

Expectations of the Home Church of a Member in Discernment

Committee on Ministry: Preparation

St. Louis Association of the Missouri Mid-South Conference

United Church of Christ

"The local church and its pastor play a variety of roles in relation to members in discernment. Local churches are primary places where persons are nurtured in the Christian faith, hear the call of God to ministry, and make decisions about the specific forms their ministries will take. Pastors and lay leaders are significant persons in helping members identify and claim their gifts for ministry." (UCC Manual on Ministry)

Local churches communicate to the Committee On Ministry: Preparation (COM:P) as they identify members who have gifts for ministry and who seek support and guidance. (See the document *The Process for Seeking to be a Member in Discernment*.)

Once a person has been taken in discernment, the local church becomes a partner with the person and the COM:P in supporting and guiding the person during her or his required preparation for ordination. (The local church is encouraged to secure copies of the following sections from the UCC Manual on Ministry: Student in Care of Association and Ordained Ministry for guidance.)

The local church's role during the discernment process includes the following:

Have a service of "Recognition of a Student In Care of Association" (See UCC Book of Worship, page 393) and invite a representative of the COM:P to participate.

Maintain an active relationship with the Member in Discernment (MID), following his or her educational progress and growth in character and gifts for ministry. The pastor is encouraged to have a mentoring relationship with the student.

Establish a *MID Support Committee* of three to seven members, including the pastor, who guides the church's relationship with the student for the duration of the discernment period. Among its tasks it would:

Pray for the MID regularly.

Explore opportunities for supporting the MID financially. **This includes the payment of 40% of the cost of the MID's required psychological evaluation very early in the process.**

Support the MID through special occasion notes, cards and care packages.

Engage the MID around their call to ministry and the discernment of their gifts for ordained ministry. Does the church see evidence of the MID's call to and gifts for ordained ministry?

Name a person from the committee as a liaison with the MID's advisor and communicate with the advisor about the MID's involvement in the life and work of the church, its relationship with the MID, and its discernment of the MID's gift for ordained ministry.

Meet with the MID at least twice a year. This is best done face-to-face, but may be necessary to do by phone or video conference if the MID is attending an out-of-state seminary.

Provide opportunities for the MID to participate in the life and work of the church, as time permits, and to participate in worship and/or educational leadership occasionally.

Seek a relationship with the MID's fieldwork placements and observe the MID in these settings.

Visit the MID at the seminary where she or he is studying.

Request that the MID share seminary transcripts and field education reports annually.

Prepare a written report annually summarizing the MID's involvement in the life of the home church, its observations about the MID's growth and development for ministry, and any concerns it has about the MID's ability to complete the discernment process and enter ordained ministry in the UCC. Send this report to the MID's advisor.

Send a representative to the MID's annual update interviews with the COM:P.

Make certain the MID receives all mailings from the local church to its members.

As the MID nears seminary graduation and is ready to seek ordination, the home church support committee and/or governing board will do the following:

Review the documentation the MID has provided during the period of discernment.

Read the MID's ordination paper prepared for COM:P.

Interview the MID to make a final determination of fitness for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ. It may explore the MID's faith and theological perspective, the development of gifts for ordained ministry, how the person's understanding of call has changed or grown during the period of preparation, and to decide whether or not to recommend her or him to the Association to be examined for ordination. In making its decision whether or not to recommend the person for ordination, it will answer the following questions for itself:

- Are we persuaded God is calling the person to ordained ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ?

- What are the significant gifts for ministry we see in this person?
- Do we have concerns about the character, ethics or preparation of the person who leads us to have reservations about him or her serving the church in the role of ordained minister?

If it is decided to recommend the MID for ordination pending a call, it sends a letter of recommendation to the COM:P and requests an ordination interview. It will share the process it used for making the recommendation, its own perceptions of the person's fitness and gifts for ministry, any concerns it may have about the person, and the relationship it has had with the MID during the discernment process.

Send a representative to support the MID during the ordination interview.

Upon approval for ordination and acceptance of a call, the home church and person cooperate with the COM:P to plan and conduct a service of ordination (See UCC Book of Worship, page 400 for a model service – COM:P also provides Ordination Service Template). While it is strongly encouraged that the person be ordained in their home church, under certain circumstances the person may be ordained in the church calling the person to ministry. In this case, the home church will send representatives to participate in the service.

At the service of ordination, the local church may present symbolic gift(s) to the newly ordained minister.