

Southwest Association  
Michigan Conference, United Church of Christ

**Member in Discernment Manual**

Process, Policies, and Forms

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Southwest Association Church and Ministry Committee on August 1, 2019  
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**The Member-In-Discernment Process**

When a person feels a call to ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ, they enter into the Member-In-Discernment process with the Association Church & Ministry Committee. It is our intention that this process be consistent with and follow the national policies and recommendations of the United Church of Christ, particularly as expressed in the Manual on Ministry. Should documentation differ, the Association policies take precedence. The process is outlined in general below. Other parts of this manual provide additional details.

1. An individual who perceives a call to ordained ministry should contact the Southwest Association Church & Ministry Committee (C&M) to express interest in becoming a Member-

In-Discernment. The individual may contact any member of Church & Ministry Committee or a member of the Michigan Conference staff.

2. The individual's contact information is forwarded to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator. This should include their name, address, e-mail address, phone number, and home church.
3. The Member-In-Discernment Coordinator sends the Member-In-Discernment Information Pack to the candidate.
4. The Member-In-Discernment Coordinator creates a file to keep documents received from the candidate.
5. The Member-In-Discernment Coordinator contacts the Chair of the Church & Ministry Committee to alert them that there is a new Member-In-Discernment candidate and of the need for a potential future interview with the candidate.
6. The Member-In-Discernment Coordinator sends the "Called From This Community" document to the candidate's home church.
7. When all necessary documents have been received from the candidate and their home church, the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator will notify the Chair of the Church & Ministry Committee. The Chair will then contact the candidate to schedule an initial interview with the committee. The pastor of the candidate's home church should also attend this interview and the candidate may bring up to one other person to the interview as support.
8. The Member-In-Discernment Coordinator will forward the candidate's submitted documents to the entire Church & Ministry Committee at least one week prior to the candidate's interview.
9. At the interview, the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator will introduce the candidate and their home-church pastor to the Church & Ministry Committee. Prayer will be offered after introductions. Questions for the candidate will address their sense of call and potential fitness for ministry. If desired, the committee may speak with the home-church pastor and other support persons after the candidate is excused. A final prayer will be offered at the close of the interview. The candidate will receive the decision of the committee via email within two weeks.
10. The Church & Ministry Committee will pray and deliberate and make a decision about the candidate's fitness to proceed in the Member-In-Discernment process. The decision of Church & Ministry Committee may take one of several forms:

\* **Yes.** This candidate seems to have an authentic call to ministry, and the gifts, abilities, and determination to meet the requirements for ordination and should be accepted as a Member-In-Discernment. The Chair will communicate this "yes" decision to the candidate and the pastor. The Registrar of the Association will send a Member-In-Discernment Certificate to the new Member-In-Discernment (MID) and notify the conference of the decision. The Member-In-Discernment Coordinator will create and maintain throughout the process a Member-In-Discernment checklist for the MID.

\* **No, but...** The Committee may feel that at this time it is not able to make a positive decision to enter into a Member-In-Discernment relationship. The Chair will communicate this decision to the candidate, the pastor, and the home church, indicating that if identified issues are addressed, the candidate could reapply at a later date.

\* **No.** When the candidate does not appear to have the potential for ordained ministry, is not authentic in intentions, or exhibits immaturity or emotional problems, the Committee may need to say no. The Chair will communicate that decision to the candidate, the pastor, and the home church and make provisions for pastoral care to the church and the candidate.

11. The Church and Ministry Committee will assign an advisor to the MID to guide them through the Member-In-Discernment process and the MID will be notified as to the identity of their advisor. The advisor will be given a copy of the Responsibilities of MID Advisors, Expectations for MID Advisors and the MID Advisor Report.
12. The Church and Ministry Committee and the MID will agree on a covenant that outlines the expectations of the formational phase of the Member-In-Discernment process. Requirements named in this manual will be in effect whether or not they are named in the formation covenant.
13. During their first year, the MID must complete a career assessment. Currently, evaluations are done with Midwest Ministry Development (<https://www.midwestministrydev.org>). The MID should schedule their evaluation after given approval by the Church & Ministry Committee, but before the end of their first year. The MID should work with their MID advisor to make sure they register for the correct assessment (the service offers several options). The assessment is typically 2-3 days long. The program fee is billed directly to the candidate and must be paid before the final report is released. This fee will vary based on whether the candidates chooses a group or individual program. The MID is also responsible for the cost of any travel related to the testing. It is recommended that the MID's home church split the program fee and travel costs with the MID if possible. If the home church cannot assist, the MID remains responsible for the entire cost. Note: The program fee is not the entire cost of the testing. The balance of the fees are paid directly to Midwest Ministry Development by the Association / Conference.

