

<b>Policy:</b>	Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Policy (PLAR)
<b>Effective Date:</b>	2014
<b>Date Last Reviewed:</b>	September 2017
<b>Scheduled Review Date:</b>	September 2019
<b>Supersedes:</b>	All previous PLAR policies and/or statements
<b>Approved by:</b>	

## **Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition Policy**

The following policy for Prior Learning and Assessment is designed to be used in exceptional circumstances to determine educational requirements for applicants whose previous education, experience, or learning merits consideration as equivalent to a portion of the Diploma in Diaconal Ministry. The aim of the policy is to sufficiently recognize an applicant's prior learning and offer appropriate credit while upholding the pedagogy, integrity, and rigor of CCS programs.

### **A. POLICY**

#### **1. What is Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition?**

- a. CCS recognizes that adult learners acquire knowledge and skills through life and work experience. Through Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR), CCS will assess an applicant's existing level and integration of knowledge, skills and learning against a part of the CCS curriculum for the Diploma in Diaconal Ministry, with the aim of granting recognition for the learning that has taken place.
- b. PLAR is the assessment of what has been learned through formal and non-formal education, training or experience that corresponds to learning outcomes identified by CCS. It is used to evaluate knowledge, skills, and competencies that may have been acquired and integrated through such experiences as employment, reading, hobbies, volunteer work, travel, or artistic pursuits.

#### **2. What parts of the CCS Diploma in Diaconal Ministry are eligible?**

- a. PLAR may be applied to the following component parts of the program:
  - Learning on Purpose
  - Field Placements
  - Theme Learning Circles
  - External Courses
  - Global Perspectives Experience
  - Individual assignments
  - Mini-courses
- b. The parts of the program that are **ineligible** for PLAR consideration are:
  - Integration Learning Circles I, II, III

- c. While a general guideline is that no more than 50% of the requirements for the Diploma may be recognized as completed through the PLAR process, each applicant will be assessed on their individual experience and learnings.
- d. Learning in Community is considered an essential component of the CCS Diploma. Applicants are required to experience a minimum of four learning circles at CCS (not including the Leadership Development Module). They are also expected to demonstrate experiences of learning in community for the portion of the program for which equivalency is being sought.

**3. How is prior learning demonstrated?**

- a. Applicants are required to assemble a portfolio of materials which record and verify learning achievements and relate them to the Learning Guidelines (attached to this policy). Staff may assist in identifying Program areas and Learning Guidelines for the portfolio. Such identification may also occur during the Review of Learnings interview (see PLAR Process flow chart).
- b. Progress through the Diploma program is assessed against Learning Guidelines (attached) which are integrated throughout the program. To help an applicant prepare for a portfolio, these guidelines may be organized under the following headings:

Formation

- 1.1. Spirituality
- 1.2. Self Awareness/Self Understanding
- 1.3. Self in Relation to Others
- 1.4. Diaconal Identity
- 1.5. Integrated Understanding of Ministry

Christian Heritage

- 2.1. Theology
- 2.2. Faith and Church Tradition

Context and Culture of Ministry Leadership

- 3.1. Diversity
- 3.2. Social Ministry

Ministry Leadership

- 4.1. Learning
- 4.2. Group Process
- 4.3. Leadership
- 4.4. Communication
- 4.5. Organizational and Administrative Skills
- 4.6. Pastoral Care
- 4.7. Education in Faith Community
- 4.8. Liturgical Ministry
- 4.9. Learning in Community

- c. Applicants are required to participate in a “Review of Learning” by video call or in person. The Review of Learning is a 2-3 hour interview, similar to an oral exam, which takes place with a

panel consisting of the Principal, a program staff member, and a member of the Program Committee. Its purpose is to help determine an applicant's readiness for the program at the level they are seeking.

#### **4. How is Prior Learning assessed?**

The Principal and a member of the program staff, and any needed resource persons, will assess the applicant's portfolio and Review of Learning against the outcomes, standards, and criteria for the Diploma in Diaconal Ministry Program. Their assessment will determine whether and to what degree an applicant's evidence of knowledge, attitudes, skills and integration corresponds to the portion of the Diploma for which equivalency is being sought.

