



FORMAL GUIDE TO THE MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT PROCESS

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA NEVADA CONFERENCE

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INTRODUCTION

The process of authorizing candidates for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ is a covenantal relationship among individual Members in Discernment (MID), their local churches, their Associations, and the Committee on Ministry (COM). The purpose of these guidelines is to establish procedures for the conduct of this authorization process with the Church and Ministry Committee (a form of a COM) in the Southern Association of the Southern California Nevada Conference. This policy's language and practices are informed and grounded in the UCC Manual on Ministry, 2018.

Hearing the call from General Synod to be a denomination that is Accessible to All (A2A) in every setting of the Church, the COM is committed to embodying those practices. At any time during this process, candidates are invited to contact the COM Chair and the Conference staff to discuss needed accommodations during their Member in Discernment process.

ORDINATION IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The United Church of Christ believes that God calls every Christian to be a servant of God, a minister, living and serving in Christ's name. This call is celebrated sacramentally in baptism as persons are claimed for Christ by the Holy Spirit and the Church; all who are baptized spend the rest of their lives responding to God's call and claim. The particulars of each person's call and ministry vary with time, place, talents, experience, personal situation and responsibilities, and, importantly, the needs of the world. Ministry is lived in every aspect of one's life as God's love is shown in word and deed.

The Church acknowledges that its members have many diverse ministries in the world and in the Church. It also recognizes a specific need for representative servant leaders "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). The United Church of Christ, along with the Church Universal through the ages and throughout the world, affirms God's call to some individuals to be such leaders who help the Church to be what God intends it to be. These persons are set apart through prayer and the laying on of hands in the rite of ordination.

In ordination, the individual makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic ministry, they continue the witness of Christ's followers from New Testament times. They receive authority from the Triune God to serve in Jesus' name. Ordained Ministers have particular responsibilities for the proclamation and practice of the Christian faith and for the life of the Church itself.

Ordained Ministers are authorized to serve and to lead on behalf of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal, a ministry that encompasses the fullest range of leadership ministries: priestly and prophetic, representative and servant. They are called to embody the love of God for the world and to proclaim the good news on behalf of the Church, personally and publicly pointing the Church to its dependence on Jesus Christ, the source of its faith, mission, and unity.

Ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ is in accord with the Church Universal as this ministry serves the unity of the Church and continues to witness to the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth and his followers across generations. As did prophets and priests of the Hebrew Scriptures and disciples and apostles of Jesus in the New Testament, Ordained Ministers stand with the people before God and carry the Word of God to the people. Ordained Ministers belong to both God and the people. They are nurtured and sustained by both; they are responsible to both. In the United Church of Christ, this relationship and responsibility is called Ordained Ministerial Standing. It is embodied in a covenant under God among the Association, the Ordained Minister, the Local Church of membership, and the ministry setting.

Because both the demands upon Ordained Ministers and the needs of the Church are multiple, no person will have all the needed gifts to offer to all people in all situations. Nevertheless, all Ordained Ministers are servants of God in their ministry on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ. Ordained ministry is ministry of the Church entrusted to individuals; it is not the ministry of individuals acting independently. Ordained Ministers are persons of faith, claimed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and committed to the Church and its ministry. They seek to serve God and the world in humility, able and willing to offer and receive wisdom. The Church looks to them to be learned persons and to have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Church historically and ecumenically.

Manual on Ministry: A Guide to the Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ, Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ, 2018.

OVERVIEW OF THE DISCERNMENT PROCESS

WHEN TO APPLY

A person seeking to become a Member in Discernment's is encouraged to begin the discernment process in conversation with the pastor of their Local Church at the point when they first feel a sense of call to authorized ministry. To apply for Member in Discernment status a person must minimally have already acquired a high school diploma or GED.

LENGTH OF RELATIONSHIP

The Member in Discernment should expect to be in the discernment process with the Committee on Ministry (COM) for typically 1-3 years, depending upon the educational background, the professional experience, and life experience of the candidate. Those who have completed their discernment process and have been approved for ordination pending call will continue as Members in Discernment until they receive a suitable call.

ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

In addition to these Discernment Guidelines, all Members in Discernment shall ensure that they become familiar with the following documents:

THE MANUAL ON MINISTRY (THE MOM)

The Manual on Ministry is a resource from the United Church of Christ that outlines a set of processes, guidelines, and best practices recommended to Associations and their Committees on Ministry in carrying out their work.

