Professional Ordained Ministry

Approved: 2007
Spiritual Leadership in Metropolitan Community Churches

“The spirit of the Lord is on me because God has anointed me to preach good news to the poor and has sent me to proclaim freedom …” Luke 4:18

Preparation for Professional Spiritual Leadership in MCC

MCC has staked its claim. As one of the world’s emerging churches, we are proclaiming a spirituality that is liberating and sufficiently profound to address the issues of our chaotic and complicated world. We live out our belief that in the margins we are blessed and we are offering multiple ways for people to access our message of liberation and inclusion. Through church planting, church revitalization, alliance, the internet, and our work in acts of compassion and justice, we will expand our reach substantially over the next few years. MCC will become a name known to an increasing number of people as a place where all are welcomed and our service to those who are excluded is a primary focus of our ministry. We will be leaders in the world about the union of spirituality and sexuality by articulating our message and spreading it effectively.

From the MCC Strategic Plan, 2005

With critical minds and passionate hearts, professional spiritual leaders in MCC are those who seek to love God, following the teachings of Jesus, serve people and know ourselves. We are committed to engaging in life-long spiritual practices for ongoing spiritual development, including integration of spirituality and sexuality. MCC Clergy are those who lead ministries that are in and for the world, bring the blessing and joy of the liberating gospel as we work to dismantle systems of injustice. Spiritual leaders in MCC live and gather wisdom from and among the people to create together a spirituality that is sufficiently profound and liberating for an increasingly complicated world.

One who is prepared for ordained ministry in MCC will:

● Have attained a theological education.

● Participate in an ongoing program of spiritual formation.

● Embody the identity of MCC, including a knowledge and appreciation of the history of MCC and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI) community at large.

● Have explored deeply the unity of sexuality and spirituality.

● Articulate our call to ministry/MCC ministry.
• Develop skills in organizational administration and financial leadership.

• Understand ourselves as public/professional representatives of the LGBTQI community who speak with a voice of moral authority.

• Be engaged in ongoing spiritual inquiry.

• Have a consciousness of and passion for social justice and know how to organize and participate in social action.

• Be aware of and identify with our particular engagement of both critical mind and passionate heart.

• Strive for excellence in ministry.

• Have a growing self-knowledge, including knowledge of need for self-care.

• Be able to participate in collegial relationships and collaborative ministry.

• Be equipped to build partnerships: ecumenical, interreligious, local and global.

• Seek to develop leadership skills in order to facilitate positive transformation of both society and individuals within it

Articulating the Theology of Ordination in MCC

In the New Testament book of Acts, we learn that Paul and Barnabas ordained leaders for each congregation, praying for them and committing them to God’s service. In the Hebrew Bible, Moses is told to anoint, ordain and consecrate priests. Throughout the bible we read of people answering a call to ordained ministry and being commissioned to serve the community in the name of God.

Answering the vocational call to ordained ministry in Metropolitan Community Churches is a lengthy and courageous process. One discerns within oneself such a calling, and then seeks guidance in testing and having that call confirmed. Periods of spiritual formation, psychological testing, theological education, and practical training bring one finally to a place where the larger “body” says that one is fully prepared to enter into the life of professional ministry.

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1 This document is meant to articulate a practical theology of discerning and answering a call to ordained ministry. A more comprehensive document on the various theologies represented within MCC of what ordination means and what occurs at and beyond the moment of ordination is probably needed, either as a supplement to this manual or as a stand alone document. Such work is planned for the future.

2 Acts 14.23

3 Exodus 28.41
Along the way, a candidate may learn that his or her calling is to a ministry other than that of ordained clergy; or, the process may reveal that a candidate’s gifts-set is better suited to a particular lay ministry. Discerning and answering a perceived call to become a Professional Spiritual Leader is a journey that can lead in any number of directions.

**Who is Called to Ministry?**
Believing in the priesthood of all believers, MCC affirms that every member of the Church is called to ministry. Moreover, the theology of Ministry in MCC can simply be stated as God calls each of us to minister in some way to others. The bible is filled with examples of spiritual gifts (and the biblical lists of such gifts are probably not exhaustive) and we can be sure that each of us is in some way gifted and that the Church and the world will be the better for the faithful sharing of our various gifts.

