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# Ordination and Installation Handbook

for Unitarian Universalist Clergy  
& Congregations

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# Introduction

Answering the call to ministry is more than just a career choice. Being ordained into professional religious leadership and accepting a call to parish ministry are both life-changing events. With careful planning, the services of Ordination and Installation are opportunities not only to celebrate these profoundly transformative moments, but also to embody our Unitarian Universalist history and theology<sup>1</sup> in meaningful and just ways. It's our shared responsibility to create services that reflect the depth and power of our tradition as well as our unique identities and cultures.

This Handbook was created to provide both clergy and congregations with historical, theological, liturgical, and practical grounding for these occasions. While you may be tempted to skim the sections that don't serve your immediate curiosity, we encourage you to review this Handbook mindfully and as a whole, for we most effectively serve our proud, imperfect, and evolving Unitarian Universalist faith when we take the time to integrate its many facets and imperatives.

Many people—not just its co-authors and editor—contributed to this Handbook. We are grateful for their presence in the pages that follow.

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<sup>1</sup> This Handbook uses the traditional, currently accepted spelling of theology for ease of reading. Given that its Greek root, *theos*, is male-centric, we acknowledge the limitations inherent to this spelling. Embracing the spirit of both/and, we delight that our language continues to evolve toward inclusivity: for some folx, a more gender-inclusive spelling might be the(\*)logy or the(x)logy.

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# Overview

## Ordination

Ordination is one of the most important traditions of our faith. A congregation's decision to ordain someone represents the congregation's faith in, and support for, the ordinand's ministry. This recognition of a person's calling forth is also a recognition of their setting apart, functioning as "a rite of initiation, taking an ordinand from their status as layperson and initiating them into the community of clergy."<sup>2</sup> In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, the ritual of ordination also allows the minister to use the title of Reverend.

As a formal recognition of entry into service as a Unitarian Universalist minister, ordination offers an invitation to individual and communal transformation, as well as an opportunity to serve our faith in the world.

Ordination isn't just about one person's ministry. In the Unitarian Universalist tradition, authority to ordain (and to call) ministers rests squarely with the congregation, a decision that Rev. Joanna Crawford calls "a theological statement."<sup>3</sup> She elaborates:

The sacramental duties [of ministry] are referred to as the "priestly functions," even though none in our tradition go by the title of priest... [F]or an ordination, the congregation as a whole, the church body, does the priestly function... They draw out from their midst an individual, acknowledge the calling in their life, and because we are a tradition of learned clergy, often recognize the

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Robersmith, "Obligation and Opportunity: Examining the Practice of Ordination in Contemporary Unitarian Universalism."

<sup>3</sup> In her 2012 blog post, "[Ordination as a Theological Statement](#)."

education, training, and fellowshiping that has been a part of their preparation. And then they set the individual apart, giving them special authority for ministry.

It takes away my breath: not just the transformation of the ordinand, but the transformation of the congregation itself, into this priestly role. It is incarnation, as the congregation becomes the body of Unitarian Universalism, of our heritage, our traditions.

The ordination will happen to me, but it is not about me. It's about the holy mystery in which we understand ourselves as a Unitarian Universalist congregation. We do not require an intermediary or higher authority, such as a bishop, to acknowledge the workings of Spirit; *we are* that authority.

As theological statement and “holy mystery,” a Service of Ordination centers around a spoken ritual in which the members of one or more congregations recognize a person as a minister called to serve, and confers ministerial authority. The **Liturgy** section of this handbook explains in detail that the service of ordination includes some familiar elements, like a chalice lighting, hymns, and a sermon delivered by a guest preacher. Traditionally, it also includes singular elements, including a Charge to the Minister and a Charge to the Congregation.

A congregation's process to decide whether to ordain a person is usually outlined in their bylaws, and usually includes a Board or congregational vote. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) recommends that congregations ordain a person only after the person has completed the preparation needed and been invited into Fellowship.<sup>4</sup> A congregation may ordain many ministers over the course of time. It may also ordain community ministers affiliated with

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<sup>4</sup> Entering into ministerial fellowship is the process by which a candidate for the Unitarian Universalist ministry is interviewed and approved by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC), which has jurisdiction over all phases of ministerial credentialing. The MFC also has the authority to remove ministerial fellowship.

the congregation as well as other ministers who have served or are serving them, such as interns or contract ministers.

## The Ordinand

The ritual ordination usually happens once in a minister's life; it may happen again only if a minister changes denominations. For many, ordination is the culmination of years of discernment, study, and formation in preparation to serve. After completing seminary, an internship, and the fellowship process, the ordinand is finally welcomed into the ranks of the Unitarian Universalist ministry, “commissioned to make the practice of our faith their life’s work and accept ... that lifelong charge.”<sup>5</sup>

Unlike other religious denominations that practice group ordinations, Unitarian Universalist ordination services usually affirm and celebrate an individual person’s ministry.<sup>6</sup> That quality, along with the nature of ordination itself, makes ordination a profoundly meaningful event for the ordinand—and yet some clergy report struggling to communicate that significance to friends or family members. One minister jokes that while many people have more than one graduation and even more than one wedding ceremony, ordination is a thing she only did once. “I wish I had realized how much bigger a deal I needed to make of it so that they could see how important it was to me. Other ministers have said that they experienced this too, that people were excited about graduation but had no idea how to process ordination.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robersmith.

<sup>6</sup> On occasion, two people might be ordained together.

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Hayes, personal communication.

## Installations

An installation service formally celebrates the covenantal relationship between a minister<sup>8</sup> and the congregation that has called the minister. Often, though not always, an Installation service occurs within the first year of a settlement between a minister, or co-ministers, and a congregation to which they are called. It marks the congregation's successful completion of the ministerial search process—the weeks and months of self-examination and self-promotion as they hope to attract someone who is qualified to be, and who wants to be, their new minister. The congregational vote to call the minister—often held months earlier, during the minister's candidating week—is the act that leads to the installation, which is a celebration of the joy both parties feel for having found one another, and their agreement to enter into a covenant of shared ministry.

The Installation isn't something the congregation does for the minister; rather, it honors and celebrates the promises you are making to one another as you knit yourselves into shared ministry. As a result, the Service of Installation is centered around a spoken ritual that lifts up your covenant of shared ministry. As with the Service of Ordination, it's a worship service that offers an invitation to individual and communal transformation as well as an opportunity to live our faith in the world.

A minister may participate in an installation whenever they are called to serve a congregation, which may be once or several times over the course of their ministry. A congregation may install multiple clergy, one ministerial call at a time, over their congregational lifetime.

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<sup>8</sup> For ease of reading, this Handbook refers to the “minister” (singular) being installed. When co-ministers are called to a congregation, they are co-installees: their Installation service will install them both at the same time.

## Combining Ordination and Installation

Depending on the circumstances, an individual's ordination and installation might be held years apart, or combined into a single service. For example, a combined Service of Ordination and Installation would be held for a minister who has been recently accepted into Preliminary Fellowship and, at about the same time, called to serve a congregation. In this case, the congregation would both ordain the minister and install them as the congregation's settled minister.

A Service of Ordination alone would be appropriate for a minister who has recently been granted Preliminary Fellowship and who plans to serve in a community setting, or in another ministry outside of the parish. It may also be appropriate for a minister serving in a contract position, such as an interim or developmental ministry. In this case, the ordaining congregation could be one that the minister is affiliated with, has been a member of in the past, has served, or plans to serve.

A Service of Installation alone would be appropriate for a minister who has already been ordained and who has recently been called to serve a congregation.

## Our Histories

When it comes to ordination and installation, our Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist histories are both ancient and varied. Ordination, in particular, is a sacrament in Protestant and Catholic traditions; our history of connection to and reaction against Christian traditions have contributed to our current practices.

## Early Christian Roots

One of the most concise histories of ordination is offered by Baptist historian Dr. Wm. Loyd Allen:

The New Testament gives no comprehensive instructions for ordination. The doctrine and practice of ordination has continued to evolve over the centuries, resulting in a variety of forms with a multiplicity of meanings. From the New Testament to the end of the Middle Ages, the meaning of ordination moved toward an ever more exclusive and hierarchical rite designed to establish the primacy of the clergy over the laity. By the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic tradition viewed ordination as an indelible mark granted by God and conferred by ordained clergy upon those whom the clergy approved for entry into elite ministerial society.