**For Example, in 2023:**

Total Cost for a Group Candidate Program: \$1665 (\$520 paid by the MID)

Total Cost for an Individual Candidate Program: \$1975 (\$830 paid by the MID)

The balance of cost was paid by the Association.

Note: this example doesn't include travel costs which are also paid by the MID

14. Member-In-Discernment status is granted for one year at a time. The MID will meet with the Church and Ministry Committee annually to review their progress toward ordination and possible renewal of their Member-In-Discernment status. It is the responsibility of the MID to schedule this meeting with the committee Chair at least sixty days in advance. At least one month prior to this meeting the MID should submit a report of their activities from the previous year, a copy of their current portfolio, and a report from their MID advisor to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator. The portfolio is explained in detail below.

15. The Member-In-Discernment Coordinator will forward submitted reports to the Church and Ministry Committee at least two weeks prior to the annual review.
16. The annual review should include discussions on the MID's formation process, involvement in the life of the Church, relationship with the MID advisor, and any concerns or questions the MID wants to share. Based on its annual review, the Church and Ministry Committee must decide to renew a Member In Discernment's status for another year or to discontinue it. Member-In-Discernment status will not be renewed for a second year until the report from the career assessment service has been received. Again, the annual review is another checkpoint where the primary question is whether or not the MID shows promise for becoming an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ. Is the potential being developed so there is likelihood that ordination can be granted at the conclusion of the process?
17. The Member-In-Discernment process lasts a minimum of 2 years and quite possibly longer. When the Church and Ministry Committee is satisfied, through annual reviews and a thorough evaluation of the MID's portfolio, that the MID's formational process is at a stage where the MID exhibits competency in the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers, they will indicate approval to proceed to an Ordination Interview. At that point, the MID must ask the governing board of their home church to submit an Ecclesiastical Council Application. After receipt of this application, the committee chair will work with the MID to schedule the Ordination Interview. The MID's advisor and home-church pastor are required to attend the Ordination Interview.
18. At least one month prior to the Ordination Interview, the MID should submit all of the documentation listed in the "Ecclesiastical Approval" section of the Member-In-Discernment Checklist to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator. The Coordinator will then forward these documents to the Church and Ministry Committee at least two weeks prior to the interview.
19. The Ordination is typically more in-depth than the Annual Reviews. During the interview the Church and Ministry Committee will hear statements from the home-church pastor and the MID advisor. The MID will discuss his or her faith pilgrimage during the Member-In-Discernment process and the present sense of call to ordained ministry. The MID will also make a statement about the type of call being sought. The Committee will ask questions or raise issues based on the documentation provided by the candidate. Potential questions are suggested elsewhere in this manual. The Committee's task in the interview (examination!) is to satisfy itself that the candidate is prepared for and can faithfully and effectively carry out the responsibilities of ordained ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The Committee will be alert both to tangible and intangible evidences of the candidate's fitness for ordained ministry in the areas of faith and calling, church loyalty and commitment, knowledge and skills, character and personality, and understandings of ordained ministry, as well as in relation to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. It may be helpful to have the candidate reflect and comment on the ordination vows to be made during the ordination service.
20. Please note that Ordination is not an outcome of this interview. After the candidate and guests have been excused, the Church and Ministry Committee will deliberate. Options include: "Yes" (continue to an Ecclesiastical Council), "No, but" (more work needs to be done before proceeding), and "No" (the Member-In-Discernment process should be terminated). The Chair

will inform the candidate and the local church of the Committee's decision. If the decision is "Yes", the Committee will make plans for the Ecclesiastical Council.

