



Admission of Ministers

Guidelines for Presbytery Mentors and Applicants

	Name	Contact
Presbytery:	p:..... e:.....
Applicant:	p:..... e:.....
Mentor:	p:..... e:.....
First Meeting:	Date:	
	Venue:	

Admission of Ministers in the UCA

As part of the Admission of Ministers process in the Uniting Church, the presbytery will assign a mentor for all applicants in the Admission process. The mentor is not an overseer or a supervisor. The goal of the mentor is to assist the individual in interpreting the reality of his or her ministry in relationship to the presbytery in which s/he is situated.

The first meeting should be within a month of the minister's arrival and subsequent conversations may be either in person or via the telephone.

1. Period of mentor relationship: three years;
2. Frequency of meeting: once a month for first 12 months; as often as necessary after that but at least once every three months;
3. Purpose: to welcome, orient, and introduce an applicant to the UCA; and to discuss and facilitate adjustment to UCA polity and theology.

Some suggestions for discussion include:

- Basis of Union
- Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice
- Uniting Church Studies
- Experience of a UCA congregation

- Experience of Australian culture, UCA culture
- Similarities and differences between the UCA and their previous denomination
- Meeting processes
- Roles and responsibilities of the Councils of the Church
- Etc.

‘More than just a chat’: the idea of mentoring

The idea of mentoring is ancient and is used today in many different contexts. Mentors are often described as advisers but while advising plays a major part in any mentoring relationship, mentoring - as it is understood in the Admission of Ministers process – is primarily about accompanying an applicant on a particular stage of their ministry journey as well as

- providing information relating to church structures, people and processes, including the Admission process, as necessary;
- reflecting with the applicant on the subjects required for Admission, particularly Uniting Church Studies, Ethical Ministry, and Polity and Ethos

The primary task of the mentor is to help the applicant develop a better understanding the polity and ethos of the Uniting Church, the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice and they have a particularly important role in building the applicant’s confidence and helping them to develop their understanding of the UCA. To do this successfully, the mentor may, at times, need to take into account the applicant’s circumstances, including their personal situation and any psychosocial factors that may affect their ability to achieve their objectives.

Features of a good mentoring relationship

An effective mentoring relationship is characterised by:

- Clear roles and expectations
- Excellent two-way communication
- High level of trust with regard for confidentiality
- Clear framework with a focus on the applicant’s needs and objectives

The roles that mentors play require considerable input and active engagement with the applicant in thinking, planning, assessing needs, problem solving and providing constructive feedback.

The relationship between mentors and applicants in the Uniting Church is collegial rather than hierarchical.

What are the attributes of a skilled mentor?

A skilled mentor is guided by:

- a reflective practice
- a well-developed communication style
- the ability to assess the needs of an applicant
- effective strategies for helping the applicant achieve their objectives

An effective mentor will usually include most of the following attributes:

- **Accessibility and reliability** – is approachable, sticks to meeting times, provides

honest feedback in a positive spirit

- **Empathy** – has personal insight into an applicant’s skills, needs and personal circumstance while understanding that these will differ from their own experience
- **Open-mindedness** – has respect for applicant’s individuality, working style, background, gender, cultural background and ministry goals
- **Consistency and integrity** – acts on principles, demonstrates sound values and ethical practice both personally and professionally
- **Patience** – is a good listener, doesn’t teach or instruct, assists the applicant to explore their options and supports them in taking action and risks
- **Savvy** - understands the pragmatic aspects of working in ministry in the UCA

Mentoring across differences

Each individual applicant will require different levels of support and encouragement. Mentors thus need to be flexible, sensitive and open-minded when working with different applicants. This is especially the case where cross- cultural and cross-gender mentoring are involved. In these situations a mentor can learn a lot about the various issues that arise for a minister of another culture, gender or sexuality or who has a disability.

It is important for both the mentor and applicant to respect and understand their different backgrounds and attributes, to be sensitive to styles of communication that may be gender or culture based, and for mentors to understand the applicant’s needs, taking into account their background and ministry circumstances.

Confidentiality

As a mentor you may be party to certain kinds of information about an applicant: from their past professional struggles and achievements, to their future plans and their personal circumstances (e.g. health, family responsibilities etc.) The applicant should feel that they can trust you with personal information that is affecting their progress generally and which may have relevance for the mentoring relationship.

Similarly, applicants need to be sensitive to information that mentors confide and to keep things discussed in the mentoring context confidential.

As a rule, mentors and applicants should respect the confidentiality of all their discussions. Information that could possibly be regarded as sensitive by either the mentor or applicant should be kept confidential unless the level of disclosure has been discussed and agreed.

For the applicant

Here are some suggestions that will help to make the mentoring process a more enjoyable and productive experience for you and your mentor.

- **Be organised.** Plan ahead, think about the issues you want to discuss before you meet again with your mentor. Careful preparation will enable you to get the most out of the meetings.
- **Keep a log.** Make a record of what you discuss in each meeting and what you aimed to do before the next one.
- **Be proactive.** Don’t expect to be looked after or given all the answers. Maintain your independence. Be responsible for your own decisions.
- **Ask useful questions.** Don’t pretend you understand what the mentor is saying

if you don't. The mentoring meeting is your time and the mentor will expect you to make the most of it and draw upon their knowledge and expertise.

- **Have respect.** Be considerate. Make and keep appointments. Stay focused. Don't overstay your welcome.
- **Show appreciation.** Everyone likes to be thanked. Remember that your mentor has volunteered to help you. When you achieve a great outcome, let them know and acknowledge their role.
- **Reciprocate.** Mentors will be interested in learning from the applicant as well as sharing their own knowledge and expertise.

The first meeting

The initial formal meeting is important for providing a framework for how the mentoring relationship is going to proceed.

Here are some suggestions as to what needs to be discussed in the initial meeting.

1. Objectives of the AoM process

Discuss and review the purpose of mentoring in the Admission process:

- To welcome, orient, and introduce an applicant to the UCA; and
- to discuss and facilitate adjustment to UCA polity and theology

2. Planning

Create a timetable for meeting with suggested topics for discussion

3. Confirm whether you want to continue

After the initial meeting is a good time to discuss whether or not you think the mentoring relationship is going to work well. If either person feels that the match is not going to be productive and satisfying, this is the time to talk about it.

What if the mentoring is not progressing well?

Not all mentoring relationships are fabulously successful though sometimes the value of the mentoring isn't apparent until much later – even years later! Problems may arise for a number of reasons. For instance,

- you have different communication styles,
- you have different expectations of the mentor or applicant role,
- an unforeseen conflict of interest arises
- the mentoring discussions have simply run out of steam

If you are having problems, please discuss it with your mentor or applicant.

If you can't resolve things or if you would just like to talk through the issues in confidence first, contact:

Presbytery AoM contact:

Talking it over will give you time to reflect on the mentoring relationship and get a perspective on things. It may be better to end the mentoring relationship than let things slide. If you do choose to sever the mentoring relationship, your presbytery contact can advise you on how you could do that in the most positive way possible.