The belief that ordination bestows some special and sacred status beyond that of the ordinary Christian still has currency today. The Protestant Reformation refuted this claim, emphasizing the doctrine of the priesthood of believers over against the hierarchical medieval view of ordination.

## Unitarian

One root of our Unitarian lineage is the assembly of New England churches whose identity was declared, in 1648, in the Cambridge Platform. This document recognized both the autonomy of each church and the connection between congregations who covenanted with each other in voluntary association.

“These early congregationalists rejected a traditional notion of apostolic succession,” explains Susan LaMar,<sup>9</sup> “in favor of a scriptural one<sup>10</sup> which recognized gifts and callings from within the church. They followed this recognition with an election to service. Their focus, as in the early church, was on service and the making of disciples through service.”

In other words, our congregational ancestors took seriously their sacred right and responsibility to recognize callings among their members, and to call forth those individuals in service to God. There’s a direct link between that practice and the authority for today’s UU congregations as the only body that can ordain UU ministers.

In the early days of New England, a Congregational church would ordain a minister to serve only that congregation. If a minister were to change congregations—which rarely happened—the minister would be re-ordained by the new congregation. But, as Rev. Susan Ritchie explains, by the time Unitarianism emerged, Congregationalists were recognizing ordination as more universal and using installation to recognize the relationship between a minister and a particular congregation.

This history underscores congregational responsibility in our current practice of ordination: a congregation ordains a person into Unitarian Universalist ministry knowing that the minister may go on to serve any congregation, and will represent the denomination as a whole.

## Universalist

In the Universalist tradition, ordination traditions varied through time.<sup>11</sup> In the beginning, the practice was quite informal. As the denomination became more

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<sup>9</sup> “Unitarian Universalist Ordination—A Search for Meaning,” Susan G. LaMar. Prepared for the Harper's Ferry Ministerial Study Group, November 12, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Cor, 12:28; Acts 6:2-6

<sup>11</sup> Susan Ritchie

structured, ordinations were done on a denominational level, often in a service for several ordinands at a state and/or regional gathering.

The distinction between ordination and installation is more clear in the Universalist tradition. Ordination recognized a minister's connection to the larger denomination, while installation recognized the connection between a particular minister and a congregation.

## **Reexamining Tradition**

While there's a great deal in our Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist histories to be honored and appreciated, much of that history and tradition is rooted in white supremacy culture and its attendant ableism, classism, sexism, and other forms of oppression that's both explicit and implicit. We tend to cling to rules and expectations simply because "that's what we've always done" without pausing to consider who the "we" is.

As more people of color, disabled people, and queer, transgender and gender nonconforming people enter our UU ministry and our congregations, they're challenging the definition of who "we" are as Unitarian Universalists. They are rightly insisting that traditions be re-examined, and that norms be discarded when they've outlived their usefulness. They urge us to draw the circle wider so that it includes everyone.

## **Our Theology**

### **Relationships, Connection, and Covenant**

Ordinations and installations are occasions in which our theology is made manifest in relationship. While our congregational polity is grounded in

covenantal relationships, covenant—which Rev. Sue Phillips<sup>12</sup> describes as thriving “at the intersection of individual, community, and the Sacred”—is also a *theological* foundation of Unitarian Universalism.

In our faith tradition, our relationships are voluntary and based on covenants (or promises) that we make to each other.<sup>13</sup> We form and sustain covenantal relationships through connection to ourselves, to each other, and to something greater than us. Whether it’s explicit or not, each of these relationships is part of the Services of Ordination and Installation.

A person can’t prepare for the ministry without attending to their intellectual and spiritual growth; exploring their history; deepening their self-knowledge and self-awareness; and developing practice to continue that self-exploration.

That process of individual ministerial formation occurs within the context of community (to paraphrase Phillips, you can claim to hold Unitarian Universalist beliefs, but you can’t be Unitarian Universalist all by yourself; we practice our religion in community). An important communal relationship for ministers in formation is the congregation that nurtures, teaches, and even endorses them.

The connection between a minister and a congregation is especially apparent in a service of Installation, as an affirmation of the covenant between them: minister and congregation are accountable to each other, as well as to the larger denomination and world in which they live out their shared ministry.

Yet another relationship exists as the source of call: that between minister and Spirit, the Divine, the Beloved, Humanity, or however you name it. “It is this beckoning from the divine,” says LaMar, “a desire to do our work and live our lives in constant relationship with the divine that constitutes a ‘call.’” Wherever,

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<sup>12</sup> In “[Congregational Polity and the Myth of Congregational Autonomy](#).”

<sup>13</sup> One of the Five Smooth Stones of religious liberalism offered by James Luther Adams is that all relations between people rest on mutual, free consent rather than coercion.

whatever, whoever that call comes from, this connection both offers spiritual challenge, and demands accountability.

How an individual and a congregation understand and describe these relationships has practical implications for these services: Who is included in the service, and in what way? What rituals are included in the service? Where is the service held and when? (We explore these questions further in the **Liturgy** section.)

## **Creative Tension between the Individual and the Communal**

Ordination and installation services tend to be minister-centric. This has, at times, created tension as ordinands and ministers strive to weave their individuality, personality, and culture into occasions that are steeped in history and tradition. Phillips suggests that the “tension between [individual] freedom and connection is our birthright.”<sup>14</sup> We navigate this tension whenever and wherever we are in relationship—including in the Services of Ordination and Installation.

In an ordination service, where a congregation recognizes the individual's call to service, it's easy to imagine that the service is about the ordinand and their accomplishments. But while ordination is a rite of passage for the ordinand, it's also a recognition of tradition and lineage; of connection to colleagues, to the larger community, to a UU movement with its own history. Ordination is a recognition of something beyond that beckons and calls us, and to an entire web of relationships. When ordination speakers focus only on the ordinand's achievement of this milestone as though it were a one-person graduation ceremony, the event fails to evoke the layers of relationship and the commitment to service that form the theological basis for ordination.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Similarly, an installation service—which uplifts covenant and shared ministry—is about more than the match between an individual and the congregation: it’s an opportunity to affirm our covenant to work together to create the beloved community. As you plan your installation service, notice and then name your connections to the larger community, to Unitarian Universalism, and to the Something Greater that you articulate collectively.

## The Planning Process, Part 1: Relationships, Roles, and Responsibilities

Planning an Ordination or Installation service requires thoughtful consideration of a long list of decisions. Who will make those decisions? Who has the authority to decide? This section addresses the roles and responsibilities of the planners. It also addresses the minister’s relationships (with colleagues as well as with the lay and professional members of the congregation) and how those relationships impact the decision-making process.

### Relationships of Value

Although it’s expected, but not required, that the current President of the Board of Trustees of the ordaining or installing congregation will lead the actual act of ordination or installation, there are no rules regarding who can participate in an ordination or installation service. In fact, these services are an opportunity for ordinands/ministers and congregations to reflect a vision of a truly shared ministry by including other religious professionals in the ordination or installation service. For example, it’s now customary to invite all religious professionals, clergy, and seminarians to process at ordinations and installations. This honors the contributions of religious educators, musicians, chaplains, community ministers, and recognizes their professional parity with ordained clergy.

Many ordinands and ministers invite those who have loved them into ministry to participate in their ordination and installation services. This may include seminary professors, internship supervisors, mentors, classmates, or other colleagues. It may also include family members and spouses. One minister invited their young son to light the chalice at their ordination; another held the hand of their spouse throughout the act of ordination to honor their partner's sacrifice and commitment to this new minister's call. It is important that both the ordinand/minister and congregation are in agreement about the chosen participants, whoever they are and however they are chosen.

## The Ordaining Congregation

For many years, notes Rev. Mark Belletini, "ordinands were expected to wait until they were actually serving a congregation with which they were in covenant to have a ceremony." Today, it's become more common for a minister's home congregation or intern congregation to ordain them. Whatever you choose, having a personal relationship with the ordaining congregation has a unique impact.

Each congregation should have a procedure for ordaining ministers. That process could be a full congregational vote or a vote of their governing body. Be sure to speak with the Lead Minister (or Board President, if there is no minister) about your hopes to be ordained by your chosen congregation, and why. Follow their instructions on obtaining permission from the congregation's board or members.<sup>15</sup>

Speak directly with the lead minister, if there is one, in the congregation where the ordination will occur: to be clear about who you anticipate will do which elements and also to confirm what that person's role will be before you begin to ask others. It is also customary for the minister/ordinand to extend the invitation

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<sup>15</sup> Ungar & Ungar.

to participate in the service. Sometimes, the invitation is a specific ask (“Will you preach at my installation?”). Sometimes, the invitation is more broad (“I don’t have all the details just yet, but will you participate in my ordination?”)

