

**SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NEVADA CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**“FORMING AND PREPARING PASTORAL
LEADERS FOR GOD’S CHURCH”**

***Materials to Aid
the United Church of Christ
in Finding, Preparing and Authorizing
the Leaders God is Calling from and for It***

**Materials Prepared by the Southern California Nevada Conference
Ministry Issues Implementation Committee**

**These Materials are based on the resource
*A Working Paper from the
Ministry Issues Implementation Committee*
in collaboration with
The Parish Life and Leadership Team
Local Church Ministries**

United Church of Christ

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Forming and Preparing Pastoral Leaders for God's Church

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THE CALL TO AUTHORIZED MINISTRY IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

A Biblical Understanding of “Call”

The experience of God intentionally reaching out to the human family with guidance, warning, comfort, direction and inspiration is foundational to the biblical narrative. The nature of this reaching out, this “call,” is varied, unpredictable, and directed to both individuals and communities, who each and together must discern its intent. All authorized and lay ministries in the United Church of Christ assume the faithful are called by God to service, witness, and fully engaged discipleship in the world. In both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, ours is a God who calls each of God’s people to faithfulness.

While scripture makes clear that God’s call to faithfulness comes to all disciples, the biblical witness affirms that some are called to respond to that call in specific ways: “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” (*Ephesians 4:11*) To Jeremiah God says, “Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (*Jeremiah 1:5*) The call is related to the context as God calls Esther “for such a time as this.” (*Esther 4:13-17*) A sense of such call is the critical foundation, inspiration and ongoing guide to all who consider, prepare for, and become authorized for ministry in the United Church of Christ.

Call to Ministry in the United Church of Christ

The United Church of Christ seeks to respond faithfully to the call of God to participate in God’s mission in this world. We claim that reality and relationship in our UCC Constitution: The United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls the whole Church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the Gospel in church and society. The United Church of Christ seeks to undergird the ministry of its members by nurturing faith, calling forth gifts, and equipping members for Christian service. (UCC Constitution, Paragraph 20, 2005 edition)

Who is called? How?

God’s call comes to every Christian. God’s call comes in various voices, at various times, inviting, challenging, urging persons and communities to respond faithfully. That call is, at the same time, both an invitation to and the gift of the possibility or potential to respond. From ancient times as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, God is heard “calling” individuals and communities to serve God in various ways. People in all walks of life, at various stages of life, and in all times hear God’s Spirit inviting or urging or even commanding them to respond obediently. God is known and active as creator, judge, redeemer, and God’s people are called to participate in God’s activity in this world. The call is not always clearly understood. The response is often a mixture of faith and fear; but the tradition continues. God calls us to be God’s people in whatever time and place God chooses.

Individual Christians and the whole Christian Church continue to hear God’s call. We, too, respond in mixed ways. Sometimes we find it difficult to determine whether the call we hear is from God, from ourselves, or from other powers. Sometimes we find it difficult to understand the character of a faithful response. When we hear and respond, it is God’s grace at work within us. Every Christian is “called” to ministry, to participate in God’s work in the world. God speaks, and persons hear, in various ways. God speaks through Scripture, through friends and family, through teachers, through enemies, through silence, through nature, through art, through the Christ, and infinitely more. This holy experience is often intensely personal, perhaps also private. It may be overwhelmingly powerful or mildly confusing.

Later testimony may express the experience with “I know,” or “I knew,” words of certainty and conviction. Or individuals may look to others in the community of faith to help them to listen, hear, and understand what it is that God is saying. Time is a factor. When God is ready, the persons or community being called may find themselves doggedly pursued and unable to resist. The knowledge of God’s leading is real, often on multiple levels, and commands response.

Persons are also called, as God speaks to us, through and by the particular gifts they have. The New Testament reminds us in more than one place that the Spirit gives gifts, that the gifts are varied, and that the gifts are given to individuals for the life of the whole community. Indeed, one’s “secret” and individual/personal call may be verbalized by another who recognizes God’s call in the individual’s gifts. The observation that “You’d make a good . . .” or the invitation suggesting “Have you ever thought about . . . ?” is often the Spirit’s calling through that recognition. Particular ministries, whatever their character and context, require particular gifts and the reality of such gifts is, itself, also God’s call.

The Church strives to be faithful to God’s mission in this world. As it is both the Body of Christ and a human community, the Church requires leaders who themselves are called by Christ into the Church and who are also called by both Christ and the Church to become authorized ministers. Their particular role and work is to “equip the saints for the work of ministry.” These persons are called in this four-fold sense:

-They are members of the Church who are called in their baptisms and membership promises to be a member of the Body of Christ in ministry in and to God’s world;

-They are persons of faith who know God in their individual experience and hear God’s particular call to them;

-They are persons whose gifts are those required by the Church in order for it to be that which God calls and commands it to be; and finally

*-They are persons called by the Church as it, too, responds to God’s call to mission. (See *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry*, by H. Richard Niebuhr, c. 1956.)*

When all these facets of God’s call are heard in the community, the Church proceeds toward authorizing such persons for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. In the United Church of Christ, authorization is by ordination, commissioning, or licensure.

New Relationships, New Responsibilities

As persons experience God’s call, the Church and its members must be continually listening and sharing their experiences and understandings. Often we have interpreted being “called to ministry” only in terms of the Church’s authorized ministries. We have not honored the importance of witnessing to Christ in the many ways we encounter God’s world. Nor have we recognized the many forms of work and participation in the world which God may be using to bring new life to humanity and all creation. The tradition of the Protestant reformers, based upon their reading of the New Testament, and claimed by the United Church of Christ, affirms the vocation of the whole body, of all members, of the “priesthood of all believers.” All Christians are called to ministry. The issue for discernment is to *what* ministry is this person, or is this community, called at this time. By the power of the Spirit we are graced to hear the particulars of the call and to respond. We almost never do that alone.

Typically many participants, individuals and communities, are involved in the process of one person being called to ministry. However, in the United Church of Christ, Congregations and Associations have particular responsibility for authorization itself and, therefore, must assume primary roles and work together in accompanying persons who may be called to such ministries. All participants are required to be faithful to Christ, to the whole Church, and to one another in this endeavor. As they listen together for God's call, they will keep in mind these dimensions of the call to authorized ministry:

Call occurs in many ways, many circumstances, and many seasons of life.

Jeremiah and Samuel were called by God at an early age, but it is not assumed that a call to authorized ministry must be heard from youth. Paul's transformation in Acts 9 is a pivotal illustration of the about-face which call can precipitate after an initial path through life has already begun. Peter and Andrew were busy "casting a net into the sea," and James and John were "mending their nets" when Jesus called to them and they chose to follow (*Matthew 4:18-22*). The changing nature of ministry in the church, and the need for leaders who are experienced in varied ways, will demand that both Members and Church and Ministry Committees be open to calls which come in nontraditional and unexpected life circumstances.

Call is not a single moment, but a continuing openness to hearing God's direction.

Those preparing for authorized ministry and those already authorized must recognize that vital and engaged spiritual leadership requires attentiveness to the ongoing nature of call. Long after his conversion and initial call, Paul continued to listen for new direction: "A vision appeared to Paul in the night... and when he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them." (*Acts 16:9-10*) Discernment of call is a perpetual task for those who lead in the church; processes of preparation and formation and the everyday practice of authorized ministry to and within the United Church of Christ may lead to unexpected results and changes of course.

