and then headed off to PNG with an inter-church mission agency where they have served for twenty-five years as bible teachers and mentors to church planters and young pastors. Their family situation brings them back to Tasmania where their small home church decides to extend a call to them as pastors. Though they have served with distinction, in PNG they have done little formal training other than the conferences and seminars they have attended over the years. They are feeling anxious that at their stage of life they may need to become full-time students again, so they decide they will apply to be accredited with CCVT but will not pursue endorsement...

“I’ve Been Chipping Away At Study and Part-Time Kids Work.”

Anne has taken a number of years to focus on raising her four kids as they’ve progressed through primary school and then high school. Along the way she has become a leader first in the church’s thriving playgroup ministries, then with the Kid’s Club program. Along the way, she has completed a couple of theology subjects, and begun to sense a call to school’s chaplaincy, building on her former career as a teacher. Her church then asked her to take up the two day a week role of Minister to children. She completes the accreditation requirements and wonders whether there is value in being formally endorsed as part of her journey...

“Boy, It’s Been A Challenging Time For Me, Maybe ...”

Doug has been through a harrowing few years in ministry! All sorts of matters came to a head at his last two churches causing his stress levels to go through the roof and his coping mechanisms to fail. The consequences included his marriage of many years ending and an extended time on stress leave. After a number of further years working as a bus driver; a new home and a new marriage, Doug’s call to ministry has “re-emerged” and finding it awkward to consider his former denomination, he has contacted the Churches of Christ. He is encouraged to start attending a Church of Christ and talks to CCVT about putting in an Expression of Interest in Placement form...

“I’ve Been A Non-English Speaking Minister Overseas.”

George has been a fervent evangelist and church planter in his homeland in the Middle East. The Lord has laid it on his heart to become a missionary to the materialistic nation of Australia where many of his country folk have settled and are imbibing that same consumerist lifestyle. George knows how to relate to those folks! Though his English is rudimentary, George applies himself and plants a lively community of close to a hundred souls. He realises that belonging and accountability for he and his congregation are important and he hears that Churches of Christ have ‘no Creed but Christ’ and allow significant congregational autonomy, so his congregation becomes affiliated with CCVT. He understands that affiliation has a number of requirements, which includes accreditation of all Ministers, so he contacts Churches of Christ to find out how he becomes accredited...

See the ‘Becoming an Accredited or Endorsed Minister’ for more information about Accreditation, Endorsement and Ordination with Churches of Christ Vic/Tas.

But Won't It All Be Wonderful?

Wonderful, maybe; but easy...? Jesus' call in Mathew, Mark and Luke for followers to take up their cross and follow him is one of those challenging verses that reveals to Christians that there will be an element of cost involved in the faithful service of God. Beyond our faithful and passionate response to be about God's work, those who choose to embrace vocational ministry will face challenges and costs that will place strains on individuals, families and congregations.

When considering ministry as vocation (whether it be a voluntarily position, part time or full-time employment, missionary work or a chaplaincy placement) it is wise to consider the challenges and pressures involved in the "doing" of ministry as well as the preparation through education and formation that occurs in-order for an individual to be equipped and prepared for healthy ministry and challenges along the way.

Ministry and the training for it, impacts people in many ways and for each of us the costs associated with ministry will be different due to our differing gifts, ages and life situations. There are however four aspects in life for which the human costs of ministry are universal. These main universal challenges associated with ministry are best explored through the headings of Spiritual, Financial, Social and Emotional costs.

What Are The Spiritual Costs?

Spirituality

The term spirituality is a term that we use to help define the relationship and conversation between our soul and God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is the term through which we explore, understand and define our "core faith values" as distinct from our operating beliefs. It is the term through which we define our practice of prayer and the understanding of call, purpose, and service in ministry. In the vocation of ministry all of these aspects of our spirituality will be challenged at some time, in some way, shape or form.

The Cost To Our Spirituality

The pastoral role within ministry can be the most challenging burden at times. As ministers we sit with others in their fear, pain, sickness or dying. We are called upon for guidance and support in times of management or crisis to families and/or congregational life. All of us will face challenges to our own and other peoples' lives that will draw on all our resources (and then some more), and at other times challenge everything we hold dear. While these costs are real and can occur at differing times and stages of ministry they should not be seen as failure or threat to our spiritual journey. Rather, they can be times for spiritual renewal, times through which God can minister to us. Viewing these times of challenge as times for further formation offering new insight into God's person, revelation, nurture and love will not only help us to mature and grow in God but will also equip us to help guide others in similar experiences.

What Are The Financial Costs?

The Cost Of Study

While there are many pathways to structure the study and time it will take you to prepare for ministry, recognising the loss of income and its impact to lifestyle is an important factor for consideration. There are ways

of receiving governmental and scholarship support while you study, and contacting the registrars of colleges will provide you with information on course choice, duration, costs and requirements.

The Cost Of Relocation

Whether you are relocating for ministry or study there are costs involved in relocating. It is common practice for some removal costs to be covered by the calling church, in addition there are fees for the connection of services such as water, gas, electricity, phone and internet. As students you may also need to consider the ongoing costs of accommodation and/or ongoing travel.

What Is The Social Cost Of Ministry?

Ministry Can Be An Itinerant Life

To receive a call into ministry is to face a life of change and expectations. There are several social aspects that will challenge all ministers. Leaving ministries, long-term friends and/or family can be dislocating. Do not underestimate the impact these moves can have on you or your family. The impact of these changes can be best explored as follows:

The Call To and From A Community

Ministry is often couched in the language of call. A call to ministry comes as an invitation to enter into a new social context.