The COM has adopted and adapted policies from the MOM to fit this ministerial context. The COM's specific policies and procedures herein are what govern their discernment and work in partnership with candidates, Members in Discernment, local churches, Associations, and other partners.

The Manual on Ministry is available online at www.ucc.org/ministers_manual.

THE MARKS OF FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST (THE "MARKS")

Those who hold ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ are entrusted with and accountable for the faithfulness and effectiveness of their lives and ministries on its behalf. The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ (the Marks) strive to highlight the complex combination of talents, understandings, and skills needed for ministerial leadership in the United Church of Christ. COMs use the Marks to guide their work of authorizing and overseeing Ordained Ministers.

The Marks are available at www.ucc.org/ministers_marks and in Section 1:1 of the Manual on Ministry.

UCC MINISTERIAL CODE

All persons with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ are expected to abide by the UCC Ministerial Code. The Ministerial Code is outlined in Section 2:3 of the Manual on Ministry.

1. EXPLORATION OF CALL WITH LOCAL CHURCH

For those exploring a sense of call to ordained ministry, the first place to engage that call and listen for feedback is the Local Church. A person must be an active member of a Local Church for at least one year before applying to the COM to enter the Member in Discernment process.

BEGINNING DISCERNMENT WITH THE LOCAL CHURCH'S PASTOR

The discernment process begins when a person seeks out the pastor of the local church in which they hold active membership to discuss and explore their sense of call. Meetings between a person considering ordained ministry and their Local Church pastor should explore the person's sense of vocation and consider what it means to be called to ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The pastor also provides general information on the process of discernment, connects them with the Conference staff and COM Chairperson, and assists with forming a Local Church Discernment Committee.

INITIAL CONTACT WITH THE CONFERENCE STAFF AND COM CHAIRPERSON

As the person and the Local Church pastor begin discernment together, the person and Local Church pastor should contact the Conference staff member who supports the Members in Discernment process. The Conference staff member and COM chairperson will provide the person and Local Church pastor information on the UCC process of discernment, support the development of a Local Church Discernment Committee, and provide training and resources for the Discernment Committee to guide their work.

FORMATION OF A LOCAL CHURCH DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

If, after a period of discernment with the pastor, the person is ready to continue in the discernment process, a Discernment Committee is formed by the local church. The Local Church Discernment Committee may be a standing committee or an ad hoc committee as local circumstances dictate. It should consist of 4-7 members of the church, one of whom should be an ordained UCC pastor. If the person discerning a call to ordained ministry is currently an employee of the local church or is serving as the lead or solo pastor, special attention should be given to the formation of this committee to ensure it can be one truly centered on discernment rather than employment, oversight, or supervision.

The purpose of the Local Church Discernment Committee is to help the person listen to and test their sense of call. The goal of discernment for the Local Church Discernment Committee, in reflection with the person, is to determine if the person has the inherent gifts, character, and potential to serve faithfully and effectively as an Ordained Minister in and on behalf of the denomination.

TASKS: WRITE A SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In the initial stage of discernment, the Local Church Discernment Committee should request that the person write a Spiritual Autobiography¹ and a Statement of Faith by asking the candidate:

¹ A spiritual autobiography is a story of how significant events, relationships, and cultural influences have contributed to the author's spiritual formation, relationship with God, interpretation of scriptures, and understanding of how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

Introduce yourself by way of sharing your spiritual autobiography. Conclude by writing your own personal Statement of Faith. You may structure that in any variety of ways but may find it helpful to look at the various versions of the UCC's Statement of Faith.²

What is submitted should inform conversations and discernment in the weeks and months to follow. The person should be encouraged to keep revising both of these pieces of writing as they gain more clarity about their spiritual journey and how they articulate their faith and theological understandings.

TASKS: ENGAGE THE MARKS FOR FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS AND JOURNALING THE JOURNEY

Additionally, at the beginning of this time of discernment, members of the Local Church Discernment Committee should familiarize themselves with the Marks for Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers³ and its companion discernment resource, Journaling the Journey⁴. Working through Journaling the Journey together as a practice for discernment is highly recommended.

TASKS: ARTICULATING UNDERSTANDING OF ORDINATION, VOCATION, AND CALL

As the person's sense of call becomes clearer, as well as their particular potential for faithful and effective ministry, the Local Church Discernment Committee should request the person to reflect on following questions:

- Describe your theological understanding of ordination and the role of the Church in discerning a call to the vocation of ministry.
- Describe in particular your call to the vocation of ministry and the setting to which you currently feel most called.
- Expanding on the understanding of ordination, why are you interested in ordination and ministry specifically in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ?