Call to authorized ministry is discerned with others.

The UCC is committed to shared and accountable leadership in the church, beginning with the understanding of call outlined in these documents. Members considering authorized ministry, those in a formal process of preparation, and those already authorized, must be in consistent relationship and regular conversation with Church and Ministry Committees, local church leaders, trusted guides, mentors, teachers and supervisors in order to follow the biblical example of communal discernment of call. "Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses." (*1 Timothy 6:12*) The community of faith participates in the call of God when Matthias is called to discipleship following Jesus' resurrection. (*Acts 1:15-26*)

While personal reflection and decision-making is a key component of discernment of call, from the earliest days of the Christian church through to the last edition of the Manual on Ministry, personal call is shaped and confirmed in the community of those representing the church in which ministry is to be practiced. It is critical that those preparing for and practicing authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ affirm that God's personal call is ongoing and unpredictable, that discernment of call in community may lead to unexpected results and varied tasks, and that one must always be able and willing to articulate one's evolving understanding of call for those served by that ministry.

CORE UNDERSTANDINGS

I. Call to Ministry

1. The United Church of Christ and all its members are called by God to be ministers, serving in God's mission in and to this world.
2. Faithful discernment of and response to God's call to ministry involves both individuals and the church itself. Such discernment and response is an on-going practice.
3. Some members are called by God and the United Church of Christ to serve on the Church's behalf as authorized (ordained, commissioned, or licensed) ministers as the UCC participates in God's mission.

II. Call to Authorized Ministry (Ordination, Commissioning, Licensing) in the United Church of Christ

1. When a member's call leads to consideration of authorized ministry, the Church and that member together seek to discern God's particular call to that person. Such discernment and response is an ongoing practice.
2. The primary question guiding discernment is, "To what ministry is this person called?" And then, "Does this ministry require authorization? If so, what form of authorization?"
3. The particular program of formation and preparation for possible authorization of that member is determined by the Church and Ministry Committee, in consultation with the member and the Local Church, according to the needs of the UCC, the gifts of the person, and the "Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ." It is anticipated that a seminary degree program will continue to be the preferred primary educational process for most potential candidates for ordination.
4. As the member who is called prepares for possible authorization, discernment continues within a covenant among the person, the Association (through its Church and Ministry Committee) representing the UCC, and the Local Church.
5. The Covenant of Discernment and Formation replaces the current UCC practice of a "Student in Care." A Covenant of Discernment and Formation is the process to be followed for all forms of authorization.

III. Readiness for Authorization

1. Throughout the time of Discernment and Formation, the Church and Ministry Committee, in continuing conversation with the member and the Local Church, engages in discerning the member's call, determines an appropriate and effective program of preparation for that member, and assesses progress toward readiness for authorization.

2. In determining readiness for authorization, the Church and Ministry Committee focuses on the potential candidate's qualifications for that particular authorization rather than on the completion of one particular educational process. This determination is guided by the "Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ" and the needs of the Church.
3. Each authorization (licensing, commissioning, and ordination) is defined by the UCC Constitution and Bylaws.
4. The Association determines whether and when to proceed to authorization on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

IV. Authorized Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ

1. Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ is a covenant of an Association, an authorized minister, a local church, and the calling body (if other than a local church).
2. The Covenant of Ministerial Standing is guided by the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ, the "Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ," and the policies of the Association.
3. All the covenant partners are responsible to each and all of the other partners.
4. All Covenants of Ministerial Standing include, but are not limited to, appropriate support of the minister, faithfulness of all to the United Church of Christ, and the continuing discernment of call and formation for ministry.

V. UCC Identity and Authorized Ministry

1. All authorized ministers of the United Church of Christ, commissioned, licensed, or ordained, serve on behalf of the whole United Church of Christ.
2. UCC identity and relationships are a fundamental component of the call to, the preparation for, and the practice of authorized ministry.
3. The United Church of Christ is committed to fostering an environment that celebrates diversity of expressions of Christian faith and promotes mutually enriching interaction of various Christian cultures, theologies, spiritualities, and ideologies.

UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICING DISCERNMENT

Discernment is a spiritual discipline, not a mechanical process.....It is an ancient spiritual practice in the life of the Church, a gift from God working through the Holy Spirit for the good of the whole body. It focuses on the sacred and the holy ground on which the body finds itself. Discernment is open to God's surprises!

Core Understandings:

- When a member's call leads to consideration of authorized ministry, the Church and that member together seek to discern God's particular call to that person. Such discernment and response is an ongoing practice.
- The particular program of formation and preparation for possible authorization of that member is determined by the Church and Ministry Committee, in consultation with the member and the Local Church, according to the needs of the UCC and the gifts of the person.
- As the member who is called prepares for possible authorization, discernment continues within a covenant among the person, the Association (through its Church and Ministry Committee) representing the UCC, and the Local Church.
- A Covenant of Discernment and Formation replaces the current UCC practice of a "Student In Care." A Covenant of Discernment and Formation is the process to be followed for all forms of authorization.

Members of Local Churches, Ministry Discernment Committees, and Association Church and Ministry Committees are called to discern God's will in their ministry with persons who feel they have a call from God to seek authorized ministry. They must first be persons who practice discernment in their own lives and ministries.

The process of discernment is an on-going one, involving careful listening and continual prayer. It is most effective when it becomes an integral part of a church's make-up. The process calls for individuals who can truly listen:

- to potential candidates and covenantal partners
- to the needs of the Church
- to one another
- to and for the voice of God

A helpful exercise (Ministry Issues Document, Draft 3.1, p. 38) asks persons to reflect on times when they experienced the characteristics - respect, trust, honesty, sensitivity, consistency - that mark a faithful discernment process.

Discerning God's will is greatly enhanced by the following practices:

- listening to God in regular times of prayer and meditation and adopting practices of prayer that become part of the fabric of the group
- being comfortable with silence
- talking over decisions with covenantal partners, who can help one listen for God's desire
- working regularly with a spiritual director for support/guidance/encouragement

Discernment then is "...the intentional practice by which a community or individual seeks, recognizes and intentionally takes part in the activity of God in concrete situations." (*Practicing Our Faith*, Dorothy Bass, ed.) While local Ministry Discernment Committees and Church and Ministry Committees need to work on essential and measurable expectations, the framework for their ministry is to bring their desires and will into harmony with God's desires and will.

A NEW MODEL: COVENANT OF DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION

While discernment is a fluid and ongoing process, there are some specific points that identify transitions on the path of discerning a call to authorized ministry and readiness for authorization. These include:

<i>Points of Discernment in the Covenant of Discernment and Formation</i>	
Mutual Covenant of Discernment	This is the entry point to the process that is agreed upon by the Member in Discernment (MID), the MID's home church community, and the Association Church and Ministry Committee (C&M). NOTE: Prior to this step, the church community will engage with the MID in a process of discernment both about recommending the MID to the Association and their own willingness to be active partners in the Covenant of Discernment and Formation.
Covenant of Formation	Prior to entering this phase, a decision is made about whether the MID's call is to a form of UCC authorized ministry and what that form might be: licensed, ordained, or commissioned. At this point a learning plan is defined, including educational expectations as well as mentoring/experience, and an outline of other areas of ministerial readiness needing further formation. A specific plan will be agreed upon by all covenantal parties.
Assessment of Readiness for Authorization	Using the collection of "Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers," the C&M, in covenant with the MID and her/his local church, discerns the MID's readiness for authorization. By this point in the process, the C&M will have used multiple tools for discernment: psychological assessment, reports from such experiences as field education or supervised ministry, reviews from seminaries or other educational programs, reports from CPE supervisors and MID mentors, feedback from the MID's church community as well as their own relationship with the MID, and intentional times of prayer and reflection.
Authorization	Pending a call from a specific body, the C&M determines the MID is ready for authorization. At this point, the MID becomes a Candidate for Authorized Ministry. An Ecclesiastical Council is held for those seeking ordination or commissioning. Authorization is celebrated in a rite of commissioning, licensure, or ordination.
Ongoing Covenant of Accountability	ALL persons holding UCC ministerial authorization enter into this covenant that includes accountability to their Association and the Wider Church, agreement to engage regularly in continuing education, and a commitment to ongoing nurture and formation.