You’ll also need to recruit an Ordination or Installation Committee (or Team, or Task Force) to coordinate the supportive and logistical aspects of the event. Think about the skills you need, your relationship with them, and choose people who can help bring about a meaningful ceremony. They can assist in many ways and be a great support. Most people will be delighted to be involved. (See **Planning, Parts 2 and 3**)

## Consider the Relationships

- **The Ordinand and the Minister (or lay leader) of the Ordaining Congregation:** An ordinand may have a close relationship with the congregation’s current minister (or lay leader), or they may not know each other at all. In either case, it’s important for them to talk about their expectations—especially those related to costs, use of congregational resources, and decision-making authority. These conversations may be potentially awkward where there is no prior relationship, but they’re essential for ensuring a smooth planning process.
- **New Minister and Current Lead Minister:** A minister being installed in a multi-staff setting (i.e, where there is a lead minister) may feel hesitant in the planning process. It’s important for everyone to be clear about expectations for who does what and who has the authority to make decisions. The new minister may feel strongly that this is their event; and the congregation may feel that it is mostly their event. An open dialogue about expectations will help to ease misunderstandings about the purpose of the ceremony.
- **Ordinand and Congregational Staff:** The ordaining congregation’s staff may be well-known to the ordinand. As a result of close personal

- relationships, it may be tempting to ask staff to perform tasks and take on responsibilities during the planning process. However, those staff have a clear reporting authority in place, and the ordinand should follow the existing processes and procedures based on the initial conversation with that congregation's minister (or lay leader).
- **New Minister and Congregational Staff:** This ceremony may be the first large project the new minister and the staff undertake together. It is an opportunity to demonstrate the value of shared ministry, as “good relationships between colleagues in a multi-staff setting provide models of collaboration and trust that can help congregations articulate a vision of shared ministry across professional and lay lines.”<sup>16</sup>
  - **Ordinand/Minister and the Planning Committee:** The minister may have a clear vision for the service, but isn't a member of the planning committee—although they may meet with the committee. It's best if the minister/ordinand has a good working relationship with the committee's chairperson. Some congregations may have limited experience with installations or ordinations, and they will require more guidance from the celebrant. Even congregations with years of experience will look to the minister or ordinand for their ideas and suggestions. Members of the search committee may take part in the service but are not members of the planning team.
  - **Community Ministers:** When a community minister is ordained by a congregation, the above considerations about relationships apply. Installing a Community Minister allows congregations to express their authority further by entering into a covenantal relationship with clergy who serve our faith beyond the walls of the congregation.
  - **Newly Called Ministers:** Moving from their personal sense of call, an ordinand reaches out to a congregation to request ordination. Similarly, a minister's personal authority is expressed when they accept a call and decide to enter into covenant with a congregation. In the planning

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<sup>16</sup> [“Religious Leadership,”](#) UUA.org

process, the minister has all the authority they were granted through the process of being called. Because Installation ceremonies usually occur months after a new minister is settled, the minister's authority over worship planning and resources is already established in that congregation. This authority is balanced with that of the congregation to perform the act of installation in a mutual relationship of shared vision and mission.

- The Ordinand: Often, the ordinand will not have any formal authority within the congregation that ordains them. They may have personal influence based on existing relationships, but there may be no prior relationship between the ordinand and the congregation. In either case, it's important for the ordinand to respect the existing authority of the current minister or board president, and the professional staff. Communicating expectations, roles, responsibilities early and often will help ensure a smooth planning process.
- Planning Committee: The congregation grants authority to this committee through whatever process they use to form new committees or work groups. The committee then plans the event and ensures that the congregation's resources are used well to carry off a meaningful, professional ceremony. This committee is careful to follow existing procedures to reserve space, spend money, communicate, etc.
- Cohorts or Co-Ministers Being Ordained Together by the Same Congregation: A Congregation may agree to ordain two people at the same time. This should not cause additional resources of time or expense. Planners should take care not to double the time limit, however. As Shari Halliday-Quan points out, there are benefits to making ordination a shared one: it's a practical solution for increasingly common financial concerns, and it draws on the historical practices of our Universalist forebears. A joint ordination service is also an antidote to individualism; that is to say, the celebration of an individual's personality or trajectory is not really the point of an ordination.

- A Minister Being Ordained by One Congregation and Installed by Another: If this is the case, it is the minister's responsibility to ensure that the search committee knows that this is their desire. Otherwise, the congregation may have assumed that they would be ordaining and installing their new minister. It would not be improper to negotiate this during the final days of Candidating Week.

## **Decisions and Tasks**

In general, the minister takes responsibility for planning the service, working closely with the congregation's current professional staff (lay or ordained). This may be somewhat challenging if these relationships are new. The minister seeking ordination is advised to respect the authority of the congregation and its leadership.

Be mindful of other situations in the congregation that might affect the staff's energy or dynamics. Also pay attention to the level of experience they have. Perhaps the congregation hasn't ordained a minister in several decades, or maybe this community is close to a seminary and does one every year. Be prepared to educate a congregation that has little experience with these types of ceremonies. Also be prepared for a congregation that knows exactly how they want to ordain or install their next minister.

## **Choosing Participants**

It's primarily the responsibility of the Ordinand or Installee(s) to choose the most meaningful (and also appropriate) leaders for each element of the ceremony, which are described in detail in this Handbook's Liturgy section. This task can be fraught if someone who thought they "should" have a role feels left out, or if someone's chosen who's not quite up to the task requested of them.

Choosing ceremony participants can feel especially awkward when a minister is new to an area, and hasn't yet established relationships with ministerial colleagues in their new chapter or cluster. Building relationships with colleagues in the area in which you will be serving can support you and your ministry. They can also give you a sense of the culture of ordinations or installations in the area.

## The Planning Process, Part 2: Timing

It could take months for a congregation to approve your ordination. It could also take some time for a planning committee to be formed. Because of this, some suggest that initial conversations take place during Candidating Week, being sensitive to the fact that the vote has not yet taken place. However, once a congregation has voted to ordain you or a congregation has called you, there are some tasks to get started on. Time will fly.

Try to give yourself a minimum of six months to prepare for an Ordination, especially if the congregation has never had one before. An Installation might be able to be planned in three months, but six is better, as you want to allow for as much time as possible without also leaving a congregation hanging. You'll need this time for travel arrangements, copyright permissions, and other tasks.

Both ordination and installation ceremonies are commonly held on a Sunday afternoon or early evening. Sometimes these services are held on Saturday afternoons as a way to avoid the time crunch of traveling after Sunday worship. (This may not be an option for those whose Sabbath is Saturday, such as in the Jewish community.)

Set a date after considering your family's calendar, the congregation's calendar, the regional calendar, your UUMA chapter's calendar, and even the city or town calendar.

In considering a date and time, reflect on who else you want to be there. If you hope local clergy or your chapter members will be there, consider how far they might have to travel. Holding the service too early in the afternoon might impede participation by those who live some distance away.

## Suggested Timeline

### 6-8 MONTHS BEFORE

Minister:

- Decide on the appropriate congregation.
- Establish contact with the minister or lay leader of that congregation. Make a formal request for ordination. Allow enough time for the process, whether it is a vote of the Board or a vote of the congregation.
- Ask that a Planning Committee be formed using the procedures of the particular congregation.
- Make a rough outline of the service to help determine the participants.
- Find a date that works for the congregation, the key participants, and does not interfere with large denominational or local events. Sunday afternoon or evening seems to be a popular time frame.
- Send a notice with date, time and location to the UUMA and local colleagues. This will give colleagues enough time to make plans if they need to be out of the pulpit that day.

*Planning Team/Congregation & Minister:*

- Read through this manual to understand the purpose of the occasion, the various decisions to be made, and the relationships and roles of the participants.