The call out of ministry can come at the hand of the community within which they have been working; at other times ministers may feel that they have achieved all it is that they are able to achieve within a vocation and decide that it is time to move on.

This call out of ministry can be a fulfilling process if it is discerned by both leadership and minister together. The process can be confronting and painful when one of the parties disagrees with the decision to conclude the partnership. Whether the decision to conclude a ministry is made by the minister or leaders this decision will leave the minister and their family in a transitional phase.

Both leaving and entering communities of faith can be challenging for the whole family, and needs to be handled with care. Each member of the family will be leaving friends and support, and it will take time to form new circles of friendship and support.

The Cost To Family

Do not underestimate the cost of ministry on your family. Beyond the time ministry demands and the needs of a church community, ministry is a 24/7/365 job. Ministers need to make time for their family. The hours ministry demands will place a strain on lifestyle; weekend work, night time meetings, pastoral requirements of a community, funerals, weddings, sermons and programs all play a role in placing a strain on family life. Maintaining a healthy balance between ministry and family life is important.

What Are The Emotional Costs?

Spiritual, financial and social costs can all place huge pressure on one's emotions. There are many positives to ministry; sharing and equipping people for their lives and own ministry; the honour of being the spiritual guide to the major celebratory milestones in life, child dedications, weddings and funerals; helping people through their own life issues. However, the intimacy this demands comes with costs.

Cost To Self

The constant giving demanded by ministry can become emotionally exhausting if it is not balanced by times of refreshment. Ministry entails being invited into life-changing crises (funerals, hospitalisations, life cycle changes, etc), all of which not only call for your deepest empathy and care, but may also trigger painful memories of your own. Ministers can easily become prey to unhealthy practices, or burnout, as a response to emotional depletion. It is important to maintain the practice of receiving professional supervision to help guard against this. It is also vital to maintain friendships and life-affirming activity outside the place of ministry.

Cost To Family

It is important to remember that the emotional energy needed to pastorally care for others, may sometimes come at the cost of being absent from your family. Again, good supervision will help maintain a good balance between ministry needs and being emotionally available to your family.

Ministry is a rich and rewarding vocation in life and there are many wonderful experiences and opportunities to be experienced for the minister, their families and our church congregations. Careful preparation, ongoing support through supervision, maintaining your personal and ministry development, and good attention to friendships and a healthy family/work/play balance, will all help you to remain fruitful in this wonderful calling.

WHERE DO I LEARN MORE ABOUT WHAT CHURCHES OF CHRIST BELIEVE?

There are many resources available to help you in learning more:

- Visit the Churches of Christ National site at cofcaustralia.org.
- The “Churches of Christ Identity” subject offered by Stirling Theological College or “The Restoration Movement” unit offered by ACOM (Australian College of Ministries) are worth considering for those wishing to dig deeper.

Other Resources Include:

- Campbell T, *Declaration and Address*; Stone BW and others, ‘Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery’, St. Louis, Missouri Bethany Press, 1960.
- Chapman GL, *No Other Foundation: a documentary history of Churches of Christ in Australia, 1846-1990*, 3 vols, Melbourne: Australian Churches of Christ Historical Society, 1993.
- Osborn RE, *The Faith We Affirm: Basic Beliefs of Disciples of Christ*, St Louis: Bethany Press, 1979, Chapter 5, ‘Ministry Together in Discipleship’.
- Williams EL, *Churches of Christ: An Interpretation*, Melbourne: Vital Publications, 1980, Chapter 6, ‘The Ministry of the Church’.
- ‘The Church as Communion in Christ’, Agreed Statement of the Disciples of Christ/Roman Catholic Dialogue (1983-1992), Call to Unity 1 (2003) 9-16.

GETTING STARTED – IS THIS ME?

As you have read through the previous chapters, you may be coming to the conclusion that you ought to be starting the journey towards endorsed ministry. Applicants for accreditation and endorsement are on differing journeys. Some are already in vocational ministry; others have not yet begun that journey. Some have completed a significant amount of training, whilst others are considering what initial course of study they might embark on. A number of candidates are already ordained through other church traditions and come with significant experience; whilst others are considering ministry from totally unrelated vocations.

The following points will provide stepping-stones to point the way:

Step 1: Conversation With God and Your Church Community

The first step is to digest and ponder the material contained in this booklet. How do you understand God's call on your life? Are there questions or concerns that the material raises for you? What resonates with you and confirms your interest? What do the key people in your life say as they read and reflect with you?

What about your church community and the leadership?

Take your time! Sometimes the idea is right but the timing is awry! For some, a season of continuing to volunteer at church or focusing just on theological study, or even gaining a little more "life experience" may lay a solid foundation on which to pursue accreditation and endorsement.

Step 2: Conversation With CCVT

Once you have decided you want to explore ministry you can find more information on Accreditation and Endorsement on the CCVT website or you can contact CCVT on 03 9488 8800. If you are a trained minister from another denomination and you wish to be considered for ministry vacancy, please contact CCVT on 03 9488 8800.

Step 3: Ministry Formation and Training

Applicants who have not as yet taken a formal course of theological study, supervised fieldwork and spiritual formation will need to do so as part of their preparation for ministry with CCVT. You are advised to contact one of the following organisations for the list of subjects that you will need to undertake towards ministry endorsement:

Stirling Theological College, (03) 9790 1000, email: registrar@stirling.edu.au

Australian College of Ministries, (03) 8878 2500, email: nmeredith@acom.edu.au