

SACRAMENTS POLICY

Northern Spirit Regional Council

Preamble

Celebrating the sacraments is an essential element of Christian life in the United Church of Canada. Our founding statement of beliefs, the *Twenty Articles of Doctrine* states that Christ's church on earth should be organized for several purposes including "the administration of the sacraments." The 1940 *Statement of Faith* states that "for the fulfillment of her mission in the world God has given to the Church the Ministry, the Scriptures and the Sacraments," and further states that Christian people "are called to abide within the fellowship of the Church" including "common worship and the sacraments." Our most recent statement of faith, 2006's *A Song of Faith*, reminds us that the sacraments "point beyond themselves to God and God's love, teaching us to be alert to the sacred in the midst of life." In each generation, our denomination has affirmed that celebrating the sacraments matters deeply for those who follow in the way of Christ and has prepared individuals to preside at sacraments for the upbuilding of the Church.

Christ is present in every community of faith whether or not a minister is present. Each community of faith "has authority and responsibility for... ensuring the proper administration of the sacraments (B.2.1.3)." Presiding at sacraments is usually one of the responsibilities given to the minister present in a community of faith. There are, however, many circumstances where a community of faith does not have a minister among them, and in those circumstances, an alternative method for administering the sacraments must be found.

Sacraments Elders

When a community of faith is without a minister it is essential that the sacraments continue to be offered on a regular basis according to the needs of the community of faith. Sacraments elders are an excellent option, and the Northern Spirit Region encourages any community of faith without a minister to recommend lay members who could serve in this capacity to the Region for consideration.

- It is expected that a community of faith without a minister will "recommend suitable members [to the Regional Council] for consideration... as sacraments elders (B.7.4.5)."
- Sacraments elders "may administer the sacraments in their community of faith for a 12-month term that may be renewed. The licence automatically ends if a member of the order of ministry or designated lay minister is called or appointed to the community of faith (I.2.4.4)."
- Sacraments elders will function under the supervision of a pastoral charge supervisor appointed by the Region (I.2.5.2).
- Sacraments elders must complete a program of formation and preparation for administering the sacraments offered by the Region before they will be licenced, and their permission is limited to their own pastoral charge.
- If a Licensed Lay Worship Leader already exists in a given community of faith, the normal expectation is that the community of faith will recommend a different person to serve as a sacraments elder.

Candidates

The sacraments are formational for all Christians and administering the sacraments is formational for those called into ministry. It is important that this formational activity begin to take shape as candidates consider their call to ministry.

- It is the responsibility of the Candidacy Board to authorize candidates “as ready for ministry leadership, including for candidate supply appointments (H.3.7).”
- It is the responsibility of the whole church to provide “a variety of learning opportunities [to] equip individuals and candidates for ministry (I.11.4).”
- Any candidate for ministry whom the Candidacy Board has authorized to take candidacy supply appointments may be recommended to the Region by the community of faith in which they have been appointed to receive a licence to perform the sacraments within that community of faith. The expectation is that the Region will, under normal circumstances, approve such requests regardless of whether or not there are other ministry personnel present in the community of faith.
- “A candidate... who has been appointed to a community of faith may administer the sacraments in that community of faith for the duration of the appointment (I.2.4.4).”

Diaconal Supply and Ordained Supply

In many cases ministers who are in the process of admission to the order of ministry in the United Church from other denominations will have been administering the sacraments for some time. It is important to honour this as part of their ongoing life of ministry and to recognize that administering the sacraments in the context of United Church community is one important part of the formational process for those in the admissions process.

- “To serve as a Diaconal Supply or Ordained Supply, [a] minister must be in the process of admission to the order of ministry of the United Church (I.1.2.4)” with some rare exceptions.
- Any Diaconal Supply or Ordained Supply may be recommended by their community of faith to receive a licence to perform the sacraments within that community of faith from the Region with the expectation that the Region will, under normal circumstances, approve such a request regardless of whether or not there are other ministry personnel present in the community of faith.

Designated Lay Ministers

- Designated Lay Ministers who are in an appointment are licensed to administer the sacraments within the Region for the duration of their call or appointment and do not need to apply to the Regional Council.
- Any person who was serving as a designated lay minister at the time of their retirement may, **at the time of their retirement**, request a license to administer the sacraments from the Region with the expectation that the Region will, under normal circumstances, approve such a request.

Diaconal Ministers

- Diaconal Ministers who are in call or appointment are licensed to administer the sacraments within the Region for the duration of their call or appointment and do not need to apply to the Regional Council.
- Retired Diaconal Ministers may request a license to administer the sacraments from the Region with the expectation that the Region will, under normal circumstances, approve such a request.