## **4-5 MONTHS BEFORE**

Minister:

- Contact service participants to confirm acceptance and provide information: which expenses will be reimbursed, type of lodging, who will make travel arrangements and reservations, role in the service, time limit for speaking, their participation in pre- or post-service events
- Decide whether to give a gift from the minister to the congregation
- Notify local/chapter clergy of the event to get it on their personal calendars
- Contact Regional and UUMA staff to get on regional calendars

*Planning Team/Congregation & Minister:*

- Decide if there will be a pre-service meal for out-of-town guests, family, search committee members, board members, and staff.
- Determine how to provide lodging for out of town guests (home hospitality, hotels, etc.)
- Plan speakers' transportation to/from airport
- Consider decorations, flowers, other logistical needs
- Plan a reception or meal after the service.
- Decide on gift options from the congregation to the minister

*Planning Team:*

- Prepare a Budget and submit to appropriate committee or decision-maker. Throughout the planning process, ensure adherence to budget.

## **2-4 MONTHS BEFORE**

Minister:

- Notify the UUA after the ordination dates has been finalized and request an Ordination Certificate.

*Planning Team/Congregation & Minister:*

- Create a communications plan to include press release to local newspaper, social media posts, internal publicity, and invitations to neighboring clergy
- Decide whether the expense, volunteer time, and use of resources to send paper invitations in the mail is important to you.

## **4-6 WEEKS BEFORE**

### *Planning Team/Congregation & Minister:*

- Decide whether to give small gifts to clergy or other service participants.
- Identify the Head Usher and charge them with logistical details on the day--from parking to signage to nametags, accessibility for diverse needs and safety for all.
- Provide instructions about how speakers will be reimbursed for expenses

### *Minister:*

- Send all participants a draft order of service, schedule of events, maps, special instructions
- Select a marshal and charge them with their responsibilities.

## **1-2 WEEKS BEFORE**

### *Planning Team/Congregation & Minister:*

- Design and Produce printed Orders of Service. Alternatively, project the order of service onto a screen for the benefit of the audience and print a few hard copies for the participants and others who want a souvenir from the event.

### *Minister:*

- Determine who will meet with the participants to run through the service details. This includes a seating plan for participants with speaking roles as well as processing clergy; location and users of microphones; plans for movement of those with speaking roles, and clarity about the introduction of each element in the service.

# The Planning Process, Part 3: Practicing Financial Stewardship

## Budget Considerations

A well-planned, professional, and meaningful ceremony can be planned frugally or extravagantly. Most are somewhere in-between. Many congregations put a one-time line item in that year's budget for an Installation for the newly arriving minister(s), while other congregations use funds left over from the search process. Apart from that, usually the Planning Committee, in conversation with the lead minister or governing Board, determines a budget, identifies where the money will come from, and conducts any special fundraising—planned or unplanned—that the budget demands.

When ministers are ordained by congregations they don't serve, it can be a delicate but essential task to decide who will be responsible for what costs. Some congregations have the resources to pay for—or provide—some elements, but often some of the costs are incurred by the ordinand. The diverse expectations around this dynamic are still emerging.

Once again, it will be important to remember the other events occurring in the life of the congregation (annual pledge, a building campaign or a staff transition) when thinking about enlisting volunteers to give their time and talents.

If the approved budget is lower than desired, the celebrant should refrain from soliciting individual congregants (including via online fundraising) without the knowledge of the Planning Committee.

## Sample Costs

Providing the funds for key speakers to be at your event is an important form of hospitality, so the largest expense is often related to guest speakers. It's customary to pay the travel and lodging expenses for the preacher (and, sometimes, a preaching honorarium as well). UUA staff, however, use their own budgets to attend these official functions and are not reimbursed by the congregation.

Consider the costs of those who will participate in the worship and the costs of a reception, snacks, or a meal for participants ahead of the service; whether or not an honorarium is expected for the person(s) preaching; and whether transportation costs will be reimbursed for particular guests and worship participants. These may be awkward conversations to consider yet they're far less awkward than assumptions that go unnamed. Direct conversations about what each person expects or requests can help you plan and stay within budget. If you have to say no because you can't afford that person's travel, be honest. Perhaps there can be a way to have them present in a different way.

In order to reduce costs, a congregation can provide home hospitality and airport transportation to guests. Expensive printing costs can be reduced by using electronic invitations (in fact, very few people choose to send printed invitations through the mail), and hard copy orders of service can be reduced using projected images. Meals either before and/or after the service can be donated by congregants or local establishments.

There might also be costs for guest musicians, dancers, chancel décor, choir music, copyright permissions, special paper or printing in color for the orders of service, etc. All of these are issues to discuss before a budget is solidified.

Another expectation to talk about explicitly is whether to give gifts to service participants. They need not be extravagant—and in fact, they may not be

necessary at all. At one installation, the ordinand gave out more than twenty gifts: nine to each of the speakers; four to the musicians; two to the technical support team; five to each of the ordination committee members from the two ordaining congregations; and gifts for everyone who traveled from out of town for the event.

Not every ordinand or congregation is able to support the financial load of an elaborate event. Without mindfulness, ordinations can become more like productions that perpetuate classism. Some caution against the rise of a “more is more” attitude in the planning of these services. A person can be ordained—or a minister can be installed—in a smaller, simpler worship service. Instead of gifts, speakers can receive verbal thank yous, simple cards or even an expression of gratitude in the order of service. Instead of a formal dinner, the congregation can host a potluck reception.

The purpose here is not to suggest that all tradition is bad or should be abandoned. Rather, it’s an invitation to re-examine what we do and why we do it. It’s a reminder of our covenant to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person, and the quest of Unitarian Universalism to be open and welcoming to all.

## Sample Costs

- Airfare or mileage for preacher
- Accommodation for preacher
- Honorarium for preacher
- Airfare or mileage for other guest speakers
- Accommodation for other guest speakers
- Musicians’ compensation
- Permission/Copyright fees
- Printing costs for hard copy invitations

- Postage for hard copy invitations
- Order of Service
- Thank You gifts and/or refreshments for colleagues
- Flowers and other decoration
- Professional photographer
- Pre-service lunch
- Post-service reception
- Gifts for participants
- Overtime for staff

## The Planning Process, Part 4: Practicalities

Everything about your ordination and/or installation service will be more meaningful for participants and attendees if you attend to the details with great care.

### Orders of Service

The order of service (OOS) for Ordination and Installation ceremonies are usually fancier and more elaborate than a typical Sunday worship order of service. They're also longer, because hymn texts are usually printed in the order of service to minimize fumbling with hymnals.

Before printing hymn texts, contact the appropriate people for copyright permission. The UUA can provide information about all of the hymns in our hymnals, but you might be using a song that's from another source, like an independent singer-songwriter. Don't be surprised if they request a small fee for permission to do this. All of this means that you may spend more time and money on this element. It's worth it, though, to be in right relationship with composers.

Questions that might factor into your collective decision-making are:

- Who will design the order of service, and in what program or app?
- Will it be printed? If so, by whom and where?
- Will it be in color or in black-and-white? Will it be printed on special paper?
- Will you want information to be on slides for flatscreens or a projector? Who will make those? (Light words on a darker background can be easier for some to read.)
- Will you include images? Do you have permission to use them?
- Will someone participate in the service virtually—that is, joining through technology—and does the congregation have the technology and WiFi bandwidth to make this work?

## Photography/Videography

You may want to recruit a photographer and/or a videographer for your service—and you might already have one or two folks in the congregation who are excellent at photography. Otherwise, you might consider hiring a professional photographer—someone who often does weddings or public events rather than portraits. It's a good idea to meet with them ahead of time if they haven't attended an ordination or installation before so that they know what the significant moments they are looking for: the moments to capture.

Sometimes, depending on the size of the space, it can be helpful to have both a professional and a volunteer or two just to be able to have both the expertise of framing particular moments of the professional and the capturing of relationships that a person in the congregation may have (like the chalice's significance). Having photos and/or video can help remind the congregation for the length of a ministry of the joy and commitments of the event. Video in shorter chapters, rather than the full service, can allow for some wonderful ways of revisiting the promises of the covenant in an installation or a reminder to the

ordained of the various pieces of the ritual that matter. For lay folks, it can lift up the importance of relationship and shared ministry.

## Technology

Some congregations now have the capability to livestream the service. This is wonderful for friends and family at a distance who, for whatever reason, can't travel. If no permanent recording is made of the livestream, it might meet requirements for copyright. Perform due diligence to find out. Your homework includes asking your participants if they are willing to be filmed/livestreamed/recorded ahead of time. In some states, it may mean signing a release form. It can be more complicated than it might appear on the surface. You may choose to go a more informal route and have a family member or colleague use a platform such as Zoom or Facetime on a personal phone to virtually bring someone into the space.

