

SACRAMENTS POLICY
Northern Spirit Regional Council
Updated September 2024

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.

Active/Retired Ordered Ministers (OM/DM):

- All ordered ministers (Ordained and Commissioned) who are active within the bounds of The Northern Spirit Regional Council are automatically granted the rites to administer the sacraments.
- Upon retirement Ordained Ministers continue to hold that rite. 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.

Designated Lay Ministers (DLM):

- 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.
- Upon being granted Testamur by the United Church of Canada. Former Designated Lay Ministers will follow the policy of active/retired ordered ministers.

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 via written request to receive a license 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 via written request to receive a license 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.

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).” via written request.
- Sacraments elders may administer the sacraments in their community of faith for a twelve (12) month term that may be renewed. The license 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).”
- Those recommend by their community of faith to become a Sacraments elders must complete a training program of formation and preparation for administering the sacraments offered by the Region before they will be licensed. This training will be offered through the Lay Support Committee online or in-person.
- After completion of the training program those who have participated will be appointed a mentor (normally an order of ministry personal or DLM) who will meet with them to discuss their learnings and discuss the preparation of sacrament liturgy for use within their community of faith. It is the expectation that the mentor will also debrief with the person they are appointed to after their first-time officiating.
- After the initial mentorship connection and completion of the training program, the mentor will correspond in writing to the Region that the person(s) is ready to be licensed.
- Licensing will then be recommended by the Lay Support Committee and approved by the Pastoral

relations Commission. A certificate of the license along with a letter explaining the purpose and limitations of the license will be sent to both the person(s) and the community of faith.

- Sacraments elders will function under the supervision of a pastoral charge supervisor appointed by the Region (I.2.5.2).
- Sacrament elders are only licensed for the community of faith in which they were recommend from.
- If a community of faith has a Licensed Lay Worship Leader (LLWL) within the community of faith they are able to also be the Sacrament Elder, or another person can be selected for this role. If a LLWL of the community of faith leads worship with the sacraments included, they cannot be reimbursed specifically for the sacraments