

Note to Angee – Feel free to break this into smaller segments. Thanks! -- Lorrie

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

Initiated in 2019, the School for Ministry is a new venture for CCIW (Disciples of Christ) and the Illinois Conference of the UCC. Built on a foundation of God's life-changing love, the School serves as a continuing education training ground for Commissioned Ministers (DoC) and Lay Ministers (UCC).

In these days of rapid change, the Christian church has new needs for ministerial leadership. Hence, the School for Ministry offers to feed God's sheep and God's shepherds. We are calling and equipping gifted laity in the congregation to help them to discern their call to ministry in the context of intentional, sacramental community.

Through nurturing and education, faculty, staff, and administration will help aspiring leaders gain the ability to become faithful, well-qualified pastors and ministers. We are confident that the School's educational ministry will change the lives of leaders and congregations, moving them from surviving to thriving.

What will it look like?

The educational experience will take place in groups of students called cohorts. The first experience for each cohort will be a weekend spiritual retreat, which will focus on discerning a call to ministry. There will be a scripture-based study of call – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Moses, the disciples. There will be opportunities to practice deep listening and to engage in Circles of Trust (ala Parker Palmer), a version of a Quaker clearness committee.

Courses in the first year will likely include Basic Bible – origins, meaning, the Canon, interpretation – Hebrew scriptures in the winter/spring session and New Testament in the fall session. These courses will be offered online through an accredited university. A summer intensive experience will likely include a week-long, in-depth study of a particular book of the Bible such as Ezekiel, the Gospel of John, the Psalms.

We want the intensive courses to be open to everyone – clergy and laity – led by some of the most gifted seminary professors today. During the summer week, there will be additional opportunities for the School's first cohort to continue deepening their spiritual growth.

The cohort will journey through the three-year process together as they take classes online in the spring and fall, gather for the intensive classes each summer and have the support of a mentor, a spiritual director, and a life coach. Collegiality and community are two of the strong features of the program.

Through these experiences, the School will help congregations in need of leadership development, including rural and small churches as well as those with diverse racial-ethnic make ups. The educational program will emphasize cultivating leaders from within our congregations and recognizing the gifts of the laity.

The School will emphasize pro-reconciling, anti-racist approaches, seeking to understand our place in God's diverse creation. We have a robust, 20-year history of providing anti-racism training in our Region. That tradition continues.

What outcomes will we see?

We'll ask our students to tell us a story about transformation in their lives — stories such as those that members of the School for Ministry Board recently shared. This is what they said –

Story A – I had a career, and during this time I knew I had things I might share through the church. I was uncertain but thought I might have a call to ministry. What to do with it? In my association with others in a similar situation, I became a lot more certain regarding the call. I learned many things I didn't know and found I could be helpful to others. The relationships are carrying on.

Story B- I retired early. While I was working, I preached in several churches in the community. I came to the Disciples of Christ church, and they encouraged me to consider pastoring them. They encouraged me to attend The School for Ministry. I was reluctant, but now I appreciate how much there is to learn and I am empowered to learn more as I pastor. Understanding the depth and breadth of scripture and the history in it has been a very rich experience. I learned there is more to pastoring than preaching. I know more about healthy spiritual growth and mission/outreach in the community.

Story C – Is there a call for me? I know seminary is not for me. In the School for Ministry, I can deepen my faith, receive knowledge to become a competent minister. It fits with the time and money I can give. I'm not sure I'll serve a congregation, but I have developed a great skill set. It helps me to serve more effectively as a layperson.

Assistance is Available

The CCIW and the Illinois Conference are offering generous subsidies for students to reduce the cost of attending the School for Ministry. A new minister can afford to take classes and will not have to travel to make each class.

We're creating the next crop of ministers – a new way of education for a new day in ministry. A gifted and passionate Board is leading this start-up ministry. Please pray for this great group of servants as this new ministry takes shape. These are exciting times!

Watch this space for more updates and the expanding horizons of the School for Ministry.