#### **5. What is the outcome of a PLAR process?**

Recommendations resulting from the PLAR assessment may include:

- a. A statement of the portion of the Diploma curriculum the applicant is considered to have completed;
- b. Additional assignment or assignments required to achieve full recognition of the portion of the Diploma curriculum for which equivalency is being sought.
- c. A statement that recognition of equivalency was not granted.

#### **6. Expenses**

PLAR is itself a learning process and therefore subject to tuition.

- a. An individual requesting the PLAR process will be charged an application fee of \$50.00 plus,
- b. \$750.00 flat fee once the applicant is approved for assessment.
- c. In some cases, applicants will be asked to travel to Winnipeg at their own expense to participate in the Review of Learning.

#### **7. Certification**

Students who receive recognition for a portion of the Diploma and who complete the remaining requirements will be granted a Diploma in Diaconal Ministry and will be granted Testamur for Diaconal Ministry in The United Church of Canada.

APPENDIX – LEARNING GUIDELINES

# Centre for Christian Studies

## Learning Guidelines

### ***Introduction***

The Centre for Christian Studies uses the “Learning Guidelines” as a means of determining whether a student demonstrates increasing competence in each of the areas identified as essential for functioning effectively in ministries of education, pastoral care, and social justice. These guidelines are used by student colleagues and Program Staff in the Review of Learnings/Assessment process at the end of the Leadership Development Module, during each of the Learning Circles in the theme years, and in the Integrating Year. They are also used by Program Staff in the final year-end review for the Theme Years and Integrating Year. We believe that an acceptable degree of competence is essential in each category of the guidelines in order for a student to progress from one year to the next and to complete the program. Students will normally be assessed on their individual competence for ministry based on a combination of institutional expectations as stated in these guidelines, their own learning goals, and demonstrated cumulative progress from year to year. We believe that every person always has more to learn.

The Centre for Christian Studies has a particular responsibility to certify to The United Church of Canada that, upon graduating from CCS, a student has met the testamur/educational requirements for commissioning as a Diaconal Minister as prescribed in *The Manual of The United Church of Canada*. These Guidelines are the primary resource used for making that determination.

***Guidelines*** (amended and approved by CCS Central Council, May 2013, reordered in 2014)

## 1. Formation

### 1.1 Spirituality

- Understands and tends one’s own spirituality.
- Lives out of a sense of gratitude and hope.
- Respects a variety of spiritual understandings and practices.
- Encourages others in their spiritual journeys.
- Articulates one’s own understanding of prayer and how that is related in ministry.
- Accepts different understandings of prayer.

### 1.2 Self Awareness/Self Understanding

- Has a realistic sense one's strengths and weaknesses.
- Is gracious toward oneself and practices self-care.
- Stretches and challenges oneself appropriately.
- Understands and accepts of one's own sexuality.
- Acknowledges the diversity of one's gifts in ministry.
- Is able to be self-directed in one's work.
- Discerns when to be serious and when to be playful.

### **1.3 Self in Relation to Others**

- Holds others with respect and positive regard.
- Recognizes, and appropriately monitors, one's own privilege, power, and vulnerability,
- Develops and sustains respectful relationships in a variety of ministry contexts.
- Works effectively in a variety of team configurations.
- Is aware of differences of race, class, age, sexual orientation, gender, culture, language, abilities and religion and understands the implications for ministry.
- Demonstrates interpersonal skills for ministry.
- Understands, and is committed to, appropriate boundaries in ministry.
- Exercises good judgment and understands how one's words and actions affect others.

### **1.4 Diaconal Identity**

- Understands and values the history of diaconal ministry - biblically and within Church tradition.
- Is familiar with diaconal networks - denominationally, regionally, and internationally.
- Understands and is committed to diaconal perspectives on education, pastoral care, and social justice.
- Identifies and articulates one's own role and identity in diaconal ministry.

### **1.5 Integrated Understanding of Ministry**

- Is grounded and centred in one's own value and worth, perspective and world view, faith and vision.
- Acknowledges one's own gifts and skills for ministry.
- Understands one's vocation as related to the whole church.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the importance of accountability in ministry.
- Integrates one's knowledge, understanding, attitudes, skills, and self-awareness in ministry.
- Demonstrates the ability to integrate theologically and theoretically; prophetic, pastoral, educational, spiritual, administrative and liturgical elements of the practice of ministry.

