

## Frequently Asked Questions About Ordination Unitarian Universalist Church of Greater Lynn

How do UUs ordain their clergy?

Ministers in the Unitarian Universalist tradition are ordained by congregations, a legacy of our congregational polity dating back to the 18th century. The authority of the congregation to ordain religious leaders was a hard-won battle for our forebears, who resented having clergy imposed upon them by what they felt were corrupt hierarchical entities.

What role does the Unitarian Universalist Association play in this process?

Today, those who hope to be ordained by our congregations are first sponsored by a congregation and enter **aspirant** status at the Unitarian Universalist Association, where they begin the process with the department of ministry. Although the local congregation has the authority to ordain, the UUA has a vested interest in making sure that clergy in our tradition are well-trained and prepared for this work. Therefore, the **Ministerial Fellowship Committee** of the UUA, who will eventually review each candidate's readiness for ordination, maintains a list of requirements and credentials that ministers should achieve before serving in various ministry contexts. The MFC has a thick dossier on each candidate which it reviews before a final examination/interview after which a candidate is either informed that they are not a good candidate for ministry, that they have more work to complete, or are welcomed into **fellowship**.

*Chris Scheller was received into fellowship on December 15, 2020.*

Some of the requirements for fellowship are: the achievement of an M.Div. degree from a credentialed institution (a three year program), the completion of supervised field education and internships, supervised clinical training in a hospital or other chaplaincy setting (ten weeks full time), a psychiatric evaluation, career counseling, and evaluations from lay people in congregations where one has trained.

While each congregation has the right to ordain anyone it chooses, the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association discourage the ordination of those who have not had academic and practical training provided by an accredited theological school, and who have not been welcomed into preliminary fellowship.

So that's fellowship, how is that different from ordination?

Ordination is an act by which the church formally validates the formation process and achievement of ministerial fellowship and grants the honorific "Reverend" upon one they deem to be entrusted with the responsibilities of that title. This happens during a formal service of ordination that is celebratory and sacred, usually scheduled on a Sunday afternoon. If the congregation votes to ordain Chris, we hope to schedule the ordination for early April, 2022.

But don't we already have a minister at UUCGL?

Yes, we do. The Rev. Dr. Victoria Weinstein was called by congregational vote in 2013 to be the **settled** minister of this congregation and holds the title "Parish Minister." Chris is a **hired member of the UUCGL staff**, working under the supervision of the Parish Minister. His employment status will not change after his ordination. What will change is his title, as he will be Minister of Community Life and Learning rather than Director of Community Life and Learning.

Have we ever ordained a minister at UUCGL?

Yes, you have. You ordained the Rev. Gordon McKeeman and possibly others. The congregation has also had ministers on staff in recent history during the tenure of settled ministers Rev. Bob Slater. Rev. Anita Farber-Robertson, and Rev. Vann Knight.

Ordination, Preliminary Ministerial Fellowship, and Committee on Ministry

When a ministerial candidate first receives fellowship, it is referred to as "Preliminary Fellowship." The minister works with a lay committee to reflect on their learning and growth and submits reviews and evaluations to the Ministerial Fellowship Committee for several renewal periods until the MFC grants Full Fellowship (analogous to tenure in the academic setting). The Committee on Ministry at UUCGL will meet regularly to reflect on Chris's ministerial competency within the context of our unique church community. Rev. Dr. Weinstein will also be part of this process and submit evaluations to the MFC along with the committee's packets. Each minister in Preliminary Fellowship is required to have a mentor, and Chris's is the Rev. Jude Geiger, also a religious educator.

Ordination and the Job Search Process

Some of you have asked whether the act of ordaining Chris will mean that Chris will leave to search for another position as a settled minister. Chris writes, "my calling has brought me here to this position because I have a deep love for family ministry, religious education, community life, and church programming for all ages. I am excited to work on our Home Base Initiative." Being ordained by this congregation does not make Chris any more eligible to enter the search process to become the settled minister of another congregation. He was already eligible to enter that search process when he was granted Preliminary Ministerial Fellowship back in 2020.

## History of Discussion About Ordination with Congregation

**Oct 15th:** Weekly Update for week of Oct 17th onward, Rev. Vicki's message lay the groundwork for the discussion.

**Oct 17th:** Chris preached on his "[Journey to Ministry](#)" and explained and requested the congregation to ordain him.

**Nov 5th:** Weekly Update for week of Nov 7th onward, Chris invited congregation to Nov. 14th Q&A about Ordination in his message.

**Nov 12th:** Weekly Update for week Nov 14th onward, both Rev. Vicki and Chris invited the congregation to the Nov 14th Q&A about Ordination.

**Nov 14th:** Q&A about Ordination after church in the sanctuary in person with Rev. Vicki and Chris.

**Nov 19th:** Weekly Update for week of Nov 21st onward, Chris invited the congregation to the Nov 28th Q&A about Ordination.

**Nov 24th:** Weekly Update for week of Nov 28th onward, announcement of a special meeting of the congregation to vote to ordain our Director of Community Life and Learning, Chris Scheller, in the spring of 2022. There was also a second invitation to attend the virtual Q&A about the ordination process on Zoom during the 11:30am fellowship hour on Nov 28th.

**Nov 28th:** Virtual Q&A about Ordination after church on Zoom with Rev. Vicki and Chris.

**Dec 19th:** After worship on December 19th, there will be a special meeting of the congregation to vote to ordain our Director of Community Life and Learning, Chris Scheller, in the spring of 2022.