These phases are not necessarily linear. However, all the phases of discernment, whenever they occur and for whatever duration, are significant.

LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRY DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

Abbreviations: MID – Member in Discernment (individual) C&M – Church and Ministry Committee
AID – Advisor in Discernment (Association) (Association)
MDC – Ministry Discernment Committee MOM – Manual on Ministry
(Local Church)

When a church member expresses an interest and recognition of a call to ministry, a MDC:

1. is appointed by the local church governing body; represents the local congregation
2. assumes the responsibilities, along with the pastor, to fulfill the steps in MOM
 - a. see Sect. 2, "Student in Care of Assn.," pp. 12-14*
 - b. if MID is a seminary graduate, see Sect. 3, "Ordained Ministry," pp. 18-26
3. will nurture the MID in the spirit of discernment throughout the entire process
see Ministry Issues document "Understanding and Practicing Discernment" in the MDC packet
4. will work in partnership with the MID, the AID and the C&M in the on-going process
see Ministry Issues document "Guidelines for Discernment and Formation Process" in the MDC packet

The MDC meets regularly with the MID, using the spiritual discipline of discernment to:

1. create a caring and exploratory environment where MID can risk testing his/her vocational aspirations
2. assist the MID discern his/her particular gifts from God for ministry
3. provide a forum for exploring the MID's call to authorized ministry
 - a. discuss the meaning of ministry in general
 - b. look specifically at the difference between the call to authorized ministry and the baptismal call of all Christ's people
4. review MID's personal history, experience in the local church, spiritual journey
5. recommend MID to church's governing board when feel MID is ready
6. make formal request to C&M to receive MID into process
7. support MID during on-going assessment period if MID becomes discouraged, loses her/his way
8. serve as communication link between the MID and the congregation
9. interpret the process as the MID's discernment and formation continues
10. support the MID when decisions called for – to recommend MID for authorization, to have MID do more preparation, to end the covenant without the member moving on to authorization

Discernment, in summary, involves:

1. having a desire to become aware of God's will
2. being open to the leading of the Holy Spirit
3. listening deeply and carefully
4. asking questions in community, not isolation
5. being rooted in prayer
6. being comfortable with silence
7. trusting in the covenant partners
8. being flexible and open to God's surprises
9. accepting the outcomes of the discernment process

*A list of suggestions/areas of discernment to explore with the MID from the narrative account in MOM, Section 2, pp. 3-5 is included in the MDC packet.

COVENANTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

I. Member in Discernment's Covenantal Responsibilities

- Engage in disciplines of discernment regarding a possible call to authorized ministry.
- Receive the counsel of her/his Local Church and others regarding the possible call.
- Meet with the designated body in the member's Local Church regarding the member's call.
- Meet with the Association Church and Ministry Committee .
- Explore with the covenant partners what type of authorization (licensure, commissioning, or ordination) is the most appropriate response to the member's call.
- Work with the Association to develop an educational plan for the authorized ministry sought.
- Engage in the study and action prescribed in the education plan.
- Discern through prayer and reflection with covenant partners throughout the process.
- At the appropriate time, prepare and submit documentation to the Association and be interviewed by the Association regarding readiness for authorization.

II. Local Church's Covenantal Responsibilities

- Interact with the member as s/he undertakes initial exploration of her/his call;
- If the exploration proceeds, the Local Church recommends the member to the Association.
- After/if the Association enters into the covenant, the Local Church continues to provide support (including financial and spiritual) as the member engages in preparation for her/his ministry.
- Discern through prayer and reflection with covenant partners throughout the process.

III. Association's Covenantal Responsibilities (primarily carried out through the Church and Ministry Committee)

- Receive the recommendation and supporting materials from a Local Church regarding its member's request to enter a covenant of discernment and formation
- Interview the member; if the Association enters the covenant, work with the member to discern the form of authorization (licensure, commissioning, or ordination) most appropriate for the member's call.
- Appoint an advisor to guide the member during the covenantal period.

- When a candidate is a member of a racial/ethnic community which is not represented in significant numbers (50% or more) among the members of the Church and Ministry Committee, adapt its procedures of discernment and decision-making by including persons from the Member in Discernment's own community in the decision-making processes, taking the time and effort to educate itself concerning the community's traditions and needs, and acknowledging the validity of the member's community's discernment.
- When the Member in Discernment is a person with disabilities, adapts its procedures of discernment and decision-making so as to honor that member's gifts and needs, taking the time and effort to educate itself appropriately and including other individuals with disabilities in the processes of discernment.
- Work with the member to develop a plan of preparation.
- Meet at agreed upon intervals with the member and representative of the Local Church to review the member's progress on her/his path of preparation.
- Discern through prayer and reflection with covenant partners throughout the process.
- At the appropriate time, request appropriate documentation from member and interview member to determine readiness for authorization.
- Decide whether to proceed with authorization in covenant with the member, her/his Local Church and, when appropriate, the member's particular community.

A COVENANT OF DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION

LOCAL CHURCH

We, the members of the _____, promise to support and
(Church)
nurture _____ in her/his period of discernment and formation
(Member in Discernment)
as s/he explores a call to authorized ministry. We covenant with him/her and the _____
Association of the United Church of Christ as a sign of our mutual ministry in Christ's name.

Local Church Moderator

Date

ASSOCIATION

We, the members of _____ Association of the United Church of Christ, covenant
with the people of _____ and
(Church)
_____ to explore a call to authorized ministry in the United
(Member in Discernment)
of Christ. We will develop an educational plan with _____
(Member in Discernment)

and accompany her/him as s/he engages in a path of preparation and formation. We will provide
counsel and support and will meet with the Member in Discernment at appropriate intervals to discern
readiness for the authorized ministry sought. When the Member in Discernment is ready, we will
authorize her/him for ministry according to the faith and order of the United Church of Christ.

We covenant with him/her and the _____ as a sign of our mutual
(Church)
ministry in Christ's name.

Association Moderator

Date

MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT

I, _____, promise to continue to faithfully discern with my
covenant partners my call to ministry, including exploration regarding which form of authorized
ministry may be the most appropriate response to my call. I will engage in the educational plan and
formative practices developed with the Association that will prepare me for this calling. During this
time I will continue to participate with my Local Church, contributing to its life and witness as possible
and appropriate. I will maintain contact with the Association Church and Ministry Committee and
provide materials as requested that reflect my progress.

I covenant with _____ and the _____ Association
(Church)
as a sign of our mutual ministry in Christ's name.

Member in Discernment

Date

REPORTS REQUIRED:

To the Association

I, _____, will meet with and submit reports as
(Member in Discernment)
necessary and agreed upon to the _____ Association Church and Ministry
Committee.