The Discernment Committee should listen deeply to the person's answers and understandings, adding its own prayerful insights as well. Discernment Committees may wish to ask these questions at several different points throughout the process of discernment since the answers will change with time and experience. The person should be encouraged to keep revising their reflections and statements as they gain more clarity in their sense of call.

TASKS: REQUESTING DOCUMENTATION OF EDUCATION

While engaged in the discernment process, the Discernment Committee also requests the person provide documentation of their educational background and attainments. If the person has already completed college, seminary, and/or a theological education program, the person requests copies of official transcripts be sent from each institution. One copy from each school should be sent directly to the COM, either digitally or by mail. Another copy from each school should be sent to the Local Church Discernment Committee. If the person is currently engaged in seminary or a theological education program, unofficial transcripts may be provided as documentation at this time. If the person has been trained through an apprenticeship model or theological education program that does not issue transcripts, a comprehensive program description and evaluations may be provided as documentation at this time.

² Versions of the UCC Statement of Faith are accessible online at www.ucc.org/beliefs.

³ The Marks are available online at www.ucc.org/ministers_marks and in Section 1:1 of the Manual on Ministry.

⁴ Journaling the Journey is available through UCC Resources at www.uccresources.com.

The person is encouraged to retain digital copies of documentation of their education for later inclusion in their Marks portfolio.

TASKS: CONSENT AND RELEASE, BACKGROUND DISCLOSURE, AND BACKGROUND CHECK

Through mutual accountability the witness of the United Church of Christ is strengthened, and the Body of Christ is built up. For the purposes of transparency, discernment, and accountability, while working with their Local Church Discernment Committee, the person completes and submits the Statement of Consent and Release Form (Appendix B), the Background Disclosure (Appendix C), and Background Check Release (Appendix D). With attention to both the Marks for Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers and the UCC Ministerial Code, the Discernment Committee should undertake the process of inquiring, listening, and discerning with respect to new information that may arise. This information should be used by the Discernment Committee as they discern the next steps regarding the person's potential, readiness, or fitness for ministry at this current time.

TASKS: CREATING A FILE FOR DOCUMENTATION

Compile all documents considered or created by the person for use with the Discernment Committee into a file so that these materials can be shared with the COM when the person enters the discernment process with the Wider Church. The Discernment Committee and/or Local Church may also request additional information as it deems necessary for discernment, including statements about the candidate's faith, faith journey, background, and education. Add any additional information requested to the person's file.

DECISION MAKING BY THE LOCAL CHURCH

Following a time of discernment between the person and the Local Church Discernment Committee, and when both the Discernment Committee and the person agree that they have a discernible call to ministry, have skills in some areas of Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers, and are ready to enter into the Member in Discernment process with the COM, the Discernment Committee shall notify the Church Moderator or President (or other appropriate church leader). In accordance with its own local church polity, a congregation's governing body then reviews the candidate's file as well as the process of discernment with the local church, and makes a *Yes* or *No* decision to recommend the person to the COM for consideration to become a Member in Discernment.

If the decision is *Yes*, the Local Church governing body writes a letter of recommendation to the COM and requests that the person be received as a Member in Discernment. This recommendation does not presume a specified outcome but is an affirmation of continued discernment and ongoing support for the person's process. Accompanying the governing body's recommendation, a representative of the local church's governing body submits a completed Request for Member in Discernment Status (Appendix A) and shall forward the Request, along with a copy of the candidate's local church discernment file and the other materials specified in Appendix A, to the COM.

If, after prayerful discernment with the person, the Local Church Discernment Committee or the Local Church governing body does not believe that a call to ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ is present, the process of discernment towards ordained ministry ends here. This decision may be appropriate when a Local Church Discernment Committee determines the individual does not possess the disposition needed for ministry, is unable to follow the Ministerial Code, or is unlikely to be able to acquire the skills necessary to demonstrate the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. This decision may also be appropriate when the Local Church or Local Church Pastor discerns for another reason that they are not willing or able to support the individual through the discernment process. The *No* decision is made known to the person with appropriate pastoral support. The Local Church continues to support the person's vocational exploration and the appropriate exercise of the

person's gifts as a layperson, consistent with its encouragement of all members' gifts in service to God's mission.

