

# Commissioned Ministry Survey Results Are In!

By Christy Trudo

In the fall of 2006, the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of the United Church of Christ mailed surveys to all of the commissioned ministers that were listed with the UCC Yearbook Office. Out of the 127 individuals who received surveys, 37 responded -- representing a 29% return rate, which is relatively high.

Of the respondents, 40.5 % were commissioned to ministries of Christian education, and a handful listed related ministries in their title such as Resource Coordination or Youth Ministry. Other ministries represented were Music (16%), Spiritual Direction (11%) and health-related ministries such as Parish Nursing (8%). The remaining 24.5 % had unique titles such as Human Services, Counseling and Community Life, Visitation, and Stewardship.

Although there is much to learn about how commissioned Ministry is lived out in the United Church of Christ, this survey specifically addressed questions having to do with authorization and the relationship with the congregation, association, and conference.

Some interesting findings were drawn from those whose ministry is specifically in Christian education:

- ❖ Most have been commissioned in the past twenty years. Only two listed a commissioning date before 1986.
- ❖ The majority of ministers commissioned in Christian education had bachelor's degrees. One had no degree, one had an associate's degree, and three had Masters' degrees. Among the majority of bachelor's degrees, almost all were in a closely related field such as education, religion, and religious education.
- ❖ There were a number of additional certifications and preparations listed. As might be expected, many of the ministers commissioned in Christian education also are Certified Church Educators in the United Church of Christ.
- ❖ Most learned of commissioned ministry through conference or association staff. Several were unsure of where they first heard of it, and many listed the *Manual on Ministry* as the place where they first learned about commissioning.
- ❖ Almost all began to explore the commissioning process with their local church and association after they were fairly sure that they were interested in commissioning. At that point, they were not likely to be choosing between ordination and commissioning.
- ❖ Most respondents reported that they either had completed, or were close to completing, their professional preparation when they began to explore commission-

ing. There were just a few who had not yet begun, or who had just begun, theological preparation.

- ❖ Most respondents found that those they trusted in the UCC were not just warm, but enthusiastic about the prospect of their being commissioned; however, there also were a few who found the response "not very enthusiastic." No one received a discouraging response.
- ❖ A number of factors were noted that led these people to pursue commissioned ministry. The most common one was "a personal sense of call which included commitment to the United Church of Christ."
- ❖ The majority of respondents had an ecclesiastical council as part of their process of commissioning, but fewer than half were required to study United Church of Christ polity. More than half wrote papers relating to life pilgrimages.
- ❖ How well did the Committee on the Ministry do its job? Interestingly, there was a relatively even split between committees that did fairly well or extremely well and those that did not do very well.
- ❖ A few of the Committees on Church and Ministry that did not do well did get higher marks for working through parts of the process that were new to them. The others did not receive very high ratings.
- ❖ Time after time the comment was made, "I was the first commissioned minister they had dealt with." The geographical diversity of respondents certainly backs this up.
- ❖ How well does the association keep in touch and recognize ministries? Fairly well overall, though there were exceptions. How about the Conference? Even better overall.
- ❖ Finally, the respondents are *very* involved in wider church activities as a whole, serving on boards and committees, leading workshops, and so on.

The time that the respondents took to make comments and give detailed descriptions was remarkable -- commissioned ministers are committed people! The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team plans to use this data to assist the church in finding new and better ways of mentoring, encouraging, and recognizing this vital, but often misunderstood, form of authorized ministry.

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