Member in Discernment

Date

To the Local Church

I, _____, will meet with and submit reports as
(Member in Discernment)
necessary and agreed upon to the Ministry Discernment Committee of my Local Church.

Member in Discernment

Date

A SERVICE RECOGNIZING THE BEGINNING OF A COVENANT OF DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION¹

Local Church Representative

_____ (church) United of Christ, after carefully considering the call to explore authorized ministry of _____ (licensure, commissioning, or ordination) respectfully requests that the _____ Association receive _____ (member) as a Member in Discernment of this Association, according to the faith and order of the United Church of Christ.

Association Representative

The recognition of the establishment of a Covenant of Discernment and Formation is the way an Association affirms the process of a member responding to God's call to explore authorized ministry and to explore it in covenant community with her/his Local Church and the Association. The _____ Association celebrates this covenant with _____ (member) and _____ (church).

Association Representative to the Member in Discernment

Your intention to prepare yourself for authorized ministry will require diligent and prayerful work. This Association, through its Church and Ministry Committee, joins with your Local Church in promising to assist you in your pilgrimage of education and formation. With you, we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the future opens before all of us in this covenant. We invite you to call upon the Association wherever we may be helpful to you in your preparation and formation.

Vows

Association Representative addressing the Member in Discernment

As you enter into this covenant with _____ (church) and this Association, do you promise to seek the guidance of the congregation and Association, to receive support of both, and to communicate regularly with each?

Member in Discernment

I do with the help of God.

Association Representative addressing the local church representative

As a representative of _____ (church) entering into this covenant of discernment and formation with one of your members and with this Association, do you promise on behalf of your congregation to encourage your member in her/his preparation for authorized ministry, undergirding her/him with prayer, support and nurture?

Local Church Representative

We do with the help of God.

¹Adapted from *Book of Worship* service recognizing In Care relationship. The Ministry Issues Implementation Committee anticipates that, as the project moves forward, new liturgies will be created and offered to the Church.

Association Representative addressing a representative of the Church and Ministry Committee

As a representative of this Association's Church and Ministry Committee, do you promise to faithfully engage in this covenant with _____ (member) and _____ (church)? Will you be generous with your counsel, supportive of the member's preparation, honest in your feedback, and diligent in your assessing the readiness of this Member in Discernment for authorized ministry?

Church and Ministry Committee Representative

We will with the help of God.

Association Representative addressing the Advisor in Discernment

As advisor of this Member in Discernment, do you join this covenant, pledging to support, guide, and walk alongside this member as s/he continues the pilgrimage of education and formation, maintaining regular contact both with her/him and the Association's Church and Ministry Committee?

Advisor in Discernment

I do with the help of God.

Association Representative addressing the members of the Association

Do you, the ministers and delegates of this Association, confirm the covenant made this day among this Association, _____ (church) and _____ (Member in Discernment)?

Do you offer encouragement for this Member in Discernment, and will you pledge to sustain her/him in the continued preparation for authorized ministry in the church of Jesus Christ, to pray for her/him and to recognize this special covenant into which s/he enters with her/his congregation and this Association?

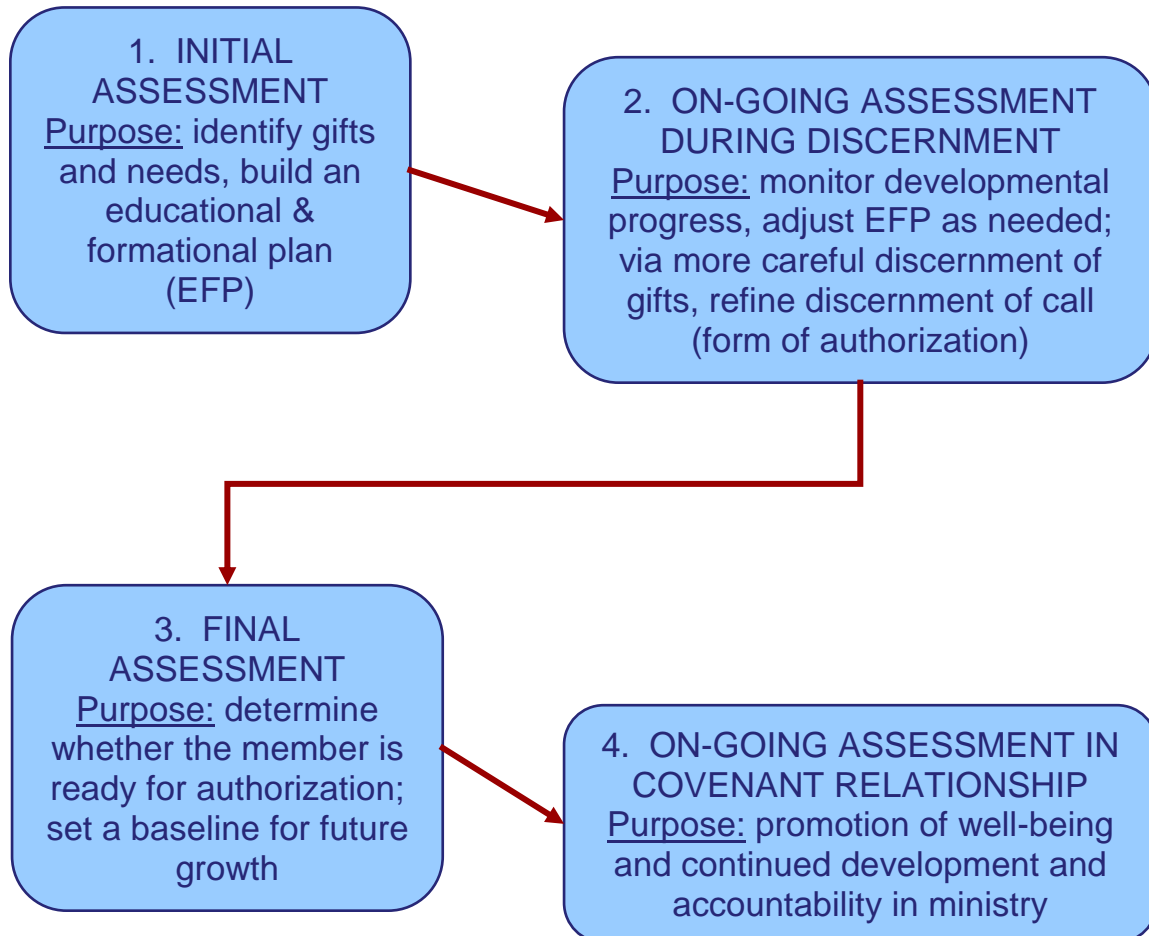
Members of the Association

We do and we will with praise and thanksgiving to God.

Prayer

Enter, O God, into this covenant made today. Pour out your Holy Spirit on this Association, congregation and _____ (member), that the promises we have made today will bear the fruit of ministry in your name, ministry of the whole people of God and ministry of those authorized for specific callings. Equip _____ (member) to be diligent in her/his discernment and preparation and _____ (church) and this Association to be faithful in offering encouragement and guidance. May our mutual ministry manifest mighty and gentle works of justice, compassion and peace, service in the service of others, and a witness to your realm that has no end. Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto you, Amen.