21. The Chair will work with the Moderator of the Association and the MID to find a mutually agreeable date to hold an Ecclesiastical Council. The Ecclesiastical Council is a meeting of the general Southwest Association and as such it cannot be scheduled any sooner than five weeks after the completion of the Ordination Interview so there is time for proper notifications to be sent by the Association Registrar. Along with invitations to clergy and member churches of the Associations, the Registrar will also distribute the MID's ordination paper electronically for review by delegates to the Ecclesiastical Council.
22. The MID should work with their MID advisor to prepare for the Ecclesiastical Council. The MID is asked to bring one (1) printed copy of their ordination paper to the Ecclesiastical Council and to be prepared to make a statement of their pilgrimage and understanding of ministry. The MID also should be prepared to answer any questions raised by the delegates attending this gathering of the Association. The delegates will vote on whether or not to grant ordination pending a call.
23. If the MID is approved for ordination pending a call, the Service of Ordination is scheduled once a call has been received by the MID and approved as suitable for ordination by the Church and Ministry Committee. In no case can it be sooner than five weeks after the Ecclesiastical Council. The MID, their home church, the calling body, and the Church and Ministry Committee may all take part in the planning of, and participate in, the service. Members of the churches of the Association are invited to attend. By this rite, ordained ministerial standing is conferred and the covenantal relationship is liturgically celebrated.
24. Sometimes individuals may not receive a call right away. While searching for a call, the person who has been made eligible for ordination pending a call remains an MID until a call is received. During this time, they continue to meet with the Church & Ministry Committee for an Annual Review. For Annual Reviews during this searching period, the MID should submit a written report on their search process at least 30 days prior to the meeting.
25. **If the MID does not receive a call after 4 years then Member-In-Discernment status is terminated and the person is no longer eligible to circulate a profile or be ordained.** The Church and Ministry Committee could, under special circumstances and at the request of the MID, consider extending the 4 year period. Member-In-Discernment status can also be terminated at any time by the Church and Ministry Committee, even after the MID has been approved by an Ecclesiastical Council, for unsatisfactory demonstration of the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers or the Ministerial Code.

# Member-In-Discernment Information Pack

Once a candidate for the Member-In-Discernment process is identified, they are to be sent a copy of the Member-In-Discernment Information Pack, which outlines the process and general requirements. The information included in the packet is an extension of this manual but it is kept as a separate file for easy sending. It consists of the following documents:

1. Member In Discernment Welcome Letter
2. Member In Discernment Application
3. Information Request Form
4. Statement of Consent and Background Disclosure
5. Member In Discernment Checklist
6. Called From This Community
7. Narrative of the Member In Discernment Process

# MID Financial Assistance Guidelines

The Church & Ministry Committee administers the Southwest Association Seminarian In-Care (MID) Fund, which is to be used for financial assistance for Members-In-Discernment.

An annual scholarship will be awarded to each MID currently enrolled in an accredited seminary and actively taking classes toward a Mdiv degree. The recommended scholarship amount is at least \$300 but this is dependent on availability of funds and the number of qualified MID's. The final amount awarded each year will be determined at a regular meeting of the committee.

The fund will also be used to pay the Association's share of the MID's Career Assessment costs (also known as the partnership fee).

If an MID needs assistance with other expenses related to their approved ministerial formation plan, they may request assistance from the committee in writing (see the Forsman Fund application for the type of information the committee would like regarding the request). Such requests will be considered at the next scheduled meeting and a decision will be made based on the availability of funds and MID need.

# Responsibilities of the Member-In-Discernment Advisor

1. Show you care. Listen! Affirm! But remember: You speak for the Church & Ministry Committee. You have an obligation to advise and to discuss issues with the candidate when appropriate.
2. You will be the primary contact with the Member-In-Discernment (MID) after he or she is accepted into the process. You are to act as their guide throughout their time as an MID, providing information and clarifications. Consult with the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator and the Church & Ministry Committee as necessary.
3. Track the progress of the MID using the Member-In-Discernment Checklist and by regularly reviewing with them their Covenant of Formation and their Portfolio.
4. Contact the candidate at least quarterly, in person twice a year if possible. Use the phone, email, video conferencing, Association and Conference meetings, etc. to make contact. See the Discussion Guidelines below. Make certain the MID receives the appropriate report form to be submitted 30 days before their Annual Review. Report contacts to the Church & Ministry Committee. Invite counsel from the Church & Ministry Committee when necessary. Make sure you retain in your files all significant information regarding the MID.
5. Submit the Advisor Report form to the Church & Ministry Committee at least 30 days prior to the MID's Annual Review. In addition to the written report, Southwest Association also requests regular oral reports in Church & Ministry Committee meetings or by phone to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator if the Advisor is not on the Church & Ministry Committee.
6. Occasional contact with the MID's home-church pastor is highly desirable.
7. Although it is the MID's sole responsibility to meet any deadlines, try to remind the MID of upcoming deadlines whenever possible. Assist the MID with scheduling and preparing for their Annual Reviews, Ordination Interview, and Ecclesiastical Council.
8. Urge the MID's attendance at annual meetings of the Southwest Association and the Michigan Conference, and at any Member-In-Discernment events.
9. Consult with the MID to help them determine when they are ready to request permission to begin the formal application process for ordination. Before beginning this process they should have met all of the goals and requirements outlined in their Covenant of Formation and this should be reflected in their Portfolio. The Portfolio should also show how the MID exhibits the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