- Understands oneself as minister and can relate to others within that role.
- Understands the significance of global perspectives for ministry and for the life and work of the church.
- Understands how life transitions affect self and others and is able to implement personal strategies to cope effectively with transition and change, including developing support networks.

## 2. Christian Heritage

### 2.1 Theology

- Explores and articulates one's theology.
- Demonstrates understanding of Christian doctrines.
- Discerns how doctrine is integrated into one's faith.
- Respects a variety of theological perspectives.
- Facilitates others in reflecting on their own theological beliefs.
- Sustains a theology of hope and vision in a variety of situations.

### 2.2 Faith and Church Tradition

- Understands the history and diversity of the Christian tradition, both denominationally and ecumenically.
- Can identify one's own theological, spiritual, and cultural roots in Christian tradition.
- Understands how theology informs one's faith and relates to one's worldview.
- Demonstrates skills in biblical interpretation and theological reflection.
- Demonstrates theological beliefs which confront hierarchy, sexism, heterosexism, ageism, classism, racism, ableism, militarism, religious and cultural discrimination, and anthropocentrism<sup>1</sup>.
- Demonstrates a theology and spirituality of respect for creation.
- Values a variety of theologies of the church and understands the strengths and limitations of each.
- Understands the polity and the ethos of one's own denomination.
- Functions effectively within church structures.
- Is familiar with the basic structures of both the Anglican Church of Canada and The United Church of Canada.

## 3. Context and Culture

### 3.1 Diversity

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<sup>1</sup> a perspective/assumption that human beings are more important than the rest of Creation

- Appreciates a variety of cultural, social, political and religious perspectives.
- Has knowledge of and understands denominations and faith traditions other than one's own.
- Willing to enhance ecumenical and interfaith relations.
- Acknowledges and respects cultures other than one's own.
- Demonstrates a readiness for nurturing intercultural connections.
- Understands the historical place of aboriginal peoples in Canadian society and the impact of colonialism, racism and residential schools, and demonstrates a willingness to respectfully engage these concerns.

### **3.2 Social Ministry**

- Understands the historical and contemporary mission of the church in the context of justice.
- Understands social analysis, is able to use different models of social analysis, and can facilitate others in doing social analysis.
- Understands structures and their impact on people's lives.
- Functions in a variety of institutional structures.
- Understands how socialization and ideological perspectives influence worldviews, theology, and perceptions of injustice/justice.
- Has an analysis of, and can make connections amongst sexism, heterosexism, racism, ageism, ableism, classism, militarism, and environmental degradation,
- Understands globalization, its impact, and the implications for ministry.
- Understands the similarities and differences between social service and social change.
- Understands the complexities of, and is committed to, solidarity.
- Demonstrates skills in developing strategies for transformation using community and church networks.
- Understands advocacy and is able to advocate for self and others, individually and systemically.
- Understands spirituality as an integral element of social ministry and spiritual health as a source of hope.
- Encourages others to offer their gifts and skills in social ministry.
- Is committed to social ministry as an essential part of the ministry of the faith community.

## **4. Ministry Leadership**

### **4.1 Learning**

- Understands learning as a life-long process and commitment.
- Approaches learning as an educator/co-learner.

- Knows and understands one's own preferred learning style.
- Understands a variety of learning styles and their implications for ministry.
- Values self-directed learning and is able to learn as a self-directed learner.
- Sets and articulates intentional goals for learning.
- Demonstrates skills in, and appreciates the value of, effective research.
- Integrates theory and experience for effective ministry.
- Assesses and evaluates one's growth and performance.
- Seeks and utilizes support for learning.
- Learns from positive and critical feedback.

#### **4.2 Group Process**

- Understands self as leader/facilitator.
- Demonstrates awareness of how one's needs and behaviour affect group dynamics.
- Analyzes context, process, and dynamics in order to help groups function more effectively.
- Utilizes a variety of leadership styles.
- Envisions, initiates, designs, plans, implements, and evaluates in a variety of group contexts.
- Nurtures spiritual health in group life in a variety of ways.
- Facilitates the participation and leadership of others.