**How to Know if One is Called to Ordained Ministry**
Knowing that every follower of Jesus Christ is called to some form of active service for the good of the human family, it makes sense for one to ask the questions, “What are my particular gifts?” and “What is my individual calling?” This begins the process that will lead some to the Rite of Ordination within Metropolitan Community Churches.

**Who Ultimately Decides?**
Ordained ministry is not superior to lay ministry. However, ordained ministers do teach and equip the laity. Therefore, the call to ordained ministry must be taken very seriously as ordained ministers influence and impact the many ministries of the church.

Realizing that ordained clergy have a great responsibility to the communities they serve, there are many voices on the journey that will contribute to the affirmation of a candidate. From the candidate who first acknowledges a belief that God is calling her/him into professional/ordained ministry - to the local church leaders who encourage the candidate to pursue the perceived call - to the seminary that academically prepares the candidate for professional ministry - to the instructors of MCC specific courses - to the Interview team - to the parish or organization that asks the candidate to accept an Authorized, Accountable, and Active ministry, many people will be prayerfully involved in the process of equipping and approving the candidate for ordination.

**Affirmation of the Call to Ordained Ministry**
Once one has accepted that as a Christian, one does indeed have a call to ministry, whether that ministry is lay or ordained, and once one has discerned that he or she has particular gifts which may be appropriate for ordained ministry as well as a passion to follow the path to professional spiritual leadership\(^4\), then one seeks the guidance and affirmation of the larger body.

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\(^4\) This passion may be described in a variety of ways, i.e., hearing an “inner voice” or experiencing an unquenchable “fire” in one’s “bones” or simply experiencing a sense that no other path would fulfill one’s life’s purpose. The language of feeling “called” may differ from culture to culture, tradition to tradition, and even individual to individual, but in any case, the person should indeed feel “called.”
The faith Community will expect the potential candidate to be able to articulate her or his sense of call. The potential candidate will be expected to share how she or he is willing to give her/his life to service of the Divine in ways that will comfort the hurting or challenge the injustices of the world or help individuals realize and claim their sacred value. If the faith Community accepts a person’s vocational call, helps the person prepare to answer that call, and finally agrees that the person is ready to answer the call, then ordination may occur. If the process leads one away from ordination one can be sure that it has not led one away from ministry. The process is meant to help clarify the call; but even if the call isn’t to ordained ministry it is certainly, all the same, a call to another kind of ministry.

Once a candidate has fulfilled all the requirements outlined in this manual and the specific National Protocol that applies to the candidate, then s/he is eligible to be interviewed by an MCC Clergy Interview Team. If the candidate is recommended for ordination by that team, then s/he is eligible for ordination after the final part of the process is complete.

The process of affirming one’s call to ordained ministry is complete once, and not until, the candidate accepts a call to an Authorized, Accountable, and Active ministry. This is known as a “Triple A” ministry. Regular attendance in worship is also very important for the life of a spiritual leader. Being part of a local spiritual community is important for the on-going spiritual formation of the Professional Spiritual Leader. This will assure that the spiritual leader is nurtured so that s/he can continually nurture others.

Once a candidate has completed the formation, training, and academic requirements and has been recommended by an MCC Clergy Interview Team, then that candidate may seek a “Triple A” ministry. Once the candidate has secured a Triple A ministry, then the candidate may be ordained in MCC.

**What is the Duration of One’s Ordination?**

Ordination is a Rite of our denomination. Some people believe that, like the Sacrament of Baptism, ordination is for life and cannot be revoked. That is a theological question about which people of conscience and good faith can disagree, but whether or not ordination is for life, the ordinand should be aware that Metropolitan Community Churches, as an entity, has the right to suspend, temporarily or permanently, an ordained person’s license to practice. Professional licenses are renewed annually and one may not function in the role of clergy in MCC without a current professional license.

Our theology of ordination includes the belief that Professional Spiritual Leaders are to be engaged in active ministry as such. Ordination in MCC is not considered a “state” but rather a continuing calling to which the Professional Spiritual Leader responds each day by renewing the commitment to serve wholeheartedly the people of God.