For the purposes of the Southwest Association Member-In-Discernment process, the Church & Ministry Committees' understanding of confidentiality is that confidential information will be shared only with people who need to know and only what they need to know. It does not mean secrecy.



# Discussion Guidelines for Member-In-Discernment Advisors

Note: For the purposes of the Southwest Association Member-In-Discernment process, the Church & Ministry Committees' understanding of confidentiality is that confidential information will be shared only with people who need to know and only what they need to know. It does not mean secrecy.

1. Contact the MID at least quarterly for discussion, in person when possible. If not in person, then make contact by phone. Video conferencing may be another option. Email is acceptable for a quick check-in or exchange of factual information but not for in-depth discussions.
2. Review one or more aspects of ministry at each session so as to expand awareness and to facilitate integration into a professional role:
  1. Worship
  2. Preaching – resources, relating to real life, preparation, delivery
  3. Pastoral Visitation
    1. hospital
    2. crisis intervention
    3. nursing home
    4. prospective members
    5. regular parish visit
  4. Sacraments
  5. Social action
  6. Devotional life
  7. Place of Bible
  8. Stewardship
  9. Working with boards and committees
  10. Recruiting and nurturing volunteers
  11. Church administration
  12. Relating to the "larger church"
  13. Coping creatively with controversy/conflict
  14. Self Care; especially help the candidate process any challenges that the MID has encountered
3. At least once a year, engage the MID (and spouse/partner, if applicable) in a more relaxed way such as inviting them to dinner, coffee, or going for a walk.
4. Encourage growth in the MID's spiritual life.
5. Deal with the MID's questions and concerns.
6. Discuss personal and emotional issues when appropriate.
7. Discuss theological issues and reflect on life theologically.
8. Offer support and pray with the MID.
9. Give the student honest and immediate feedback on all issues discussed.

# Member-In-Discernment Advisor Report

Please complete and return this report to the Southwest Association Church & Ministry Committee at least 30 days prior to the Member-In-Discernment's Annual Review.

Member In Discernment's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Advisor's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

How often and by what means have you contacted the Member-In-Discernment (MID)?

What initiative has the MID shown in (a) scheduling, (b) honoring scheduled encounters, (c) Openness in sharing, and (d) preparation when requested?

What gifts, talents and skills does the MID exhibit that give evidence of aptitude for ordained ministry?

Are there areas of ministry, other than parish ministry, for which you believe she or he is better suited?

Are there areas of growth you believe the Church and Ministry Committee should be lifting up and/or challenging the MID?

Does the MID trouble or perplex you in any way?

Other comments:

Are there any special reasons why any of this information has not been shared with the Member In Discernment?

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name printed: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Should you need to, feel free to attach additional pages. Thank you for your time in providing important information about the preparation of one of our Members-In-Discernment. After you have completed this report, please mail it to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator.

We appreciate receiving the report 30 days prior to the Member-In-Discernment's Annual Review. Thank you.

# Member-In-Discernment Initial Interview

Below are some possible questions that the Church & Ministry Committee may wish to ask candidates who have applied for Member-In-Discernment status:

1. Tell us something of your experience with the United Church of Christ.
2. What has contributed to your sense of call to ordained ministry?
3. What is your understanding of the role and work of an ordained minister?
4. Who are some of the people who have influenced your Christian life and faith?
5. How are you nurtured and fed spiritually?
6. Tell us about one of your favorite Bible passages.
7. Tell us about some of the books you've read recently.
8. What are some of the gifts you have been given for ordained ministry?
9. What is your sense of what God is calling you to do?
10. What do you do for fun?
11. What attracts you to ministry in the United Church of Christ?
12. Who is Jesus for you now?