ASSESSMENT OF PERSONS SEEKING AUTHORIZATION FLOW CHART



ADVISOR IN DISCERNMENT

The Advisor in Discernment is appointed by the Association Church and Ministry Committee and serves many functions analogous to the role of the in care advisor as identified in the current *Manual on Ministry*. The role of the Advisor in Discernment is critical in the Member in Discernment's exploration of various forms of ministry and preparation for the possibility of authorized ministry. The Advisor performs several essential functions in this spiritually rich and multi-dimensional process.

Most importantly, the Advisor serves as a trusted companion and guide on the discernment journey, listening to the Member in Discernment's aspirations, anxieties, and uncertainties, and helping to clarify the individual's sense of God's calling to a particular form of ministry. The Advisor helps the Member in Discernment discover whether authorized ministry is the most appropriate response to the individual's call, and what type of authorization (licensure, commissioning, or ordination) is most suited to that individual's gifts and graces. This spiritual companionship involves the encouragement of the Member in Discernment's prayer life, habits of disciplined study, participation in corporate worship, meditation, and other devotional practices. The Advisor fosters an atmosphere of trust and candor in which the Member in Discernment can raise and explore questions concerning faith, the Christian life, ministry, and the church. In conversation, the Member in Discernment and the Advisor will discuss the Member's educational plans in the broader context of the Member's spiritual and vocational formation. In an ethos of mutuality, the Advisor will help the Member in Discernment connect theory and practice, vocational and personal life, and study and action. In short, the Advisor serves as a coach and counselor throughout the discernment process and the preparation for the possibility of authorized ministry.

The Advisor is an essential component in the network of covenant relations between the Member in Discernment, the Association, the Association's Church and Ministry Committee, and the local congregation. Most centrally, the Advisor serves as a link between the Member in Discernment and the Association's Church and Ministry Committee. In many ways, the Advisor represents the Association and its Church and Ministry Committee. The Advisor embodies the church's support for the Member in Discernment. The Advisor will help the Member in Discernment explore ways to implement the recommendations of the Church and Ministry Committee regarding the individual's plan of preparation. A crucial aspect of this advisement process is the determination of which specific combination of educational opportunities (seminary courses, regional theological educational programs, mentoring possibilities, etc.) will be most appropriate to the member's unique path of preparation for ministry.

The Advisor also helps represent and interpret the Member in Discernment to the Association and its Church and Ministry Committee. The Advisor helps the Member in Discernment clarify for the Church and Ministry Committee the ways in which the Member's educational experiences are addressing the Association's requirements and recommendations concerning preparation for ministry. With the possibility of preparing for authorized ministry through multiple educational experiences (not just college and seminary courses), this role will become more critical and may require more intensive collaborative advisement and monitoring.

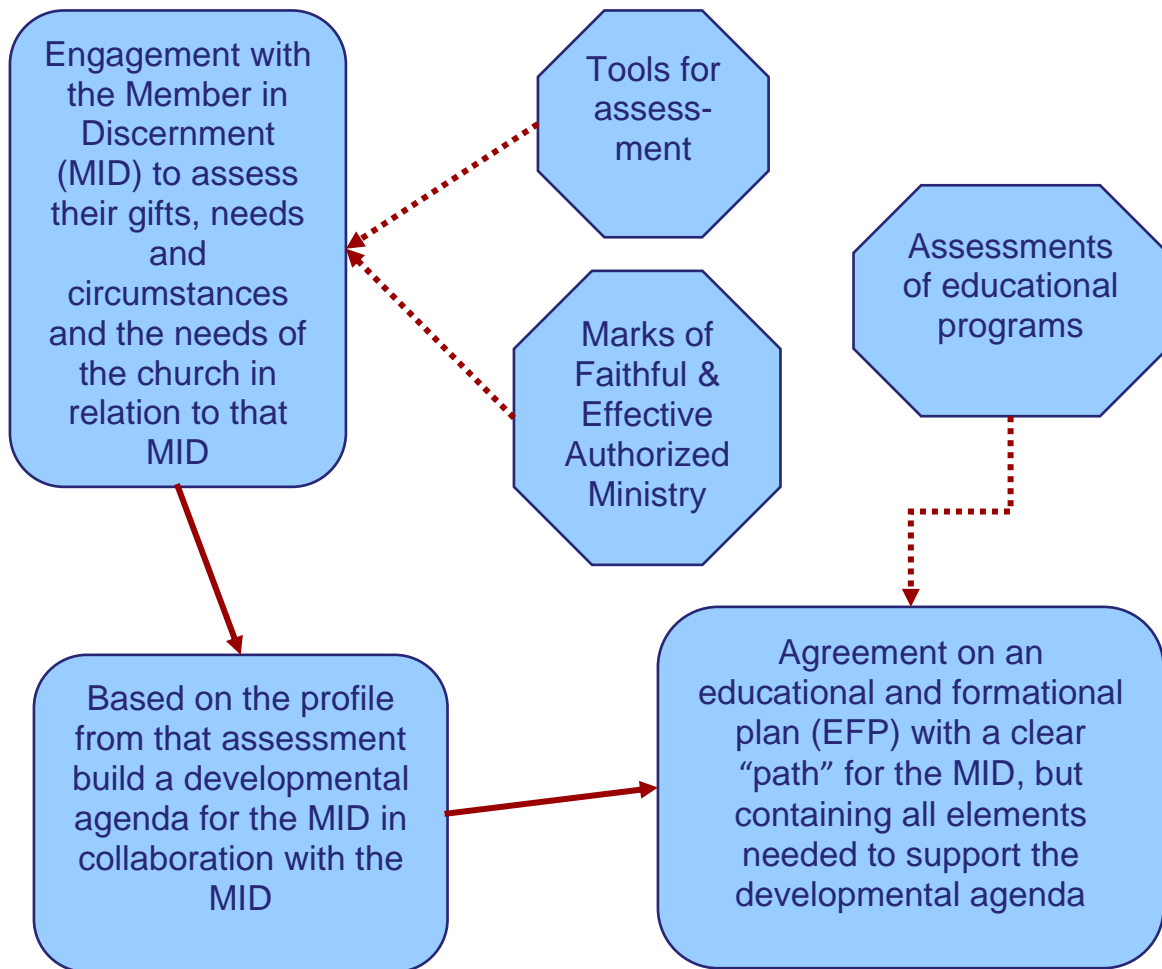
Responsibilities of the Advisor in Discernment (AID) :

- Receive orientation from the Association regarding the advisor's role and seek appropriate training (spiritual direction, life coaching, listening skills workshops, etc.) for the work of advisement.
- Act on behalf of the Church and Ministry Committee (C&M) with the Committee's full and current knowledge of the Member in Discernment (MID)'s progress and the AID's practices, advice and role.
- Maintain frequent contact with the MID via e-mails, telephone calls, written communication, and face-to-face meetings.
- Offer on-going advice and counsel.
- Provide guidance, in consultation with the Association's C&M, concerning course work and other educational opportunities.
- Help the MID understand the expectations of the C&M concerning the individual's path of preparation for authorized ministry.
- Help the MID understand the United Church of Christ's procedures for the authorization of ministries.
- Encourage the MID to participate in the life of his/her local congregation.
- Encourage the MID to be active in Association and Conference activities.
- Help the MID secure financial support for the preparation process.
- Help the MID evaluate and select appropriate educational opportunities from among the possible paths of preparation for ministry (seminary courses, regional theological education programs, mentoring, etc.).
- Help the MID prepare the necessary documentation and reports required by the Association and the broader church.
- Accompany the MID to meetings of the C&M in order to review progress.
- Foster the deepening of the MID's Christian faith and life.

