

What about Chaplaincy?

While many seminarians set their sights on parish ministry, today an increasing number of seminarians and clergy feel called to serve in specialized ministries. One of these multi-faceted ministries is chaplaincy.

What is chaplaincy? It's institutional ministry—ministry on behalf of the church, but outside a traditional church setting—in places like hospitals, prisons, and the military services. Those who have served in these settings will tell you that this can be an exciting, challenging, and rewarding way to fulfill your calling.

Chaplaincy isn't for everyone. To be a chaplain you need to have a strong pastoral identity and be able to work well independently or as part of a diverse ministry team. You must be able to function in an environment that is religiously and culturally pluralistic. And in some cases you must have special training, meet age and physical requirements, and be able to function in a mobile, frequently changing environment.*

Interested in chaplaincy, but not sure you're suited for it? A few questions may help you discern your suitability. Do you feel called to this kind of ministry, or do you simply see it as an alternative to parish ministry? What personal and professional gifts could you bring to a chaplaincy setting? Do you want to do this now, or some time later in your ministry? Do you want to do it full-time, or part-time in conjunction with another kind of ministry? Are you willing to get the training you need to be effective? These questions are all worth considering.

What kind of chaplaincy would be the best "fit"? There is a wide variety of chaplaincy settings to consider: hospital/health care, retirement center, hospice, campus, industrial, fire/police, jail/prison, and military. And you can also include pastoral counseling in this mix. Where do you think you could serve best?

What kinds of education and training do you need? To serve as a chaplain you must have a Master of Divinity degree from an accredited institution, and at least one quarter of Clinical Pastoral Education or supervised training in counseling. For full time or active duty employment in government-related chaplaincies, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs, Federal Bureau of Prisons or the military services, you must also have ordained ministry experience. Ordained ministry experience is not required to be eligible to serve in the Reserves or National Guard. The military services also have Chaplain Candidate programs for seminarians.** You can be a Chaplain Candidate while pursuing your Master of Divinity degree.

What does the church require? To represent the United Church of Christ in most chaplaincy settings requires prior approval or ecclesiastical endorsement. To participate in a military Chaplain Candidate program, you must have the approval of your Association Committee on the Ministry, your seminary, and the UCC Endorser. To serve as a chaplain, you must be endorsed. By granting approval/endorsement the church certifies that the person approved/endorsed has the ecclesiastical qualifications and

personal qualities to enable them to minister competently in a particular chaplaincy setting. The process and requirements for approval/endorsement are outlined in the UCC Manual on Ministry, Section 9, entitled “Ecclesiastical Endorsement.” You can find this document online at www.ucc.org/ministers/manual. The application for government endorsement/approval is available online. Start searching at www.ucc.org/ministers.

What kind of benefits can you expect as a chaplain?

- A fulfilling ministry as you touch the lives of a wide variety of people
- Variety of ministry that decreases potential “burnout”
- Professional training opportunities, including PG school in some cases
- Salaries that are comparable to and often better than in parish ministry
- Equal compensation regardless of gender (government chaplaincies)
- Provision of health care or health insurance
- Excellent retirement benefits (government chaplaincies)

***Special requirements for ministry as a chaplain in the military services include:**

- Age: Must be no older than age 42 (varies slightly by service)
- Must pass a physical exam and meet height and weight standards
- Must be willing to serve in a pluralistic environment, facilitating ministries to all assigned service members and their families.
- Must be willing to serve where needed (your preferences are considered, but the needs of the service have priority)

****Additional information on military Chaplain Candidate Programs:**

- Age limit varies by service: 35 USAF; 36 USN; 39 USA
- Tuition assistance is offered by the Air Force (up to \$4500 per year) and Army (up to \$4500 per year) with a Reserve commitment
- UCC offers scholarships for Chaplain Candidates through the Cannon Endowment administered by Parish Life and Leadership
- Chaplain Candidates can attend the Basic Course at their service’s Chaplain School and receive full pay and benefits while there, and for subsequent on the job training.

The age limit for beginning Federal Bureau of Prisons chaplaincy is 37. FBOP chaplains are required to retire at age 57. There is no age limit for becoming a Department of Veterans Affairs chaplain.

If you have questions or would like to discuss your interest in a particular type of chaplaincy, please contact the endorser:

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