# Member-In-Discernment Report

The completed report should be submitted by the Member-In-Discernment (MID) to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator at least 30 days prior to the MID's Annual Review. Please print or type your report.

MID's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Home Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Name and city of home church \_\_\_\_\_

1. In what ways have you been involved in your home church since your last report?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How have you participated in Association and/or Conference events since your last report? What do you anticipate being part of in the next year?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. How have you participated in other congregational or ministry settings beyond your home church?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Do you have any request(s) of the Church and Ministry Committee? If so, what?

Choose two of the five questions below. Elaborate on them in writing on a separate sheet. Be prepared to address the other three during your Annual Review with the Church & Ministry Committee.

5. Describe your most significant educational experience of the last year. Reflect theologically on how this experience encouraged and challenged your growth and development as a candidate for pastor and teacher in the United Church of Christ.

6. Share an experience in a ministry setting which has contributed to your growth and development as a candidate for pastor and teacher.

7. How have you grown spiritually in recent months?

8. What books have you read recently that you would recommend to clergy and/or laity in the Southwest Association? Why?

9. Choose of the following personal qualities and describe how that quality has recently challenged your life and faith: integrity, empathy, capacity for growth, sense of responsibility, adaptability.

Please complete and return this report to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator at least 30 days before your Church and Ministry Annual Review. Thank you.

# Ecclesiastical Council Application

Southwest Association  
Michigan Conference, United Church of Christ

Name and City of Congregation \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Member-In-Discernment \_\_\_\_\_

Responding to this person's desire to become an Ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ, this congregation hereby applies to the Church and Ministry Committee of the Southwest Association for review of this candidate for an Ordination Interview and Ecclesiastical Council. We affirm that the attached application form is accurate and complete.

The candidate has met with the local church governing board and this body hereby recommends that the candidate be considered for an Ordination Interview and Ecclesiastical Council. Attached is our written recommendation, describing the process used to make our decision.

Upon receipt of this application and approval of the Church & Ministry Committee, the Member-In-Discernment will be scheduled for an Ordination Interview. The Member-In-Discernment must submit all other required documentation to the Church & Ministry Committee at least 30 days prior to their Ordination Interview. The Ordination Interview will determine whether they will be approved for an Ecclesiastical Council.

Signature of Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Church Leader: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Leader's name printed: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed form to the Member-In-Discernment Coordinator.

# The Ordination Paper

Once the Member-In-Discernment (MID) has been approved to proceed to the Ordination Interview and the Ecclesiastical Council Application has been submitted to the Church and Ministry Committee, the MID is required to write an ordination paper and submit it to the committee at least 30 days in advance of the interview.

The ordination paper should cover the following in dialog with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. The paper does not need to cover every sub-heading for each Mark or even every Mark. However, it should engage as many of the Marks as necessary to satisfactorily explore the themes below.

1. Theological perspective and grasp of the historic Christian faith. Address the major classical themes of God / Jesus / Spirit, Sin, Eschatology, and Ministry (including the sacraments). These topics obviously cannot be covered in-depth in a short paper. However, each should at least be touched upon. Include other theological topics as they interest you and relate to your vision of ministry.
2. Understanding of the history, theological roots, polity and practice of the UCC. Discuss what they mean to you and how you expect them to manifest in life as an ordained minister.
3. Faith pilgrimage and understanding of ministry, growth in Christian faith and call to ministry.

The ordination paper should be 12-20 pages, printed in a standard readable 12 point font, and double-spaced. A paper of less than 12 pages may not adequately cover the required themes. We request that the paper not exceed 20 pages so that the time to review it does not become overly burdensome to those who will be attending the Ecclesiastical Council.



# Ordination Interview Questions<sup>1</sup>

The Ordination Interview determines whether a Member-In-Discernment is allowed to proceed to the Ecclesiastical Council. Below are some possible questions and topics which could be discussed during the Ordination Interview.