In the process of discernment or of making a determination of *Yes* or *No* in recommending a person to enter the Member in Discernment process, the local church may request a consultation with the chair or representatives of the COM and/or Conference staff. This consultation may cover any number of areas, as the COM representatives, staff, and local church shall determine, but should, at a minimum, include a discussion of the requirements and expectations of all those in the discernment process.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CAREER ASSESSMENT

After the completed and properly documented Request for Member in Discernment Status (Appendix A) is submitted to the COM's registrar, the COM will provide the person in discernment directions on how to move forward in submitting the paperwork and payment required for scheduling a psychological and career assessment. The candidate must undergo a psychological and career assessment by an examiner approved by the COM and the assessment must be completed before the initial interview with COM will be scheduled.

It shall be the responsibility of the candidate to make the necessary arrangements for the assessment and to see that it is completed promptly. The COM recommends that the cost of this assessment be shared among the candidate, their local church, and the Association of which the local church is a member. In the absence of any cost-sharing arrangement, however, it shall be the candidate's responsibility to pay for the assessment.

Additional assessments may be required from time to time during the authorization process at such times as the COM determines appropriate. Cost-sharing and financial responsibility for such assessments shall be the same as for the initial assessment.

If the person is invited to receive Member in Discernment status, acceptance of the invitation shall be deemed to be the person's express permission for the COM to include the report in their permanent records.

3. INITIAL MEETING WITH THE COM

Upon receipt of the letter from the Local Church requesting that a person be received as a Member in Discernment, the Request for Member in Discernment Status (accompanied by the application materials), and the final report from the psychological and career assessment, the COM schedules an initial meeting with the candidate. Representatives from the Local Church Discernment Committee and the applicant's pastor accompany the person to the initial meeting and may be asked to contribute. Prior to the meeting, the COM thoroughly reviews the submitted materials, which form the beginning of a file in the COM's records of the person.

The purpose of this initial meeting is to offer hospitality to the person and the Local Church, to listen prayerfully to the movement of the Spirit, to engage in conversation about the person's spiritual journey and call, to outline expectations of the process, to clarify any questions, and to make a determination, using the Marks as a guide, of the candidate's suitability for entry into the discernment process. This interview is a two-way street. The candidate and the local church representatives should feel free to ask questions regarding the discernment relationship and process, as well as any special concerns related to the candidate's particular situation. These questions or others may and should be raised by the candidate at any point in the discernment process if these matters require clarification.

DISCERNMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Following the meeting, the Committee determines whether to accept the person as a Member in Discernment and communicates this decision in a timely manner to the person and the Local Church. The COM shall document its determination. This document becomes part of the candidate's permanent record.

IF YES

If the COM's decision is *Yes*, the person may be received as a Member in Discernment. A Discernment Covenant is written between the person, the Local Church of membership, and the COM, outlining expectations for the discernment process. This Covenant shall be signed by the candidate, appropriate representative(s) of the local church and by the chair of the COM. It shall be the responsibility of the candidate to obtain the signature(s) of their local church. Upon the completion of the Covenant and its delivery to the COM, the candidate shall become a Member in Discernment. It is strongly recommended that the candidate's status as a Member in Discernment be recognized by their local church in a worship service. It is appropriate for this purpose to use the liturgy from the Book of Worship, suitably modified, for Recognition of a Student in Care of an Association.

IF NO

If the COM's decision is *No*, the discernment process towards ordained ministry ends here. The candidate will be informed of the decision in writing. The candidate and, if appropriate, representatives of the candidate's Discernment Committee and/or local church governing body may be invited to meet with and discuss the COM's concerns. Unless the COM decides otherwise, this decision is without prejudice to the candidate's reapplication for Member in Discernment status at a later date.

4. DISCERNMENT PROCESS AND PARTNERS AFTER BECOMING A MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT

APPOINTMENT OF A MID ADVISOR

When a candidate is accepted as a Member in Discernment, the COM shall appoint a Member in Discernment Advisor (MID Advisor) to work with the candidate throughout the discernment process. The MID Advisor is typically an authorized minister but may, on occasion, be a qualified layperson. The primary responsibility of the MID Advisor is to engage the Member in Discernment in theological and spiritual reflection on the MID's evolving sense of call and experience of ministerial formation. The MID Advisor also provides clarity about the process as needed and encourages the Member in Discernment's attentiveness to their progress through (and options for) the preparation and formation plan. The MID Advisor's responsibilities are further outlined and available from the COM.