As you are discerning God’s call to vocational ministry, please know the Office of Clergy Development is available to answer any questions you may have along the way.

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5 Community in this case is defined both as the parish and the denomination.
Code of Conduct

Discipline of UFMCC Clergy

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The UFMCC Bylaws, Article IV.B.1.d. state:

DISCIPLINE: The UFMCC will not condone disloyalty, unbecoming conduct, or dereliction of duty. Procedures for discipline shall be developed by the Board of Elders.

These procedures shall be included as an addendum to the UFMCC Bylaws.

NOTE: This document strives to positively articulate ethical guidelines for professional spiritual leadership in MCC. Ideally, the language in the MCC bylaws will be modified to be in alignment with this document; however, until so modified, this document provides strategies for avoiding “disloyalty, unbecoming conduct, or dereliction of duty.”

Ethics of Professional Spiritual Leadership in Metropolitan Community Churches

(aka MCC Code of Conduct)

Introduction & Intent

We are a beloved community of justice, compassion and reconciliation. We also seek to be a community of accountability and restoration. As part of our call to ministry and community, we call ourselves to the highest level of professional ethics. We strive to hold each other in graceful accountability to authentic, integrated and embodied ministry with one another and with and among our people. The purpose of this code of conduct is to articulate our vision of ethical behavior so that we might speak with moral authority and live with a shared relational harmony, to establish a set of guidelines for such professional ethical and authentic behavior within the context of MCC, and to encourage us to live out our wholeness in an integrated way.

This document will be used to hold ourselves accountable to each other and to a ministry of integrity. When we fall short, we provide systems whereby there is room for discipline and grace. We seek to restore, to rehabilitate and to make restitution whenever possible; to help people escape loneliness, despair, and degradation; and to contribute to the wholeness of the body – where we seek to do no harm, but rather to edify.

We recognize that there are certain violations of our covenant of ministry together. Some behaviors are implicitly illegal and/or immoral, which constitute ethical violations and will result in a judiciary process, the end result of which may be suspension, and/or loss
of licensure. Some behaviors and attitudes are unethical by our standards and compromise our ability to perform and provide ministry. Other behaviors and attitudes harm us and interfere with our ministry and our own efforts toward wholeness.

We seek to address these violations honestly within the framework of our commitment to restorative rather than retributive justice.

**Guidelines for Professional Ethics**

- **Honesty.** We strive to operate on the highest level of trust and integrity, which requires that we act honestly and fairly in our dealings with others. We strive to make all of our communication accurate, honest, and clear. We intentionally avoid misrepresenting the truth or misleading others. We strive to give appropriate credit to the originators of ideas or quotations that we utilize in our written or spoken communication, and will not knowingly present the material of others as our own.

- **Confidentiality.** Because we respect the integrity and protect the welfare of individuals as well as the communities we serve, we take seriously our obligation to safeguard information entrusted to us as professional ministers. If there is a legitimate reason for the health and wellbeing of an individual or the community for us to divulge information that has been shared with us in confidence, we will actively seek permission for this disclosure from the person(s) providing us the information before doing so. We also recognize that it may occasionally be appropriate to disclose confidential information, e.g. if that information pertains to the immediate danger of bodily harm/loss of life or when applicable laws mandate reporting.

- **Nonviolence.** We respect the inherent worth and dignity of all people and actively work to counter the forces of violence that inflict harm to individuals and communities. We strive to ensure that our words and deeds do not directly lead to physical, psychological, spiritual, or ritual abuse.

- **Responsible Fiscal Management.** We strive to be faithful stewards of the resources for which we are given responsibility, including financial resources. We conduct our fiscal affairs with appropriate regard to recognized business and accounting procedures, as well as applicable civil laws. We do not condone theft, fraud, or the misappropriation of church funds or property.

- **Sexual Responsibility.** We affirm sexuality as a gift from God and strive to honor this gift by conducting our own lives with responsible, sexual ethics. See Sexual Misconduct Policy.