#### **4.3 Leadership**

- Demonstrates ability to provide leadership that is visionary, prophetic, spiritually grounded and compassionate.
- Discerns what kind of leadership is necessary in various contexts, to take appropriate initiative, and to encourage and support others in taking leadership.
- Understands transition in the context of ministry and is able to offer effective leadership.

#### **4.4 Communication**

- Demonstrates ability to listen attentively and with comprehension.
- Gives and receives feedback appropriately.
- Deals with conflict effectively and engages others appropriately in conflict situations.
- Speaks with confidence in small and large groups.
- Communicates clearly orally and in written form.
- Understands the importance of context in communication.
- Demonstrates an ability to use oral and written communication that is appropriate.

#### **4.5 Organizational and Administrative Skills**



- Understands and values administration as an aspect of ministry.
- Plans, organizes, sets priorities and manages time effectively.
- Demonstrates a consistent ability to meet deadlines.
- Demonstrates administrative skills such as budgeting, organizing meetings, and supervision.

#### **4.6 Pastoral Care**

- Has an awareness and acceptance of one's roles and responsibilities in pastoral care.
- Is a non-anxious, compassionate presence.
- Understands the theory and theology of pastoral care.
- Offers effective and appropriate pastoral care in a variety of situations.
- Works effectively in pastoral situations that may be stressful and uncomfortable.
- Demonstrates analysis and understanding of diversity and its implications for pastoral care.
- Demonstrates understanding of, and commitment to, responsible pastoral ethics.
- Understands how pastoral care can be offered and experienced through worship and advocacy.
- Understands the differences and connections amongst pastoral care, pastoral counselling, and spiritual direction.
- Understands one's own expertise/limitations in pastoral counselling, when to refer, and how to set up a network of qualified people for referrals.
- Understands how dynamics of power and vulnerability affect pastoral care.
- Understands an appropriate attention to one's own and others' spiritual needs as essential in pastoral care.
- Encourages others to offer their gifts and skills in pastoral care.
- Is committed to pastoral care as an essential part of the ministry of the faith community.

#### **4.7 Education in the Faith Community**

- Understands educational theory and has educational skills grounded in theology and ministry.
- Determines and applies educational theories appropriate to various situations.
- Plans learning experiences relevant to life issues and the global context.
- Finds, creates, adapts resources and curriculum.
- Nurtures the faith of others and facilitates their learning.
- Enables others to deal with differences within a faith community.
- Encourages others to offer their gifts and skills in educational ministry.

- Is committed to educational ministry as an essential part of the ministry of the faith community.

#### **4.8 Liturgical Ministry**

- Provides liturgical leadership, being aware of one's own gifts, strengths/weaknesses, and preferred leadership styles.
- Understands the connections in liturgy with education, pastoral care, and social ministry.
- Demonstrates understanding and appropriate sensitivity of diversity and its implications for liturgical ministry.
- Demonstrates an appreciation for ritual in relation to life experiences.
- Designs and leads liturgy that is responsive to a diversity of spiritual needs and expressions.
- Supports others in identifying their liturgical and ritual needs.
- Develops, finds, and adapts liturgies and rituals to meet different needs.
- Prepares sermons that are appropriate to a variety of contexts.
- Supports and empowers others to create and lead in liturgy.
- Demonstrates an understanding of the theology of sacraments and is able to offer leadership in the sacramental ministry of the church.

#### **4.9 Learning in Community**

- Interacts effectively with others to form and sustain an intentional learning community
- demonstrates commitment over time to one's own and others' learning in community
- accepts and appreciates one's own and others' discomfort and vulnerability as part of learning in community
- shows awareness of and takes responsibility for how one's emotions impact on group process
- creates and contributes to an environment conducive to risk-taking and openness to learning in community
- develops and shares meaningful goals for learning in community
- demonstrates skills of analysis, critical thinking, and conceptual awareness while leading in team and learning in community
- is receptive, through reading and study, to voices beyond the immediate learning community
- facilitates learning with others (listens actively, encourages and supports emerging ideas, probes beneath the surface, seeks more information, clears up confusion, shares solutions, includes others, makes links, holds silence when appropriate)
- integrates discoveries and insights arising from an action-reflection model of learning
- respects the unique strengths, gifts, styles and learning edges of others when leading in team

- respects and attends to the lived experiences of marginalization in oneself and others
- makes connections in community between one's own and others' spiritual practice and faith experience

## **PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT REVIEW PROCESS**

This is a three part process:

1. Preparation and Discernment – during which you will identify and reflect on experiences of learning against CCS Learning Guidelines and Curriculum.
2. Portfolio and Demonstration – during which you will prepare an autobiography, learning statements, documentation, and commentary.
3. Review of Learning – during which you will prepare for an interview, 2-3 hours in length in person or by video, similar to an oral exam. Its purpose is to help determine your readiness for the program at the level you are seeking.