When geographic distance prohibits a Member in Discernment from meeting in person with their MID Advisor, the use of audio-visual technology is appropriate.

Members in Discernment should meet with their MID Advisors monthly.

PREPARATION AND FORMATION PLAN

A preparation and formation plan is developed by the COM, based on the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers in relation to the Committee's assessment of the Member in Discernment's application materials and psychological assessments. Preparation and formation plans are individualized and may take multiple paths based on the nature of the call, the available options to develop their competencies, and the needs of the Church. Preparation and formation plans set forth the COM's expectations concerning the education and spiritual growth required of the Member in Discernment as they proceed toward authorization. The plan is a living document and may be revised from time to time as the Member in Discernment proceeds through the authorization process.

The following are included in all Member in Discernment's preparation and formation plans and are required for those pursuing ordination

- Ongoing self-assessment based on the Marks
- Formation of a Marks Portfolio
- Monthly meetings with the MID Advisor
- Quarterly meetings with the Local Church Discernment Committee
- One unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE)
- Successful completion of an approved UCC History, Polity and Theology course
- Successful completion of boundary awareness training
- Engagement with the wider Church, such as participation in Association annual meetings, Conference annual meetings or committees, and/or General Synod

ONGOING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL CHURCH AND DISCERNMENT COMMITTEE

Members in Discernment are expected to remain actively involved in their Local Church of membership, turning to the Local Church Discernment Committee for ongoing conversation about vocation and readiness for ministry. The geographic residence of a Member in Discernment may change temporarily or permanently during the discernment process as a result of employment, education, or life circumstance. When distance keeps a Member in Discernment from participating regularly in their Local Church of membership, mutual intentionality and creativity are encouraged to continue the relationship between the Member in Discernment and their Local Church. In the event of relocation, the Member in Discernment should speak with the COM to ask if it would be appropriate to participate in a UCC congregation located geographically closer for additional formation, preparation, and community.

When geographic distance prohibits a Member in Discernment from meeting in person with their Local Church Discernment Committee, the use of technology is encouraged.

Members in Discernment should meet with their Local Church Discernment Committee at least once every three months for the duration of their discernment process.

DEVELOPING A MARKS PORTFOLIO

Beginning as soon as a person is received as a Members in Discernment, they are to begin creating a Marks Portfolio. The Portfolio is a medium for Members in Discernment to both integrate and demonstrate their personal, professional, and spiritual formation and preparation for ministry. Using the United Church of Christ's Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers as a foundation, the Portfolio is curated and arranged to demonstrate competencies and experiences in each of the eight main categories.

Working alongside and in consultation with the MID Advisor, the Marks Portfolio should be assembled, edited, and amended throughout the duration of the discernment process. Each year, a working draft of the Marks Portfolio must be submitted to the COM one month prior to the person's Annual Review.

At the conclusion of the Member in Discernment process, Members in Discernment submit a completed Portfolio. A Portfolio that demonstrates integration of the Marks is a key part of the final assessment of a candidate's readiness for ministerial authorization.

The COM will provide specific directions for completing a Marks Portfolio after a person enters the Member in Discernment process. Work that began in the early stages of discernment with the Local Church Discernment Committee can be incorporated into the beginning portions of the Marks Portfolio.

ANNUAL REVIEWS WITH THE COM

Members in Discernment meet at least annually with the COM to continue to listen together to God's call, to review their progress with the preparation and formation plan, to make adjustments or changes to the plan that may be needed, and to determine next steps in the discernment process. The annual meeting is an opportunity for both discernment and assessment based on the Marks. In particular, this is a time for COM to review and provide feedback on a Member in Discernment's Marks Portfolio. Partners in the discernment process—the Local Church pastor, representatives of the Local Church Discernment Committee, MID Advisors—participate in each Annual Review.

At least one calendar month before each Annual Review, the Member in Discernment shall submit at least one copy of each of the following to the Registrar for the COM:

- The current draft of their Marks Portfolio. This should include the following:
 - If the Member in Discernment is enrolled in a seminary, a copy of the MID's transcript showing grades received for all courses taken since the last Annual Review and all written evaluations received for field or classroom work since the last Annual Review should be included in Section 5 of the Marks Portfolio
 - If the Member in Discernment is enrolled in any other type of educational program, documentation showing grades or credit received for all courses taken since the last Annual Review and all written evaluations received for field or classroom work since the last Annual Review should be included in the Marks Portfolio
- Any CPE evaluations should be included in Section 5 of the draft Marks Portfolio
- The MID Advisor's Annual Review Sheet (Appendix F)
- The MID's Evaluation of their Advisor and Relationship Sheet (Appendix G)
- The Local Church Discernment Committee Annual Review Sheet (Appendix H)
- Such other documents as the COM shall request.