- **Responsible Use of Pastoral Authority.** As professional ministers, we strive to use our pastoral authority responsibly. We use our professional training, relationships, and practices for the benefit of the people we serve and not to secure unfair
personal advantage. We are mindful of the power differential that exists in our relationships with those we serve and supervise, and strive to structure these relationships in mutually respectful, mutually empowering, and nonexploitative ways.

- **Professional Services.** We respect the various educational and vocational standards, as well as the systems of accreditation, affiliation, and mutual accountability that exist for our own and other professions. Therefore, as clergy, we truthfully represent the facts of our professional qualifications and affiliations, and we limit our own professional practices to those for which we are equipped, authorized, and licensed. For example, we do not engage in any type of psychological counseling for which we are not licensed as required by applicable civil laws and do not hold appropriate credentials (UFMCC clergy credentials do not license one to do such counseling.)

- **Exercise of Professional Etiquette in Collegial Relationships.** We recognize that we do not do ministry on our own and we strive to honor and respect our network of colleagues in MCC. We mutually support our shared ministry by doing no harm through word or deed to the ministries or reputations of other colleagues or churches. We value the highest good of local churches over our own personal ambition or advantage. We commit ourselves to practicing professional courtesy with our colleagues and maintaining clear boundaries with former churches and parishioners. For example, we return to churches we have formerly served only with the invitation/agreement of the current pastor. Additionally, we honor the role of the current pastor in performing rites and sacraments and perform or participate in sacramental functions only with the invitation/agreement of the current pastor.

- **Commitment to Addiction Recovery.** We understand that addiction to alcohol, drugs, and other substances/practices can do us harm, impair our judgment, and seriously interfere with our ability to effectively minister in our communities. We strive for appropriate and responsible use of substances and affirm our intention to seek treatment and recovery for ourselves when necessary.

- **Covenant with MCC.** We will participate and encourage our churches to participate regularly in MCC Regional and General Conferences as primary avenues for our shared discernment, continuing education/formation, mutual edification, and relationship building.

**Sexual Misconduct Policy**

Since its founding, UFMCC has offered a counter voice to the sex negativity of JudeoChristian culture. Therefore, the UFMCC Sexual Misconduct Policy must, on the one hand, acknowledge the risk of sexual misconduct, while on the other hand avoid the risk of the disembodiment of leaders who are called to model health and wholeness, including sexual wholeness.
Let it be affirmed that sex is a gift from God. The divine value of sex includes but is not limited to pleasure, procreation, intimate communications, grace, and love. God’s gift of sexuality is to be responsibly embraced by all people, whether partnered or single, lay or clergy. A complete and responsible sexual ethic extends beyond traditional heterosexual responses to embrace the beauty of relationships among people of many sexual orientations and gender identities.

A positive sexual ethic balances desire within the embodied framework of our emotional, physical, sexual and spiritual selves, while preserving and honoring mutuality and consent.

Following are some examples of certain behaviors that could constitute a sexual misconduct:

1. Sexual contact with a minor is sexual misconduct; or

2. Sexual abuse or sexual molestation of any person, including but not limited to any sexual involvement or sexual contact with a person who is legally incompetent; or

3. Sexual harassment of any person, including those in relationships in which there is an employment, mentor, or colleague relationship between the persons involved, including but not limited to sexually oriented humor or language; questions or comments about sexual behavior or preference unrelated to employment qualifications; undesired physical contact; inappropriate comments about clothing or physical appearance; or repeated requests for social engagements; or

4. Using one’s position, whether clergy or lay, for sexual exploitation is sexual misconduct. Sexual exploitation is the development of, or the attempts to develop a sexual relationship with a person with whom s/he has a pastoral or supervisory relationship. A “pastoral relationship” is defined as a relationship between a clergy person, employee or volunteer and person receiving direct supervision, individual spiritual and/or pastoral counseling and providing confidential and/or privileged information to the clergy person, employee or volunteer. At times, a clergy person, employee, or pastoral leader may develop an appropriate sexual relationship within the context of UFMCC ministry, including the congregation in which a person is serving. Such relationships are to be entered into with those which there is no direct supervision or individual spiritual counseling. Such relationships are to be entered into with extreme caution and a spirit of discernment.