Keep in mind the needs for amplification and microphones as there are many participants doing a variety of things. Communicate what microphone options are available in your setting with those who will be in the service and find out what they might need. Some things can easily happen at a pulpit. Other things need the leader to be untethered to one spot (i.e. laying on of hands, ritual of shared ministry, etc).

Amplification is an accessibility issue. Even if someone thinks they have a loud voice-tell them they need to use a microphone. If you are in a setting that has limitations to leashed (plugged in) or unleashed (wireless) mics, tell folks that ahead of time so they can plan accordingly. It can be really helpful to create a Cue Sheet for the sound technician/volunteer to know which mic is to be used for each element. It can also be extremely helpful if the person(s) speaking, can do a sound check ahead of time so the person running the sound might be able to have a sense of what to expect. That same Cue Sheet can also include

transition notes for participants-where will they find the wireless handheld mic and where should they place it after their part is done?

Will you be using a slideshow of some sort to accompany the service? Here are some things to consider:

- Who will be creating it? By when?
- Will there be a slide for every element or just certain elements of the service?
- Do you have permission to use images? (It can be very meaningful for congregations to have images depicting significant moments in the relationship/ministry already happening and often easier to get permission.)
- It's often easier for those with visual impairments to read lighter words (like white or pale yellow) and darker backgrounds (like blue or black). General Assembly worship planning recommends (though YMMV in your setting) to have all text be at least 32 font or larger)
- The job of advancing slides should be the sole job of the person appointed. Give them a full text document or at least an Order of Service with the cues written out of what slides go with what part in case something goes awry in the advancing of a slide. Some programs allow for a print out, which might also be helpful.
- Who's setting up the technology (e.g., the projector, etc.)? You will want to test this ahead of time if this is not something you often do or use a different device than on a Sunday morning.

You may need special permissions for livestreaming, for archiving recordings of music or art or poetry, or for other 'permanent record' elements if the content is copyrighted. Permissions can often be secured, especially if the poet/musician/artist is still living. Sometimes a fee is requested. Leave enough time for this conversation to occur so that you can budget money and communication delays accordingly.

## Clergy Hospitality

A typical ordination or installation will be attended by a large number of ministerial colleagues (most, but not all, of whom will be UU). Their presence is a symbol of the covenant shared by clergy; the covenant between UU clergy; and the covenant between the UU congregations and institutions they serve.

It's customary for visiting clergy and other service participants to be offered a private, lockable gathering room before and after the service where they can hang their vestments, stow their bags, review the OOS, and don their vestments before the ceremony. In addition to providing the practical hospitality of garment racks and light refreshments, it's helpful to have a member of the planning committee orient these guests in other ways, whether it's the location of the restrooms, assuring them that their belongings will be securely locked in the robing room, or thanking them for coming.

## The Stole

Sometimes our traditions seem long-standing and obvious until we examine their history. It's true of a number of elements in UU ordination and installation services, and it's true of the now-common practice of UU clergy wearing stoles as the symbol of ordination. (Rev. Lisa Bovee-Kemper notes that our movement has experienced a “ shift from primarily cis, white, able-bodied male clergy to clergy of all genders and/or one or more marginalized identities,” and concludes: “Identity has a significant impact on what stoles (and robes) mean and how they are used, primarily whether they are experienced as optional.”

As consensus continues to shift around the significance of stoles, many UU clergy continue to understand the stole as a powerful symbol of ordination. For that reason, an ordaining congregation often gives the ordinand a stole as part

of the ordination service, and the ordinand dons it as part of that ritual. At times the stole is a gift, purchased or made by a member of the community. Other ordinands purchase their own stole (or otherwise acquire one) to be presented and placed during the service by leaders of the congregation.

The other half of liturgical vestments bear mention here: the robe. Some ordinands enter their ordination ceremony already robed; others begin the ceremony without, and create a visual ritual of putting on their clerical robe—or having a spouse or partner help them on with it, as a sign of support and affirmation of their ministry—as part of the ordination ritual.

## Liturgical Planning

It's time to plan your service! Carefully consider what you want to include in your ordination and/or installation service, and how those pieces will flow together. Because these special occasions include rituals that aren't part of regular worship, try not to throw the congregation a curve ball by crafting a service that feels unfamiliar in the extreme.

The elements and the flow of the service take into consideration the traditions of our Unitarian, Universalist, and UU heritage as well as mingle mindfully with the current culture of the ordaining or installing congregation(s) and Unitarian Universalism. Elements included also reflect the person(s) being ordained and/or installed.

For an ordination, the congregation must extend the offer of ordination and the ordinand must accept it. At an installation, the congregation and the minister must agree to enter into covenant with one another. Everything else may be expected and may be tradition, but it is not required. Ordinands and ministers are encouraged to reflect beyond the service elements that happen between the

time the chalice is lit and when the chalice is extinguished, and to examine the ordination or installation as a whole.

Be mindful and heart-full of the tendencies of white supremacy culture<sup>17</sup> and other forms of oppression to sneak into planning by purging oppressive imagery, language, and rituals from the service. For example, the hymn “Rank by Rank”<sup>18</sup> has long been used as an opening processional, despite criticism of the ableism and colonialism in its lyrics; some clergy therefore choose a completely different song. (See the discussion below on misappropriation.) In recent years, ordinands/ministers have used everything from classical to rap to pop music for the opening processional. Some have omitted the processional altogether. Remember: just because something is tradition doesn’t mean that it’s required.

Another example is the extension of the Right Hand of Fellowship/Kinship. While the symbolism is meaningful—the welcoming of the ordinand into ministerial collegiality—it’s based on the assumption that all are “able-bodied” (not to mention the ancient myth that the right hand is “good” and the left hand is “evil”). An alternative might be to re-name it the “Collegial Welcome.”

The purpose here is not to suggest that all tradition is bad or should be abandoned. Rather, it’s an invitation to re-examine what we do and why we do it. It’s a reminder of our covenant to affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every person and the quest of Unitarian Universalism to be open and welcoming to all.

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<sup>17</sup> Learn more about the characteristics of white supremacy [here](#). Learn more about authentic multiculturalism and cultural (mis)appropriation [here](#).

<sup>18</sup> #358, *Singing the Living Tradition*.

## What's Included and Why

The ordinand or the newly settled minister or co-ministers are typically the best persons to choose the elements, and create the flow and order of these elements. Consulting with others who have been ordained and/or installed is good practice. Consulting with the minister and/or congregational musician(s) can be informative. Collaboration helps interrupt the culture of white supremacy that teaches us to go it alone. That being said, the authority to decide what is (and isn't) included in the ceremony, lies with the ordinand or person(s) being installed.

Some ordinands and ministers feel the pressure to use time-tested, traditional readings, music or other elements in their ordination or installation services. However, this is an opportunity for both the ordinand/minister and the congregation to include items that are personally relevant to them. For example, an ordinand who grew up reciting a particular chalice lighting in their home congregation may use it during their ordination. You might replace a hymn with a children's song, or add something completely unexpected. Dance, bubbles, and acrobatics have all been featured in recent ordination services. For their installation, one minister hired an actress to dress as a famous member of the congregation and character in Unitarian history. Some would argue that these elements are inappropriate for the occasion; others find them entertaining and refreshing.

Depending on the culture of the congregation, these elements may be in slightly different orders or dropped altogether. The ordinand, minister, or co-ministers are encouraged to choose wisely, crafting a service that honors the congregation(s), the person(s) being ordained/installed, our long religious tradition, and the current context of Unitarian Universalist identity and ministry cultures.

While tradition is certainly part of installation and ordination services, it's important to ask *whose traditions* those services uphold. Privileging white cultural norms of worship and ritual is what UUs are striving to recognize and transform. Ordinands and ministers who hold identities that have been historically marginalized may seek to include elements honoring their heritage. For example, an African-American ordinand opened their ordination with a calling of the ancestors and traditional drumming, which then accompanied the "Rank by Rank" processional. Another service might feature bluegrass music from an ordinand's Appalachian heritage. A minister whose culture or personal history includes another language might incorporate readings in that language, or include other elements that reflect their heritage. An ordinand who is gender queer may want to include particular recognition of pronouns, or acknowledgment of a spouse who might not otherwise be recognized as such.

The key point is that the ordinand/minister is not compelled to "check their identity at the door." There are many ways to expand the limited scope of so-called cultural norms [i.e., white norms] to bring more authenticity to the ordinand's relationship to their calling and/or the installee's relationship to a particular context. It strengthens us all to broaden and deepen this rich Unitarian Universalist heritage to make it more intentionally and responsibly inclusive.