One copy of all materials shall be placed in the Member in Discernment's permanent file.

DISCERNMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Following the Annual Review, the COM prayerfully makes one of the following decisions:

- *Yes*. The Committee affirms the person's continued status as a Member in Discernment and ongoing progress in formation and preparation.
- *Yes, but*. The Committee continues the person's Member in Discernment status and adds particular learning or behavioral goals within a given time frame as a requirement for the discernment process, with a date set for reassessment.
- *No, but*. The Committee terminates the Member in Discernment status due to the Member in Discernment's lack of progress and/or substantial need for growth, with constructive feedback

offered that could help the person begin the discernment process again at a future undetermined date.

- *No.* The Committee determines that the person is not called to or suited for ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

The COM will notify the Member in Discernment, their Advisor, and their pastor of the decision. If the COM ends the Member in Discernment's status, they will be informed and invited to discuss this decision with the COM.

5. CONCLUDING THE MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT PROCESS

REQUEST FOR ORDINATION INTERVIEW: FINAL REVIEW

Once the COM assesses that a Member in Discernment has completed their preparation and formation plan and has developed their competencies related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers satisfactorily, the Member in Discernment, and Local Church Discernment Committee are notified. The Member in Discernment coordinates with each of the covenantal partners to ensure documentation is submitted.

The Local Church submits:

- A written letter from the Local Church Discernment Committee reflecting on the process of discernment, their assessment of the Member in Discernment's readiness for ministry based on the Marks
- A written request from the local congregation's leadership body supporting the Member in Discernment's request for ordination and asking that they be examined by the COM

The MID Advisor submits:

- A written letter from the MID Advisor reflecting on the process of discernment and the Advisors assessment of the Member in Discernment's readiness for ministry based on the Marks

The Member in Discernment submits:

- The final draft of the Member in Discernment's Marks Portfolio. This should be submitted as outlined in the directions provided by the COM. The COM will discuss the Portfolio with the Member in Discernment, suggesting revisions to be made before it is to be formally presented for the ordination interview. The final Marks Portfolio must include the following documentation:
 - Final Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) evaluation by your supervisor
 - Final Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) self-evaluation
 - Final educational and theological education transcripts or reports
 - Certificate of Attendance at a Pastoral Boundaries Training within the past five years
 - Documentation of completion of an approved UCC History, Polity and Theology course
- A completed Snapshot. The Snapshot is a tool for every authorized minister's visibility and networking with Conference staff across the United Church of Christ. Whether a Member in Discernment will be seeking a new call or is settled within a ministry, the Snapshot introduces the person, their skills, and their passions to Conferences. It is best practice for ordained clergy to keep their Snapshot current throughout their ministry as a way to connect and multiply their gifts in the life of the church and Wider Church. Directions and access needed for completing the Snapshot are available at http://www.ucc.org/ministers_profile.
- A completed (draft) of the UCC Ministerial Profile with its completed background check. The UCC Ministerial Profile is the document by which an authorized minister synthesizes their theology,

identity, and sense of call for the purpose of reaching out to local church search committees. Whether entering a search and call process or not, it is a tool that documents eligibility for call in or on behalf of the United Church of Christ. After ordination, it also presents official verification of a minister's authorization, standing, and fitness. Directions and access needed for completing the Profile and the background check are available at http://www.ucc.org/ministers_profile. The candidate will not be able to have the profile officially validated for circulation until after they become Ordainable Pending Call.

- Such other documents as the COM shall request.

One copy of all materials shall be placed in the Member in Discernment's permanent file.

Once these materials are submitted, the COM shall conduct a Final Review of all the material and determine whether the Member in Discernment has demonstrated integration of the Marks and readiness for an Ordination Interview. If the COM decides to proceed with the Ordination Interview, the COM chair, in consultation with the Member in Discernment, shall schedule it.

If the COM decides to deny or postpone the Ordination Interview, it shall inform the Member in Discernment, in writing, of its decision and invite them to continue conversation with the COM concerning what, if any, work or growth still needs to be accomplished before a favorable recommendation can be made.