## **Theological perspective and grasp of the historic Christian faith**

1. In context of United Church of Christ (UCC) Statement of Faith
2. Sacraments
3. Biblical interpretation
4. Personal, not academic, theological perspective; academic and practical influences

## **History and Polity of the United Church of Christ**

1. Covenant
2. Autonomy
3. Sacraments
4. Ordination
5. What are the aspects of the history, tradition, polity and practice of the UCC that are most valued by you, and how will these shape the way you engage in the tasks of ordained ministry?

## **Faith Pilgrimage and Intentions for Future Ministry**

1. How has your understanding of yourself as a person of faith changed and grown during the time of preparation for ministry?
2. How has your understanding of call changed or grown during the period of preparation?
3. What is your understanding of Church? Mission? Ministry?
4. What is the challenge and vision you have for your ministry?
5. How do you see your gifts for ministry being used in the type of ministry to which you have been called or to which you are seeking a call?
6. Where do you see your ministry in five years?
7. If not in a local church, how does your ministry relate to the local church?
8. What are your commitments to the UCC and the Church ecumenical?

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted from the pre-2017 Manual on Ministry, Section 3, page 5 and based on the three required sections (or themes) of the ordination paper.

# Covenant of Formation Guidelines

A Covenant of Formation will be entered into between the Member-In-Discernment (MID), the Southwest Association Church and Ministry Committee, and the MID's home church, which should be a member church of the Association. The covenant will outline a plan for the MID's formation as a potential authorized minister in the United Church of Christ. The plan should be guided by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. The sample covenant below is meant as a baseline from which to work. The formational plan will be agreed to by all parties and reflected in the final covenant. This formational plan must then be completed by the MID before an Ordination Interview will be held.

The formational process outlined in the covenant is expected to take a minimum of 2 years and, noting that a traditional seminary education takes at least 3 years, it may take significantly longer. The Covenant of Formation is not meant to make the formational process less rigorous than a seminary education but instead recognizes that seminary may not be the appropriate path for all those who are called to ministry. Seminary is, however, still a viable, highly respected, and even recommended path.

The covenant should take into account the MID's previous experience and education. Accordingly, some of the recommended elements below may not be included or other elements may be substituted. The covenant is meant to be customized to the formational needs of the individual MID. In addition, the covenant may state requirements in a general or specific manner as appropriate for the particular MID's formational plan. Common recommended elements of the covenant include the following.

- **Discernment Committee** – The MID is expected to form a committee that will support them on an ongoing basis with the task of discernment during their formational process. One goal of this committee is to help the MID reflect seriously upon the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers and how they understand their call as a future minister of the United Church of Christ. It is recommended that the committee consist of 4 to 5 persons in addition to the MID. These persons will often be from the MID's home church and include the home church's pastor.
- **Pastoral Care and Self Awareness in Ministry** – Pastoral Care is an important ministerial skill and self awareness of how our own experiences contribute to the ways we do pastoral care is also very important. One way an MID might address these areas is through Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). This is a program that “provides theological and professional education using the clinical method of learning in diverse contexts of ministry.” An MID taking CPE should choose a program accredited by the ACPE (<https://www.acpe.edu>). Supervisory and self evaluations are to be shared with the Church and Ministry Committee.
- **Field education** – In addition to informal experiences, the MID is expected to also obtain practical pastoral experience through more formal methods, such as a pastoral internship. A field education experience should include supervisory and self evaluations that exhibit serious reflection and are shared with the Church and Ministry Committee.
- **Academic study** – Continual and life-long learning is expected from clergy. However, a certain foundation of knowledge is required before ordination. Academic study also helps develop the MID's ability to think critically and reflect theologically. Seminary is one way to meet this goal.

However, other avenues are also possible. A Master of Divinity degree may be required by a calling body for certain situations such as chaplaincy endorsement.

- **Polity and History** – The MID should demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the polity and history of the United Church of Christ. This will typically be done by taking a formal class on the subject.
- **Portfolio** – The MID is required to maintain a Portfolio demonstrating their formation and readiness for ministry. Evidence that the MID has completed the elements of their Covenant of Formation should be clearly reflected in the Portfolio. It should be organized around the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. Additional guidelines appear below.