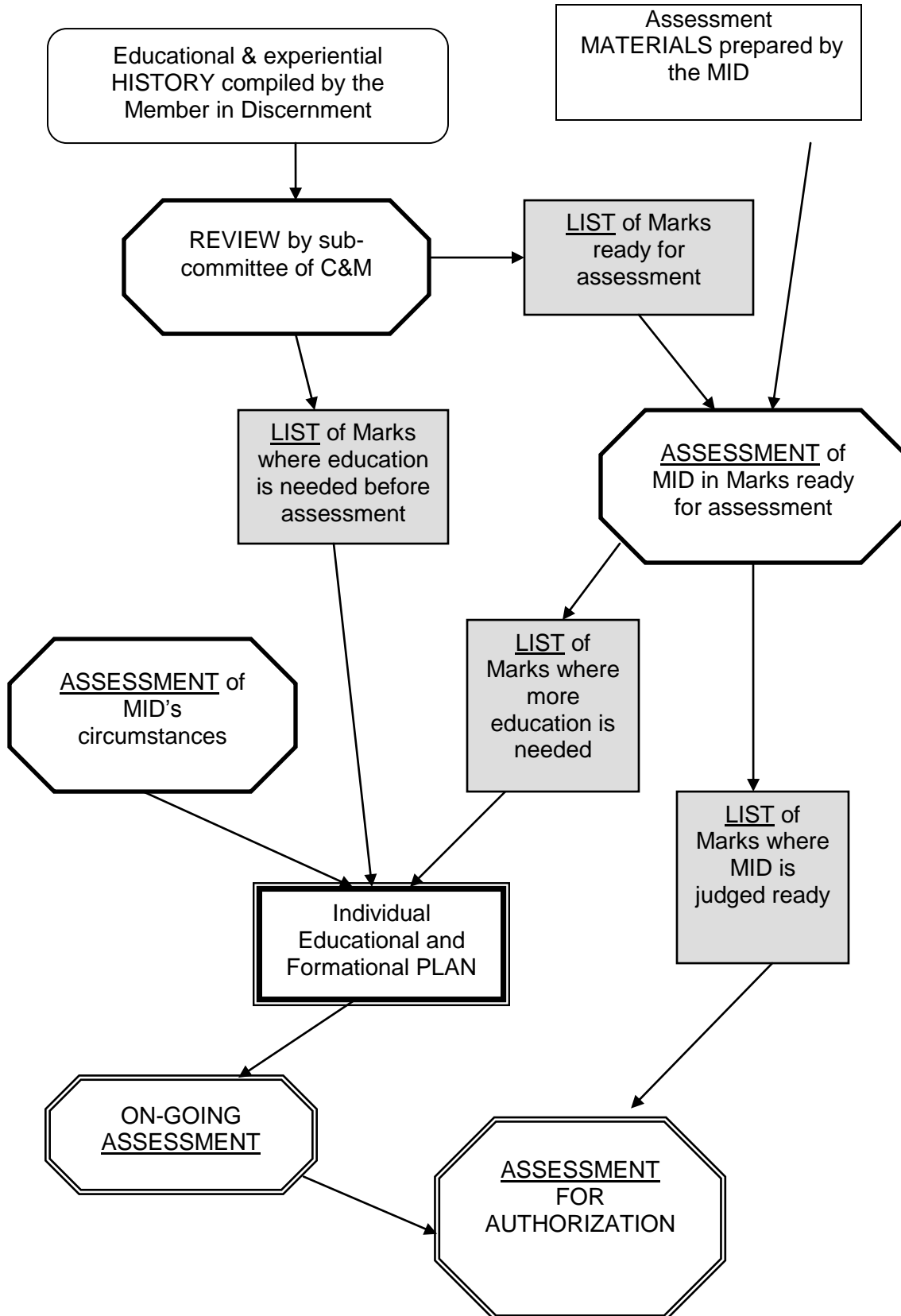
INITIAL ASSESSMENT

Initial assessment is an extensive process of evaluation in relation to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers that serves the purpose of identifying the gifts and developmental needs the Member in Discernment brings into the process of mutual exploration of call and appropriate forms of authorization. Initial assessment will be focused in terms of the Committee's and the Member in Discernment's initial sense about the form of authorization to which the member may be called (ordained, licensed, or commissioned), applying the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers through the lens of the constitutional definition of the relevant form of authorization.

Insofar as the member's gifts are reflective of God's call to her or him, initial assessment provides important information in the process of mutual discernment of God's call to the member. It also provides a clear definition of the needs for growth that should be addressed before the member would be ready for authorization. When combined with the assessment of the various educational options available for the Member in Discernment, this definition of needs informs the educational and formational plan that the C&M and the member will develop to guide the member's preparation.



ASSESSMENT OF GIFTS AND NEEDS - FLOW CHART



EDUCATIONAL FORMATION PLAN

A simple way to think about how all this information comes together in a plan is to see all this assessment work as providing the Church and Ministry Committee with two kinds of information and guidance. The assessment of gifts and needs tells the Member and the Church and Ministry Committee what the Member needs to learn and develop. The assessment of the individual's life circumstances helps the Member define the educational contexts within which he/she should do that learning and development.

The Member's aim here is to develop, together with the Church and Ministry Committee, an individual educational and formational plan that will identify the various activities required for the Member in Discernment to experience the growth that is needed for authorization. The plan should be put in writing and should organize into a clear schedule the Marks that are to be addressed, the educational and formational content that needs to be learned, and the specific educational contexts in which that learning should happen. The purpose of such a plan is both to give the Member in Discernment and the Local Church Discernment Committee clear guidance about what they need to do, and to give the Advisor and the Church and Ministry Committee a clear structure for monitoring and assessing the Member's progress.

THE MARKS OF FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST (Revised, April, 2009)

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION FOR MINISTRY

1. A lived faith showing love of God, trust in Jesus, and openness to the Holy Spirit.
2. Devotion to the word of God as revealed through scripture and Christian traditions.
3. Commitment to life-long spiritual growth and practice, individually and in community.
4. A sense of being called by God and the community to authorized ministry in the church.
5. Openness to continuing discernment of one's call in community.

UCC IDENTITY FOR MINISTRY

1. Acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as sole Head of the Church.
2. A passion for the oneness of the body of Christ as expressed through commitment to ecumenism, justice, and the full embrace of all persons in the radical hospitality of God.
3. Active membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ.
4. An understanding of the concept of covenant and how it informs the nature, purpose, and polity of the United Church of Christ.
5. A willingness to live in the covenants of mutual accountability that characterize authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ.
6. Ongoing demonstration of commitment to the United Church of Christ.
7. Stewardship of resources, including financial support of the church in all of its settings.
8. Participation in the various settings of the United Church of Christ, including the conference/association and local church.