This is also true of one's religious heritage and culture. Unitarian Universalism is an inclusive faith, where all people are welcome. Our members include those who identify as Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, Christian, Pagan, Atheist, Humanist, Sikh, and Agnostic, in addition to Unitarian Universalist. We can celebrate this when we're being ordained or installed. This may mean the incorporation of liturgical elements, rituals, or décor from our own religious culture, such as readings from the Christian Bible, the Torah, Qur'an, Bhagavad-Gita, or any other source. To do so can be a celebration of the ordinand/minister's spiritual journey. Seeking balance between tradition and personality using a robust theological foundation is a great way to create a ceremony that connects the

ordinand/installee's authentic voice to the gathered community, honoring a past, present, and future for our faith.

## **Cultural Appropriation**

Injecting individuality and personality into an ordination or installation service raises the issue of misappropriation of other cultures, which the ordinand/minister and congregation must be careful to avoid, no matter how inspiring or entertaining or exotic an idea might seem.

Cultural misappropriation (also known as “appropriation”) refers to the use or adaptation of another person’s culture without their acknowledgment or consent—usually in a way that disregards the context of the idea being used. A non-Indigenous person, with no connection to the indigenous community, performing an indigenous ritual during their ordination service is an example of cultural misappropriation. Misappropriation can happen with ideas, speech, dress, rituals, music, language or any other part of a group’s culture. This offense is typically committed by the dominant culture and is rooted in the aspects of colonialism and white supremacy that make it acceptable simply to “take” that which is fascinating or interesting, without regard for the feelings, heritage, and perspectives of the group whose culture is being taken.

Cultural misappropriation is harmful because it perpetuates colonial and white supremacy cultures. As long as it goes unchecked, it will perpetuate those cultures. More importantly, it disregards the dignity of those whose culture is being taken, who already live under the weight of oppression in society. To take, distort, and misuse another’s culture is inconsistent with Unitarian Universalist values.

We can’t identify cultural misappropriation unless we analyze our motive(s): Why do you want to use this element? If you’re not a part of the particular culture and you want to use the element because it is popular or because you consider it to

be exotic, you are committing cultural misappropriation. If you have identified an element from another culture that you would like to use “with a few alterations,” you are committing cultural misappropriation. It is not acceptable to alter or change or adapt the ideas, rituals or other elements of another’s culture.

What is the source of the component you want to use? The ordinand/minister should confirm its source and be sure to understand the appropriate context for use of that piece before including it in any worship service.

We often think we’re honoring another’s culture when we “borrow” from it, but that’s not always the case. We underestimate the harm and the hurt we can cause. We can avoid some, but not all cases of misappropriation by remembering three simple rules:

- If you don’t understand it, don’t use it.
- If you’re not sure it’s okay, it’s probably not.
- If you still want to use it, seek the opinions of at least three people from that culture and then listen to what they tell you.

## Liturgical Elements

For each of the following liturgical elements, we describe its purpose—which is often more relational than functional—the person who usually fulfills the role, and notes about length or tone. Our commentary, when offered, reflects a snapshot of a vast, evolving tradition.

The planning needs to take into account both efficiency—no ordination or installation service should exceed ninety minutes—and reverence. Ordination and installation ceremonies are occasions to celebrate, yes, but they’re also worship services whose individual elements and overall flow are equally important. Pay attention to the transition moments that weave the elements together, and be clear about who will create each transition. (Typically,

ordinands and installees do not serve as the worship associates for their own services. Intentionally note the tone of each element, ordering them to avoid emotional and spiritual whiplash.

Allow yourself to take in our frequent urging, in the section that follows, to set strict time limits on each component. A service that lasts for nearly two hours does not communicate twice the reverence and importance of an hour-long service; it does suggest that the planner was unable or unwilling to set limits and enforce boundaries.

Finally, there's no reason to include everything that follows. There is no definitive list of what should or should not be included. Rather, what's crucial is theologically grounding yourself both in your own ministry and in your understanding of how that ministry connects to the ordaining/installing congregation and the denomination.

## GATHERING

### Prelude

The Prelude, distinct from gathering music, shifts the energy from arriving to *having arrived* in the ceremonial space.

### Processional Hymn

The Processional Hymn accompanies the procession of service participants and gathered clergy, seminarians, and other dignitaries as they make their way from the back of the worship space to the sections in front that have been reserved for them.

## **Welcome**

The Welcome can be offered by a member of the Ordination/Installation planning team; the Board president; or the congregation's Lead Minister. These words set a tone of hospitality for what will follow, but should be very brief. Suggested limit: 300 words.

## **Greetings**

While it's still common for representatives from the Region, UUMA chapter, and/or local interfaith clergy group to offer Greetings—usually in person, but occasionally via video or written letter, read by someone else— this tradition is losing favor among clergy. While the Greetings are intended to lift up the ever-widening circles of relationships surrounding the congregation and/or the ordinand/installee and the larger community, they can take up great amounts of time without delivering the emotion, meaning, and spark that attendees are hungry for, and worthy of.

## **Opening Words/Call to Worship**

This element differs markedly from the Welcome, in that the speaker invokes the reverent nature of the event and, perhaps, establishes a theme for the service. Sometimes the speaker—a ministerial colleague or lay leader—writes them especially for the service, but not always. Suggested limit: 200 words.

## **Lighting the Chalice**

As a UU worship service, the Chalice Lighting is an important part of the service. If the ordinand/installee has a partner or children, those family members often light the chalice. However, this can be done by a lay leader from the

congregation or anyone else whose participation adds meaning to the service. Resist the urge to make this an additional speaking role.

## **Hymn**

A singable, uplifting Hymn can provide a welcome, uplifting interval from what will be a word-heavy service.

## **DEPTH AND SUSTENANCE**

### **Message for All Ages**

Many congregations are joyfully, intentionally, committed to weaving multigenerational relationships. Some ordinands/installees include a Message for All Ages to signal to our young ones that they're important to the community. Suggested time limit: 5 minutes.

### **Honoring the Congregation's Past**

A less traditional and more devotional way to involve the children is through Honoring the Congregation's Past.

### **Invitation to Generosity (or Sharing in Stewardship)**

The invitation to generosity expresses our giving and stewardship as spiritual practice, and briefly conveys the importance of the recipient. Usually the invitation is extended by a colleague who has benefitted from the recipient\* in some way.

Be forewarned that this part of the service, as with other components, has the potential to turn into a homily. This fact serves as another reminder for ordinands/installees to assert time limits to invited participants respectfully, frequently, and in advance rather than assuming that your speakers will remember or honor an ambiguously casual suggestion to be “brief.” Suggested limit: 500 words.

\*There are, rightly, many opinions about the offering recipient—a choice that’s ultimately up to the ordinand/installee. For many years, it was a nearly universal practice to give the entire offering to the Living Tradition Fund, a vital and life-saving well of generosity for all UU clergy.

As Unitarian Universalists seek ever more ways to express our anti-racist commitments, some ordinands and installees are choosing to give all or part of their offering to BLUU ([Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism](#)). This, too, is an act of stewardship and solidarity that expresses faith in our collective wellbeing.

However, a similar trend is for ordinands and installees to give the offering to their seminary or a local charity or nonprofit, or even to divide the offering equally between one local and one larger UU cause.

We encourage ordinands and installees to recognize how their choice of offering recipient reflects stewardship of the larger container that shapes and sustains our ministry. A tremendous percentage of UU ministers have received, or will receive, emergency assistance and/or debt reduction funds from the Living Tradition Fund during the course of their ministry. This Fund receives a single public “ask” (at General Assembly each June); the only other significant sources of contributions to the Fund is through individual events like ordinations and installations.

## Offertory

Provided by the church choir or guest musicians, this piece of music means something to ordinand(s) or installee(s).

## Reading

A Reading can set the tone for what the preacher will share, but is usually delivered by someone other than the preacher. Ideally, the preacher chooses their reading only after consulting carefully with the ordinand/installee about the nature of the event and the sermon. Suggested limit: 350 words.

There might be an interval of prayer, meditation, or shared quiet to give all in attendance an opportunity to connect with something larger and to ponder the significance of the day.

## Sermon

The Sermon is delivered by a mentor or other significant person from outside of the congregation. This could be a recognized leader in our movement, such as a seminary president, but could also be a peer. It's not unusual for the ordinand or installee to request a homily (typically under 15 minutes, or under 1700 words). Be specific with the preacher so they can prepare accordingly.