ORDINATION INTERVIEW

Once the COM assesses that a Member in Discernment has completed their preparation and formation plan, met all requirements, and has developed their competencies related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers satisfactorily, the Member in Discernment is scheduled for an ordination interview.

In preparation for the interview the Member in Discernment is expected to prepare a Portfolio Presentation to begin the time together. Directions for preparing the presentation will be provided.

In an atmosphere of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit, the COM holds the ordination interview and discusses with the Member in Discernment their sense of call and journey of preparation, reflecting together on the Portfolio Presentation alongside the Marks. Following the interview, the Committee decides if it is time to move from the discernment process to a final authorization decision.

Options for this decision are:

- *Yes*. The Committee commends the Member in Discernment to the Association for an Ecclesiastical Council.
- *Yes, but*. The Committee continues the process of discernment and defines certain learning outcomes or skillsets that must be demonstrated and reassessed by a specified time.
- *No*. The Committee does not recommend the Member in Discernment for ordination in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ and concludes that its process of discernment is complete with this decision. At this point, Member in Discernment status is terminated.

All decisions are to be communicated to the Member in Discernment in writing and added to their file.

ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCIL

In the United Church of Christ, the authority to ordain ministers and to grant ministerial standing is given to Associations. The Ecclesiastical Council is a gathering of delegates on behalf of an Association to

decide, on behalf of the United Church of Christ, for or against the ordination of a Member in Discernment (pending the receipt of an ordainable call) following the recommendation of COM.

In preparation for the Ecclesiastical Council, the agenda as well as portions of the Member in Discernment's Marks Portfolio are made available to delegates. During the Ecclesiastical Council, the Member in Discernment is introduced and then given time to present their Portfolio Presentation. Delegates are encouraged to ask questions after the presentation about material in the Portfolio and themes in the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

If the COM determines to request the convening of an Ecclesiastical Council, the chair of the COM will notify the Association Moderator, who will coordinate with them and with the Member in Discernment to make the necessary arrangements.

The member churches of the Association shall be notified of the Ecclesiastical Council by the Association. The Ecclesiastical Council shall be conducted and its decision on whether to authorize shall be made in accordance with the established procedures for such matters in the Association. If there is no such established procedure, the chair of the COM, Conference staff, the chair of the Association Committee on Ministry, and the Association Moderator shall consult and determine how to proceed.

APPROVED FOR ORDINATION PENDING CALL

In the United Church of Christ, after a Member in Discernment is "approved for ordination pending call," the Member in Discernment may begin to circulate their UCC Ministerial Profile in the search and call process.

Once a Member in Discernment is "approved for ordination pending call," they will meet annually with the COM to renew the status of "approved for ordination pending call." Annual renewal of "approved for ordination pending call" permits a Member in Discernment's UCC Ministerial Profile to continue its circulation and to be updated as needed. If a decision is made to decline renewal of "approved for ordination pending call," then Member in Discernment status is terminated and the UCC Ministerial Profile is withdrawn from circulation. A Committee may terminate "approved for ordination pending call" at any time based on lack of an ordainable call and/ or unsatisfactory demonstration of the Marks or Ministerial Code.

A Member in Discernment may be categorized as "approved for ordination pending call" for a recommended maximum of four years.

6. ORDINATION SERVICE

Once the Member in Discernment is approved for ordination pending call, and they receive a call that is recognized as an ordainable call by the COM, an ordination service shall be held.

If the Member in Discernment already has an ordainable call at the time of the decision of the Ecclesiastical Council, the ordination service shall be held as soon as practicable. If they do not already have such a call, the ordination service shall be held as soon after they receive such a call as practicable.

In either case, the time and date for the service shall be set by the chair of the Committee on Ministry, in consultation with Association Moderator, the Member in Discernment, and their Local Church. Notice of the service shall be sent and the service conducted in accordance with the established procedures for such matters in the Association. If there is no such established procedure, the chair of the COM, Conference staff, the chair of the Association Committee on Ministry and the Association Moderator shall consult and determine how to proceed.

IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE MID PROCESS,
CONTACT THE UCC CONFERENCE OFFICE TO BE
CONNECTED WITH THE COM CHAIRPERSON AND THE
ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER WHO WORKS WITH
MIDS.

THIS POLICY WAS ADOPTED BY SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION
CHURCH AND MINISTRY ON APRIL 13, 2023.