The ability:

9. to articulate diverse histories that comprise the United Church of Christ, to situate them in the broader evolution of faith traditions and to relate them to the theology, polity, and practices of the Member's local church, association, and conference.
10. to explain and work within the current polity of the UCC and its denominational structure, and to describe the covenantal relationships among the General Synod, national setting, conferences, associations, and local congregations of the UCC.
11. to share key elements of the UCC's statement of faith, constitution with its preamble, and bylaws regarding the governance, mission, and theologies of the UCC and their implications for the life of the church.
12. to articulate the UCC's commitment to being a united and uniting, multiracial and multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all, and just peace church.
13. to envision how the UCC in its various settings may respond to religious, social, economic, and political trends, changing demographics, and other emerging factors.
14. to use and promote the informational and educational resources available through UCC publications and websites.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL FORMATION FOR MINISTRY

1. A healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and personal experience.
2. A sense of theological identity and authority, while being responsive to the opinions and values of others, including those whom the Member will serve.
3. A healthy awareness of strengths, weaknesses and limits, and assumption of responsibility for one's body, mind and spirit.
4. Knowledge and observance of personal and professional boundaries in interpersonal, congregational, and community settings.
5. A commitment to continuing education, professional development, and life-long learning.
6. Demonstrated moral maturity, including integrity in personal and public life and responsibility to self, family, church, and community.

The ability:

7. to affirm the identities of others, including others very unlike oneself.
8. to engage in self-reflection and to seek and use feedback from others appropriately.
9. to engage productively in public discourse, expecting to grow and be transformed through the exchange of viewpoints.
10. to take initiative in leadership, and to frame and test a vision in community.
11. to listen empathically, communicate appropriately, and keep appropriate confidences.
12. to function as part of a team, to give and receive supervision, and to mutually equip and motivate the community of faith.
13. to be resourceful and adaptable, and know where to locate additional resources and seek consultation when needed.

14. to accept and promote diversity, to inspire others to do so, and to minister in a multicultural and multiracial, open and affirming, just peace, accessible to all, united and uniting church.

KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS FOR MINISTRY

General Knowledge and Skills

The Ability:

1. to understand and appreciate a variety of perspectives of life.
2. to understand the profound differences that physical, psychological, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, class, cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic factors make in the ways that human beings experience the world.
3. to comprehend the impact of historical change upon the thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals and societies.
4. to perceive how a person's perspectives and interests shape communication, and to appreciate the virtues and limitations of those perspectives and interests.
5. to grasp and evaluate the justifications that people give for their opinions.
6. to apply basic concepts of psychology to the understanding of oneself, others, and human interactions.
7. to appreciate the importance of symbols and images in human culture(s).
8. to understand various meanings and purposes of the arts.
9. to analyze social, political, environmental, and economic dynamics, using the tools of the social and natural sciences.
10. to use respectfully and relationally a basic knowledge of specific human cultures.
11. to communicate clearly and effectively with appropriate media and technologies.

Knowledge and Skills Specific to Authorized Ministry

1. A thorough knowledge of, and personal engagement with, the Bible.
2. Skill with methods of biblical interpretation, including the historic interpretive traditions of the church and contemporary methods, particularly those from historically underrepresented communities.
3. A deepening familiarity with the global history of the Christian churches through the ages and across cultures, including the newest Christian populations, and an understanding of the evolution of Christian communities in the United States.
4. A deepening familiarity with contemporary theological ways of thinking and with the rich and varied theological heritages, creeds, liturgies, and spiritual practices of the Christian churches.
5. An understanding of other religions and their foundational documents.

The ability:

6. to articulate a theological understanding of authorized ministry, and to relate it to the practice of ministry.
7. to analyze, evaluate, and integrate the biblical, historical, theological, and pastoral disciplines and practices in ways that contribute to fruitful and faithful Christian ministry.

8. to understand the nature, use, and misuse of power and authority, and to exercise them appropriately and effectively in authorized ministry.
9. to engage in community leadership that is collaborative and transformative.
10. to engage in respectful ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.
11. to celebrate the unique features of local faith communities while encouraging them to be receptive to perspectives from the broader church and world.
12. to appreciate, practice, and pass on traditions of faith while interpreting them in light of the context of a diverse and changing world.
13. to adapt the practices of ministry to the unique social, cultural, environmental, and ecclesiastical aspects of particular settings.
14. to discern God's mission in the world and, in response, to lead ministries of compassion, nurture, justice, and proclamation that support fullness of life for all people.
15. to preach the good news, lead worship, and participate in the sacraments in a manner faithful to the broader Christian heritage and appropriate to the characteristics of a specific culture and setting.
16. to provide effective and appropriate pastoral care and Christian education, and to equip and motivate others to share in these ministries.
17. to organize and implement programs, administer the operations of a complex organization, and initiate change when appropriate.
18. to read the contexts of a community's ministry and creatively lead that community through change or conflict.
19. to lead and encourage ministries of evangelism, service, stewardship, and social transformation.
20. to understand and participate in the financial administration of the church and other religious organizations.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION PROCESS

INTRODUCTION: The covenantal process that involves all three partners - the Member in Discernment, the Local Church/Ministry Discernment Committee, and the Church and Ministry Committee/Committee on Ministry - in its entirety, "a sacred journey guided by the Holy Spirit," with intentional times of prayer and reflection in building covenantal relationships.

ABBREVIATIONS:

MID - Member in Discernment

MDC - Ministry Discernment Committee (Local Church)

C&M – Church and Ministry Committee (Association)

MI - Ministry Issues Document

MOM - Manual on Ministry

EFP -Educational and Formation Plan

IEFP - Individual Educational and Formation Plan

INITIAL ASSESSMENT: *identify gifts and needs; build educational and formational plan; intentional times of prayer and discernment*

MID - Member in Discernment (candidate)

Express recognition of call for authorized ministry - licensing, commissioning, or ordained ministry - to local church

Develop understanding that all authorized ministers of the United Church of Christ serve on behalf of the whole church; UCC identity and relationships are an on-going part of the discernment and formation process.

Share faith journey, experience in local church, all documentation in current Manual on Ministry (MOM) Licensing, Sect. 7, pp.14, 16; Commissioning - Sect. 6, p.24, 28; Student in Care, Sect. 2, p. 12, Give MDC letter of application, 3 letters of reference, documentation of formal education
For seminary graduate, see MOM, Ordained Ministry, Sect. 3, pp. 18, 20.

Be open to moving of Spirit, variety of outcomes

Use Marks to do self-assessment of gifts, needs (see Ministry Issues document, pp. 17-21)

MDC - Ministry Discernment Committee

Local church, pastor work on living out "a culture of call" - belief in priesthood of all believers; intergenerational; connection to wider church

Work together with the MID to understand UCC identity and relationships as part of the discernment and formation process.

MDC appointed by Church Council; select advisor
Be trained in what discernment is
Be trained in responsibilities as MDC
Describe process used by local church to interview and recommend the person
Turns in materials submitted by MID
Sends verification of church membership

Recommend candidate to be MID with C&M

Use Marks to assess gifts, needs. Use charts in appendices of Ministry Issues document
List on pp. 46-47 suggest areas of discernment to explore.

C&M - Church and Ministry Committee

Receive all the papers shared with the MDC

Appoint, train C&M advisor

Receive initial work with Marks from the MID, MDC to chart progress.

MID - Member in Discernment (candidate)

Meet with C&M

Work with MDC and C&M on designing an EFP

If in seminary or a graduate, send in additional reports (see under C&M) to MDC and C&M

Take Psychological Assessment Test - pay 1/3 of cost.

Continue discernment work with MDC

Work with partners in developing IEFP

Sign Covenant of Formation

Agree to date for ritual of covenant

MDC - Ministry Discernment Committee

Meet with C&M

Work with MID and C&M on designing an EFP

Read seminary reports from MID who is a seminarian or a seminary graduate.