**This process of reflection on experience and analysing it in writing is a major source of learning.**

Recognition is given for learning that can be verified, not just experience. The portfolio is the means by which you will present what you have learned for assessment. Therefore take the time to present your learning as effectively as possible.

### **I. PREPARATION AND DISCERNMENT**

**Autobiography #1** (not for submission)

- Spend time thinking about your experience and the learning you have done through work and other life situations.
- Create a timeline which includes significant life events and transitions from your childhood to the present.
- Use words, drawings, pictures, mementos, symbols. Note insights, knowledge and skills developed in conjunction with these events.

**Reflection on how you learn** - Components to consider:

- Formal education
- Employment History and Descriptions
- Informal Education (Workshops, Training Sessions, etc.)
- Hobbies and Interests
- Volunteer Work
- Summary of Competencies
- Other Skills and Learning

**Learning Benchmarks** - Review:

- CCS Learning Guidelines
- CCS Curriculum Outlines
- Evaluations and Assessments
  - School
  - Church/denominational involvement

- Employment
- Volunteer activities

**Self-evaluation** – Identify in relation to CCS Guidelines and curriculum:

- Strengths
- Skills
- Knowledge

**Ask** – “In what program area or areas do I want to seek recognition for prior learning?”

- A theme year
- One particular element of the curriculum (e.g. Group dynamics, Facilitation)
- One or more sections of the CCS Learning Guidelines (Formation, Christian Heritage, Context and Culture, Ministry Leadership)

**Organize Documentation** (not for submission)

- Assemble material that demonstrates, reflects, verifies your learning
- Examples:
  - Workshop outlines
  - Sermons
  - Publications
  - Assignments
  - Performance reviews.

## II. PORTFOLIO AND DEMONSTRATION

The portfolio or dossier that you submit will consist of:

- A. Autobiography
- B. Statement of Prior Learning
- C. Your comments
- D. Documentation

**Autobiography #2** - Develop an autobiography that explains the context of your learning, including:

- Your current social location - and previous if different. (A reflection on your place in society as influenced by factors such as gender, class, race, ethnicity, physical and intellectual ability, religion, sexual orientation. )
- Formative events and experiences
- Significant moments and themes in your spiritual journey and your vocational journey
- Education and employment, volunteer activities, etc.

**Statement(s) of Prior Learning** – For each program area for which you are seeking recognition of prior learning, prepare a statement of learning that demonstrates your knowledge and skills:

- Identify core convictions, critical insights, central issues and questions
- You may use words, pictures, drawings, art, video...

**Comments, Reflections** - Write a brief reflection on your statement of learning which identifies significant contributions that shaped your learning in this area.

**Documentation** – Assemble items that provide external verification of your learning statements:

- Transcripts
- Diplomas
- Degrees
- Testimony from people who have experienced your leadership in these areas

(It is acceptable for the documentation for external verification to apply to more than one statement of learning).

**Request for Recognition** – Prepare a summarizing statement indicating which program component(s) you are hoping to have recognized through PLAR.

PORTFOLIO DOs	... and DON'Ts
DO reflect on lessons from life that resulted from awareness of your “social location	DON'T describe your life as a chronology of dates and events
DO include actual documents that make tangible what you want to say about yourself - letters, references from people who have seen you in action	DON'T write a resume that simply lists your experiences and accomplishments
DO back up your claims with items such as a course certificate, a license to practise, newspaper articles, job descriptions, awards, work samples, bibliographies.	DON'T just describe your qualifications.
DO consider “before” and “after” scenarios that demonstrate how something you learned or experienced changed you.	DON'T focus on activities, but rather on areas of knowledge or skill that you can demonstrate.