

Leadership of the Committees on Ministry

The KO Bylaws also state that there are Chairs of each Committee on Ministry (COM) subcommittee. Subcommittee (A) for Authorization and Standing and (D) Discernment and Preparation. However, over the years, experience has shown that “life happens” and life just makes it difficult for chairs who are often pastors of local congregations to also carry the load of leadership for the Committee on Ministry. This is especially true as more and more pastors are bi-vocational. There are no provisions in the bylaws for vice chairs.

The Conference is fortunate that there are many gifted and new people serving on the COM. But as is true about the UCC overall, many are new to the UCC and the COM is a whole new world; and a very complex one at that! So it’s important to continually train and have leadership ready to step in. So in KO, the COM has chosen to improvise. For the last year the COM A has been led by co-chairs (Mauri Peaco and Erik Graefe) and COM D has been led by Rachael Pryor, but they operate as a leadership team consulting as needed and providing backup as appropriate.

Committee on Ministry, Subcommittee “A” Authorization/Standing

Submitted by Erik Graefe, Co-chair

This committee is responsible for the support and oversight of all Authorized Ministers in the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference.



At no time during the year were we able to meet in person, yet we were able to continue on with the work entrusted to us by the conference. In March of 2020, like everyone else, we were forced reimagine the work of COM-A. Suzanne Nichols served as chair through November, guiding our work skillfully through the digital world. As of December, there have been some leadership changes on our committee. Mauri Peaco agreed to co-chair with Erik Graefe beginning in December. Mauri’s experience and integrity were invaluable in guiding the committee’s work. Rachael Pryor assumed a leadership role on our committee for a time as well, and to date, the committee is co-chaired by Gage

Church and Erik Graefe. Of course, any of us who are fortunate enough to take part in the work on behalf of the congregations in Kansas and Oklahoma do not need to be reminded of this, but without Edith Guffey's guidance, care, and belief in this committee, it simply would not have happened. Thank you, Edith.

Here are the members currently serving on the Committee on Ministry, Subcommittee A:

- Rev. Mauri Peaco, Plymouth UCC, Lawrence, KS (authorized minister/ordained/retired)
- Ellen Neufeld, St. Peter's UCC, Inman, KS (lay)
- Rev. Gage Church, Central Congregational UCC, Topeka, KS (Co-chair) (authorized minister/ordained/pastor)
- Jason Stephenson, Mayflower UCC, Oklahoma City, OK (lay)
- Erik Graefe, Zion UCC, Junction City, KS (Co-chair) (authorized minister/licensed/pastor)
- Jan Lange, Registrar and Edith Guffey (ex officio members without vote).

Much of COM-A's work throughout the year involves the necessary gathering and organizing of information gleaned from the popular information reviews. Tedious it may be, but the work is vital in keeping all of us connected to one another. More than compensating for the gathering of data are the opportunities for our committee to engage in conversations with ministers serving in Kansas and Oklahoma. It is an honor for us to support ministers, welcome new leadership, and serve as a resource in any way we are able for congregations and leaders.

In March of 2021, we were able to take part in an online educational presentation led by Tara Barber of MESA. We learned a great deal about the breadth and depth of our committee's responsibilities.

There were challenging aspects to the work as well. I can report that it has been a joy to face these challenges with those serving on this committee, and this conference can take heart knowing that this difficult work was met with diligence, humility, integrity, and most importantly, an openness to guidance from the Spirit of the Living God.