

## Resources for Assessing Members in Discernment

Committees on Ministry may utilize a variety of resources in their ongoing assessment of a Member in Discernment's marks of faithful and effective ministry. These include:

- ◆ **Case studies** Cases are short narratives of incidents or situations in ministry. COMs can use them for doing theological reflection as well as discussing how a MID might face the often complex realities presented by everyday ministry.
- ◆ **Direct experiences of ministry** Members of the COM may be invited when the MID is leading worship, speaking at a meeting, teaching an educational event, or demonstrating some other form of leadership. When such occasions become a regular part of the committee's relationship to the MID, they help build up a picture of his or her readiness for authorized ministry.
- ◆ **Portfolios** The MID may assemble a file of sermons and other writings, recordings of oral presentations, artwork, worship programs, summaries of completed projects, transcripts, letters, and other materials that, taken together, provide a picture of his or her developing ministerial competence.
- ◆ **Appreciative Inquiry** An approach to assessment rather than a resource *per se*, AI is the search for the best in a person using questions and the sharing of stories. COMs may be trained in AI for use in their ministry with MIDs.

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# Covenant of Discernment and Formation

The Process of Preparing for  
Authorized Ministry  
in the

**UNITED CHURCH  
OF CHRIST**



*And the gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

## Introduction

**When a member's call leads to consideration of authorized ministry, the church and that member together seek to discern the particular shape of the call. Such discernment is an ongoing process.**

- ◆ The primary question guiding discernment is, "To what ministry is this person called?" And then, "Does this ministry require authorization? If so, what form?"
- ◆ A program of formation and preparation for possible authorization is determined by the Association's Committee on Ministry (COM), in consultation with the member and his or her local church. In many cases, this program will include a seminary degree.
- ◆ Discernment continues within a covenant among the member, the COM, and the local church.
- ◆ The Covenant of Discernment and Formation replaces the former UCC practice of a "Student In Care." This new practice is the process to be followed for all forms of authorization (ordination, licensure, commissioning).

*"The place God calls you is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."  
(Frederick Buechner)*

## Points in the Process

- ◆ **Mutual Covenant of Discernment** A member interested in exploring authorized ministry talks with the pastor and lay leaders of the church where he or she holds membership. The church is encouraged to create a Ministry Discernment Committee (MDC). The MDC represents the congregation in helping the member discern the particular gifts for ministry God has given and also provide a forum for exploring the nature of the call. If and when appropriate, the MDC recommends the member to the governing body of the church, which makes a formal request to the Association Committee on Ministry to enter into a covenant of discernment. This covenant has three partners—the member, the local church, and the COM. The individual becomes a Member in Discernment (MID).
- ◆ **Covenant of Formation** The COM makes an initial judgment as to which of the three forms of UCC authorized ministry the MID is called. A learning plan is defined that includes education, mentoring, and other experiences of ministerial formation. A specific plan will be outlined and agreed upon by all covenantal partners. It will be designed according to the particular form of authorization anticipated and the MID's prior experience. The COM appoints an Advisor in Discernment for the MID.
- ◆ **Assessment of Readiness for Authorization** The COM discerns the MID's readiness for authorization using a collection of characteristics of good ministry in the UCC called Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. These

## Points - Continued

- Marks have been grouped into four types: *Spiritual Formation for Ministry*, *UCC Identity for Ministry*, *Personal and Professional Formation for Ministry*, and *Knowledge and Skills for Ministry*. A MID is assessed on the basis of all four, recognizing that not every minister displays them all in equal measure. To assess the MID, the COM uses multiple tools, including reports from field education supervisors, seminary reviews, psychological inventories, portfolios, and feedback from the MID's church community and Advisor in Discernment. The COM also meets regularly and intentionally with the MID for times of reflection and prayer.
- ◆ **Authorization** If and when appropriate, the COM determines that the MID is ready for authorization. In the UCC, authorization is always made pending a call from a specific body, e.g., a local church, chaplaincy, or other institution. The MID becomes a Candidate for Authorized Ministry. Upon receiving a call, authorization is celebrated in a rite of ordination, licensure, or commissioning.
  - ◆ **Ongoing Covenant of Accountability** All persons with UCC ministerial authorization enter into this covenant. It includes accountability to the Association and the wider church in addition to the calling body, agreement to engage regularly in continuing education, and a commitment to ongoing ministerial formation. Authorized ministers are encouraged to continue to use the Marks as a guide to self-assessment as well as planning for lifelong learning.