Most UU clergy share an understanding that the sermon speaks to the larger living tradition, and points toward “a relevant, stirring, redemptive, resilient Unitarian Universalism.”<sup>19</sup> In the preacher’s own words and style, the sermon might “recall the historical context of our faith, and cast a vision for where our ministry must go.”<sup>20</sup> It’s not enough for an ordination or installation sermon to

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<sup>19</sup> Rev. Sean Parker Dennison

<sup>20</sup> Rev. Christian Schmidt

laud the accomplishments of the ordinand or installee, devoid of reflection about whom, how, and what that person is promising to serve.

On the other hand, most people attending an ordination—the ordinand’s family and friends; and sometimes even the congregation itself!—may know little about how one becomes a minister, or even the experience of being called to ministry

<sup>21</sup> It’s therefore appropriate for this sermon to name how the ordinand’s/installee’s ministry fits into and furthers our collective commitment to Unitarian Universalism. In our ongoing commitment to dismantle oppression, notes Rev. Sofia Betancourt, it’s especially important to tie the ordinand’s or installee’s ministry to that message “if the ordinand/installee comes from (an) identity group(s) that are rarely well reflected by our faith leaders.”

## **Prayer or Meditation**

Following the sermon, a Prayer or Meditation offers time to contemplate what has already been said, or to connect with the Love that holds us all. Some preachers like to offer the prayer—and indeed, this will be less disruptive if the prayer follows the sermon. At times the prayer occurs elsewhere in the service, accompanied by a Shared Quiet/Silence.

The transitions between worship elements are always important, but particularly so when our attention is drawn to the tender relationship with The Unnameable. Give thought to the overall flow of your liturgy, and how silence and prayer might bring reverent power to a particular moment.

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<sup>21</sup> Denise Cawley.

## RITUAL

### Act of Ordination

Remember that an ordination service is not a graduation ceremony, but a powerful rite that connects the ordinand to both the long line of professional ministers who have come before, and to their commitment to live a life of service to our UU tradition. The Act of Ordination confers that mantle of ministry.

Since the congregation's members are the ordaining body, the Board President (or Board Presidents, if two congregations are ordaining someone) leads this ritual. All spoken roles should be printed (or should appear on screen) as the ordinand places themselves in a prominent, visible position.

### Act of Installation

In the Act of Installation, the promises focus not on the minister's lifelong commitment to serve, but rather on the new covenant between minister and congregation. These promises bind us to one another: we choose one another in a radical act of faith.

While solemn and powerful, it's not unusual for the Acts of Ordination and/or Installation to be concluded with a spontaneous and rousing expression of joy.

### Exchange of Gifts

The Act of Ordination/Installation is typically followed by an Exchange of Gifts. Most commonly, a congregation gifts the ordinand with a stole (although it could be a robe, sacred texts, or ritual objects). Between the Board President, a Planning Committee member, or someone from the Intern or Search Committee, it can be meaningful for the ordinand to choose, in advance, someone who will

place the stole on them at the moment the gift is received. Suggested length: 2 minutes.

## Laying on of Hands

In some ordination ceremonies, the moment of donning the stole—representing the mantle of ministry—is followed by a prayer, which can include the Laying on of Hands. (Note: this prayer that centers on the minister is fitting for an ordination, in which the new minister is preparing for a lifetime of service and religious leadership. A prayer during an installation service would likely be in a different place in the liturgy because the Laying on of Hands is less congruent for an installation, since the focus is the “we” of shared ministry rather than the minister.)

The Laying on of Hands is a rite invoking profound networks of connection through time and space: the ordinand to their colleagues, their family, their community, and—some say—the succession of ministers who have come before them. The ordinand may choose to kneel, sit, or stand on the chancel while surrounded, in expanding circles, by some or all those in attendance. The leader then offers a prayer.

While this ceremony provides a way to involve all those present, it also requires careful planning and tethering of energy. Questions for the ordinand and the leader of the Laying on of Hands to consider include:

- Where in the worship space will it happen?
- Who do you want touching you, as part of the inner circle? (Usually, the answer is immediate family, but it could be a close friend, mentor, and/or special colleagues.)
- Will you ask the congregation to rise and move forward to participate, or will you ask them to participate from their seats?

- How will the leader include those with mobility challenges, or whose movement may be limited by the use of listening assistance devices?

Rev. Barbara ten Hove describes her practice of leading this ritual:

I begin by inviting the ordinand to come be next to me. With music playing to keep the energy focused, I invite those the ordinand has chosen as their inner circle to come forward and lay their hands upon them. Then I invite the ordained clergy to lay their hands upon the ordinand recognizing the special role we play in



supporting a colleague. Then I invite everyone in the room to touch hands so that everyone is touching someone who is touching the ordinand. Only when we are in this place of deep connection does the act of laying on of hands finally occur. It comes from everyone in that room, and the grace that flows each time I have done this is amazing. I know it does not come from me, but I feel privileged to be a vehicle through which grace may flow. Usually it is followed

by a prayer, and when it is done, there is a palpable sense of love in the air.

The more people who come forward, the longer this ritual can take. Never fear: the power of this moment will arise not from the length of the leader's prayer, but in the overall invoking of the Love that flows through all. Suggested length: 4 minutes.

Some ministers being installed find that a **Ritual for Shared Ministry** is more effective than a Laying on of Hands. This ritual should remind both minister(s) and congregation (or community location) that they are in this together.

## **Hand of Fellowship/Hand of Kinship/Collegial Welcome**

While the name of this element has shifted, the Hand of Kinship is a ritual offered by a colleague to the ordinand as a gesture of welcome into ministry from someone who's been seasoned through long service in ministry.

In the poetic words of Rev. Barbara ten Hove, the Hand of Fellowship/Kinship

is our way of reminding the church and the clergy that ministry is a shared act. We share our ministry with the laity in some important ways, of course. But more, at the end of our ordination we join the ranks of those who have been called out into ministry. We become a part of the living tradition that includes Olympia Brown, William Ellery Channing, Egbert Ethelred Brown, and Dana Greeley. Just as the Laying on of Hands reminds us that we serve the church, the hand of fellowship reminds us that we are in covenant with our colleagues to live a religiously meaningful and morally upright life. It is why it hurts so much when someone breaks this covenant. Our hands are wounded when the connection is broken.

## Charge to the Minister

The Charge to the Minister is delivered by a colleague who's often in close relationship with the ordinand or installee, and therefore has a sense of their gifts as well as their growing edges. The Charge invites right relationship with colleagues and congregants; encourages depth and breadth of commitment; offers reminders of self and family care; and nudges you to growth in answering your call to ministry and/or to this congregation (or community ministry). Suggested limit: 350 words/3 minutes.

## Charge to the Congregation

The Charge to the Congregation is also usually delivered by a colleague—though they don't have to be ordained—who may need to name the hard things this congregation needs to work on. If the minister(s) have an identity that is sometimes marginalized, an ally might share a message. If the occasion is an installation, Rev. Erin Dajka Holley reminds us that a Charge to the Congregation “can be powerful in reminding the congregation of its ability to nurture potential new ministers.” Suggested limit: 350 words/3 minutes.

### RETURNING TO THE SERVICE OF LIFE

As the service comes to a close, you'll be grateful for asserting time limits with your participants. If you've limited the components in your service, there are some alternative elements that you might include.

## Blessing from the Community

Installation services are an opportunity for UUs from beyond the congregation to participate in an Affirmation of Mutual Care. If your ministry will entail interfaith work, your ordination or installation could include a Blessing from one of your

interfaith partners (as appropriate to their cultures and traditions, as well as your own).

## **Closing Hymn**

The service ends with a hymn that serves as a recessional hymn, in which all clergy process to the back of the worship space. In some regions, it's traditional for the ordinand or installee to remain on the chancel to deliver their benediction following this hymn. In others, the ordinand/installlee leads the recessional out and delivers the benediction from the rear of the congregation.

## **Benediction**

It's now, at the close of the service, that you speak by delivering the Benediction. While the ordinand and/or installee has spoken during the Ritual of Ordination/Installation, and perhaps during the Exchange of Gifts, this is one of the first acts of your new, formalized ministry. The benediction is not a "thank you for coming" or a rambling speech; it's the sending forth, the sharing of good news, or the hope-filled declaration of the future of this shared ministry. Suggested limit: 1 minute.