Church pays 1/3 of cost

Continue discernment work with MID;
send reports to C&M

Develop IEFP with partners

Sign Covenant of Formation

Set date for ritual of covenant in local church

C&M - Church and Ministry Committee

Meet with MID and MDC advisor, members of MDC

Work with MID and MDC on designing an EFP

From MIDs in seminary or graduates, receive Field Education report, supervised ministry report, seminary or other educational program reports. Report from CPE supervisor.

Pay 1/3 of cost. Chair(s) read report; flag any concerns.

Receive reports from MID advisor, from from MDC, C&M. Get feedback from local church community

Develop IEFP with partners

Keep portfolio to chart MID's progress

Train MDC advisor to be liaison to C&M
Train persons to be C&M advisors
Appoint subgroup to work with MID and MDC

Have all parties sign Covenant of Formation

Arrange date at local church for ritual of covenant

ON-GOING ASSESSMENT: during discernment period while in an educational program; refine discernment of call (form of authorization) via more careful discernment of gifts; monitor developmental progress, adjust EFP as needed

MID - Member in Discernment (candidate)

Continue to be open to the Spirit and variety of outcomes

Continue to do self-assessment and adjust EFP as needed; turn in a new self-assessment report

Meet with MDC, C&M

Take Boundary Training

Design a worship service and sermon to be preached;

Analyze a case study in pastoral leadership (from C&M)

Continue to refine, rework faith journey paper

MDC - Ministry Discernment Committee

Continue to nurture MID in true partnership; adjust EFP and IEPF as needed; with more careful discernment of gifts, refine discernment of call (form of authority) with MID, C&M

Meet with MID, C&M

Receive the worship service and sermon in prayer and reflection

Receive analysis and discern growth, needs

Discern growth, new understandings on part of MID understandings

C&M - Church and Ministry Committee

Check with advisor as to progress;
Receive adjustments of the EFP and IEPF
Check with MID by phone, e-mail

Meet with MID, MDC

Continue to nurture MID, MDC
Adjust EFP as needed with the MID, MDC

Receive the worship service and sermon in prayer and reflection

Give MID a case study to analyze.
Discuss MID's analysis to discern growth, needs

Receive updates on growth, new understandings

FINAL ASSESSMENT FOR AUTHORIZATION: determine whether MID is ready for authorization; set baseline for future growth

ACADEMIC ORDINATION TRACK:

Write ordination paper

Submit sermon to the C&M
Ask for 2 more letters of reference

Work on profile
Get background check done

Meet with C&M

Read paper and help MID clarify comments

Advisor - assist in profile-writing; read profile

Accompany MID to meeting with C&M

Distribute paper to C&M Members to read ahead of time, prepare questions

Receive sermon;
Receive 2 more letters of reference

Receive profile for review.

Examine MID in discernment mode; if satisfied, recommend MID to Association to hold an Ecclesiastical Council

MID - Member in Discernment (candidate)

Present paper at Ecclesiastical Council

When call received, notify C&M
Send Call Agreement to C&M; meet with C&M
Decide on date for ordination
Work on ordination service with CDM, C&M

Send out invitations together with C&M

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY TRACK:

(See documentation needed under MID, P. 24)

(Formal education – bachelor’s degree or equivalent)

Write commissioning paper -history, polity, faith journey

Ask for 4 more letters of reference

Get background check done

Meet with C&M

Present paper at Ecclesiastical Council

When call received, notify C&M
Send Call Agreement to C&M; meet with C&M

Draft 1.2 May 2010

MDC - Ministry Discernment Committee

Attend Ecclesiastical Council

Accompany MID to meeting with C&M
Determine date for ordination and clear with C&M; make plans for ordination with C&M

Read paper and help MID clarify comments

Accompany MID to meeting with C&M

Attend Ecclesiastical Council

Accompany MID to meeting with C&M

C&M - Church and Ministry Committee

Arrange Ecclesiastical Council and promotes attendance; if no call, can approve pending a call

Registrar to notify Conference Office of outcome

Review Call Agreement beforehand
Meet with MID, MDC and Calling Body representative; go over ordination plans and wording of invitation.
Assign members to participate in ordination service

Distribute paper to C&M Members to read ahead of time, prepare questions

Receive 4 more letters of reference

Examine MID in discernment mode; if satisfied, recommend MID to Association for Ecclesiastical Council

Arrange Ecclesiastical Council and promotes attendance; if no call, can approve pending a call

Registrar to notify Conference Office of outcome

Meet with MID, MDC and Calling Body representative; Approve calling body if necessary

MID - Member in Discernment (candidate)

Decide on date for commissioning service
Work on commissioning service with CDM,
C&M and calling body

MDC - Ministry Discernment Committee

Determine date for commissioning and clear with
C&M and calling body; Send out invitations
together with C&M and calling body

C&M - Church and Ministry Committee

Work on commissioning service and wording of
invitation with MID, CDM, and Calling Body.
Assigns members and calling body
representatives to be in commissioning
service

LICENSED MINISTRY TRACK:

(See documentation needed under MID, P. 24)

(Formal education – high school diploma or equivalent)

Write updated faith journey, history/polity
paper

Read paper and help MID clarify comments

Distribute paper to C&M Members to read
ahead of time, prepare questions

Submit sermon to C&M

Receive sermon

Ask for 4 more letters of reference
attesting to MID's character, skills, ability

Receive 4 more letters of reference

Updated report of church-related activities

Receive updated report of church related activities

Receive updated report of church related activities

Updated report of educational background

Receive updated report of educational background

Receive updated report of educational background

Meet with C&M

Accompany MID to C&M meeting

Meet with MID and MDC
Vote yes or no on licensure and allow to seek
placement

Work with Conference staff to secure placement

When placement finalized, notify C&M

Go over placement agreement with provisions for
salary, fringe benefits, evaluation procedures,
continuing education time and funds, reimbursement
of professional expenditures, conflict resolution proc.
procedures, and if needed, termination procedures

Go over placement agreement with provisions for
salary, fringe benefits, evaluation procedures,
continuing education time and funds, reimbursement
Professional expenditures, conflict resolution
procedures, and if needed, termination procedures

Meet with C&M
Decide on date for recognition service

Accompany licensure candidate to C&M meeting

Meet with candidate, MDC, and calling body
Determine date for recognition service with
authorized licensed minister and calling body

Work on recognition service with local church and C&M
church

Work on recognition service with candidate and local
church

**ON-GOING ASSESSMENT IN COVENANT RELATIONSHIP - promotion of well-being and continued development and accountability in ministry
POST-AUTHORIZATION - SECTION B**

Authorized Minister

Do self-assessment with Marks
Continue prayer and discernment time
by self and with Pastoral Relations/Support Committee

Meet with C&M as requested for periodic review

Take courses to fulfill continuing education requirement
to maintain standing (to be in place within 3 years of
adoption of Ministry Issues document)

Local Church Pastoral Relations/Support Committee

Do group assessment with Marks - send to Section B
Continue discernment and prayer time together
Develop EFP and IEPF for areas of needs
Acknowledge gifts

Accompany pastor to meeting with C&M

C&M - Church and Ministry Committee

Receive group assessment and refine
EFP and IEPF as needed.
Hold pastor and church in prayer.

Meet with pastor for Periodic Review

Keep documentation in pastor's portfolio
of continuing education taken