## **Postlude**

As guests begin to shift towards the celebratory reception, a Postlude can be offered.

# Liturgical Reminders

## Musical Notes

It's both unethical and a violation of copyright laws to alter, change or adapt the words of a song without the composer's permission. This practice has existed for many years: UU hymn lyrics are frequently changed to remove references to God or other language that some find offensive. However, it is not acceptable when the composer is living, and never appropriate when the composer has specifically expressed an opinion on the topic. For example, when Natalie Sleeth, the composer of "Go Now in Peace," was asked about substituting the word "Love" for "God" in the song's lyrics, she expressly forbade it. On the contrary, Jason Shelton took the initiative to change the title of his song "Standing on the Side of Love" to "Answering the Call of Love" to remove the ableist language. If you want to adapt a piece of music, get permission first.

## A Reminder about Permissions

Being in right relationship with artists, poets, musicians and other creative human beings is central to our faith, so copyright laws are important to follow. There are only very limited circumstances in which one can print copyrighted material. If you plan to include a reading or lyrics or other copyrighted material, do you have permission to print music or lyrics in the Order of Service? Do you need to purchase additional legal copies of music for a choir or additional musicians? Do you have enough hymnals for the crowd that will gather, or will lyrics appear on slides?

To learn more, consult resources from the [Unitarian Universalist Association](#) and the [Association for UU Music Ministries](#).

## The Role of Marshal

Ordinations and Installations are sacred pageantry. Their seamless unfolding is often made possible through a carefully-selected Marshal, who reviews the order of service and the space to plan and direct all movement of clergy and speakers into, during, and out of the service.

The marshal's principal role is the organization of the procession, and ensuring the correct precedence and etiquette in leading the gathered clergy into and out of the worship space. For example: How will each person or group get from point A to point B? What do they need there once they are in place? Do they need to move something from one place to another? How long will it take to travel or transition?

Rev. Hank Pierce, considered the Dean of clergy marshals, advises fellow marshals to review the ordination or installation site in person and in advance, so you have an understanding of the space, the liturgy of the day, and the expectations of the minister and the congregation. Hank also suggests that the marshal's job is "to keep everything moving and keep the ordinand (or installee) relaxed."

The marshal will:

- Make sure every participant in the robing room has an order of service
- Confirm who has the key to the robing room so that clergy can enter easily after the service
- Provide clergy and participants with time checks (for example, a ten-minute warning before lining up to process)
- Gather clergy and participants to provide instructions as how to line up, how to process, where physical transitions occur
- Remind clergy and participants to turn off their phones and bring money for the offering

- Offer a group prayer, unless something has been prearranged

Hank's suggested processional is as follows:

1. If the Choir is processing in, they go first.
2. The marshal enters
3. Participants/clergy with speaking roles come in two by two (as possible).
4. Other (non-speaking) clergy and seminarians follow
5. The ordinand(s) / installee(s) enters last

It looks like this:

Choir  
(Marshal)  
Rev. Lovejoy and Rev. Begood  
Rev. Singsong and Rev. Prayerbeads  
Rev. Mercyme and Rev. Swivelhips  
Rev. Justiceseeker and Rev. Humblepie  
(Other clergy)  
(seminarians)  
Ordinand/Installee(s)

## Questions for Reflection

We offer the following questions for your reflection as you plan and prepare Services of Ordination and Installation. You might consider these questions individually, in small groups, and/or as a congregation. You may consider them in journaling and/or in discussion with others. It is our hope that this reflection will inform and ground your practical decisions and services.

### Questions for Ordinands

What is your “why?” What meaning does the service hold for you?

What meaning do the individual rituals within the service hold for you?

Who is this service for?

Who are you accountable to?

What or whose tradition(s) are you drawing on for this service?

What has been your preparation for this rite of passage?

How do you understand your call to ministry?

How is that call manifest, embodied and strengthened in this service?

What is your relationship to the ordaining congregation?

How is this relationship manifest, embodied, and strengthened in the service?

How do you understand your relationship to something(s) greater?

How is this relationship manifest, embodied, and strengthened in the service?

How do you understand your connection to Unitarian Universalism?

How is that manifest and embodied in this service?

## **Questions for Ordaining Congregations**

What is your congregation's "why"? What meaning does the service hold for your congregation?

What meaning do the individual rituals within the service hold for your congregation?

Who is this service for?

Who is your congregation accountable to?

How does your congregation understand your congregation's authority and responsibility for ordination in general and of this person in particular?

What is your congregation's relationship to the ordinand?

How does your congregation understand the ordinand's call to ministry?

How does your congregation understand your congregation's connection to Unitarian Universalism?

How has your congregation prepared for this service, spiritually as well as practically and financially?

## **Questions for Ministers Being Installed**

What is your "why"? What meaning does the service hold for you?

What meaning do the individual rituals within the service hold for you?

Who is this service for?

Who are you accountable to?

What or whose tradition(s) are you drawing on for this service?

What has been your preparation for this rite of passage?

How do you understand your call to ministry?

How is that call manifest, embodied and strengthened in this service?

How is your relationship to the congregation in which you are being installed?

How is this relationship manifest, embodied, and strengthened in the service?

How do you understand your relationship to something greater?

How is this relationship manifest, embodied, and strengthened in the service?

How do you understand your connection to Unitarian Universalism?

How is that manifest and embodied in this service?

## **Questions for Congregations Installing a Minister**

What is your congregation's "why"? What meaning does the service hold for your congregation?

What meaning do the individual rituals within the service hold for your congregation?

Who is this service for?

Who is your congregation accountable to?

How is your relationship to the minister that you will be installing?

How does your congregation understand the minister's call to ministry?

How does your congregation understand your congregation's connection to Unitarian Universalism?

How has your congregation prepared for this service, spiritually as well as practically and financially?

## Gratitude

In 1985, Rev. Peter Spilman Raible wrote a widely-distributed handbook for ordination and installation. It served the ranks of our ministry well over the ensuing decades, and Peter's spirit was with us as we endeavored to update this document to reflect changes in our practice and understanding. We honor Peter's memory and we give thanks for this part of his enduring legacy. We're also grateful to Peter's daughter, Rev. Deborah Raible, who granted her blessing on this project.

We're very grateful to additional contributions from:

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Aileen Fitzke

Carl Gregg

Rachel Hayes

Erin Dajka Holley

Barbara ten Hove

Joel Miller

Hank Pierce

Susan Ritchie

Adam Robersmith

Leslie Takahashi

Arliss Ungar

Art Ungar

(The photo of Aileen Fitzke's laying on of hands was taken by Jeffrey B. Donohue; used with permission.)

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## Appendix: Sample Orders of Service

The following Orders of Service (OOS) are by no means directive, but demonstrate the range of creativity and uniqueness that can be featured in ordination and installation services.

### Ordination

- [Rev. Joanna Fontaine Crawford](#)
- [Rev. Mary Gear](#)
- [Rev. Jo Green](#)
- [Rev. Alice King](#)
- [Rev. Monica Jacobson-Tennessan](#)
- [Rev. Jessica Star Rockers](#)
- [Rev. Shari Woodbury](#)

### Joint Ordination (2 Congregations)

- [Rev. Molly Brewer](#) was ordained by two congregations, and her ordination had “an Imbolc twist,” including Pagan components, including an elemental invocation/release and an invocation to Brigid.

### Combined Ordination and Installation

- [Rev. Ashley Burczak](#) was ordained and installed as Affiliated Community Minister. This ceremony included a water blessing ritual, to gather and create sacred water that could travel with her to use for blessing others
- [Rev. Kevin Jagoe](#)

## Double Ordination and Installation

- [Revs. David and Teresa Schwartz](#), who are married and also serve as co-ministers, were ordained and installed in one ceremony.

## Installation

- [Rev. Kelly Weisman Asprooth-Jackson](#)
- [Rev. Sara LaWall](#)
- [Rev. Paul Sprecher](#)

## Unique Elements

- [Rev. Laura Bogle](#)'s installation included a Charge from the Earth and a Charge from the Ancestors
- [Rev. Florence Caplow](#)'s installation OOS included printed activities for the children
- [Rev. Carl Gregg](#)'s installation included a Buddhist chant, and readings from the Jewish, Christian, and UU heritages
- [Rev. Jami Yandle](#)'s ordination was a Sunday morning worship service
- [Rev. Crystal Zerfoss](#)'s ordination included an Investiture of the clerical collar and stoles