# Sample Covenant of Formation

Among  
*Member-In-Discernment's Name*  
The Southwest Association Church and Ministry Committee  
*Name of MID's home church, including city*

When an individual experiencing a call to ordained ministry is accepted by the Southwest Association Church and Ministry Committee as a Member-In-Discernment (MID), a covenantal relationship is entered into to guide the person's formation as a potential minister of the United Church of Christ. The purpose of this covenant is to:

1. provide support and clarity of process for all parties entering into this covenant
2. to encourage mutual participation and accountability for the formational process
3. to observe, nurture, celebrate, and call forth the formation of the MID

## **Covenants Of Mutual Accountability**

All parties covenant together to maintain open, honest, and respectful communication with all other parties throughout the Member-In-Discernment process. In addition,

*Member-In-Discernment's Name*, as a Member-In-Discernment of the Southwest Association, covenants:

### To the Southwest Association Church and Ministry Committee:

- Adherence to the Ministerial Code of the United Church of Christ.
- Adherence to oversight by the Association Church and Ministry Committee.
- Adherence to all requirements and processes of the Member-In-Discernment process as defined in the Member-In-Discernment Manual and accompanying documents as well as the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry. If the two should differ then Association policies will take precedence.
- Maintain familiarity with and faithfully seek to live out the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.
- Take sole responsibility for meeting all deadlines.
- Participate in Association Spring and Fall Meetings and Conference Annual Meetings.
- Form and meet at least quarterly with a Discernment Committee.
- Undertake an appropriate program of academic study and practical experience on ministerial subjects and skill areas including, but not limited to: Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Pastoral Care, Theology, Christian History and Thought, Church Leadership, Preaching, Christian Ethics, Church Administration, and Family Systems Theory.
- Engage in a formal field education experience of at least 300 hours of ministry, including supervisory and self evaluations and reflections to be shared with the Church and Ministry Committee.
- Take one (1) basic unit of Clinical Pastoral Education from an ACPE accredited center. Supervisory and self evaluations shall be shared with the Church and Ministry Committee.

- Complete a formal course of study on the history and polity of the United Church of Christ as approved by the Church and Ministry Committee.
- Engage in other educational and practical experiences that enhance the MID's ministerial formation as defined by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.
- Maintain a Portfolio according to Church and Ministry Committee guidelines. The Portfolio should show formational progress as evaluated with respect to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

To Name of MID's home church, including city:

- Maintain membership in good standing with the church.
- Support and participate in the general ministries of the church.
- Commit to earnest prayer for the well-being of this congregation and its ministry.
- Keep the church informed of the MID's formational progress.

The Southwest Association Church and Ministry Committee covenants:

To Member-In-Discernment's Name:

- Clear communication of the committee's requirements for the Member-In-Discernment process.
- Maintain transparent and just practices and policies. While the committee will endeavor not to add onerous or unjust requirements that are not specified in this written covenant, in the end it is the sacred responsibility of the committee to assure that the MID is prepared for ministry within the United Church of Christ and it is that responsibility that must take precedence.

To Name of MID's home church, including city:

- Belief in the local church as the locus for mission and ministry in the United Church of Christ and thankfulness for your support of the MID.
- Appropriate and just support and oversight of the MID.

Name of MID's home church, including city covenants:

To Member-In-Discernment's Name:

- Belief in God's call that has led the MID to this process of discernment and formation.
- Prayers for the MID's ministerial formation and their work with both the local and wider church.
- Provide support when possible, including financial assistance.
- Provide a committee of support for the MID. This may or may not constitute the MID's Discernment Committee.
- Allow the senior pastor time to advise, counsel, and support the MID.

To the Southwest Association Church and Ministry Committee:

- Support for the Association as the appropriate oversight authority for Members-In-Discernment in the United Church of Christ and thankfulness for its support of the MID.
- Appropriate and just support of the MID. We recognize and embrace the sacred call to the ministry of preparing members for ordained ministry.
- Provide requested information in a timely manner.

We trust in God’s guidance and presence with us as we seek to be faithful to this covenant:

**Member-In-Discernment:** \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name printed: \_\_\_\_\_

**Chair, Church & Ministry:** \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name printed: \_\_\_\_\_

**For the Local Church:** \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name printed: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_

# Member-In-Discernment Portfolio Guidelines

## **Purpose**

The Manual on Ministry defines the Portfolio as “the collection of materials that demonstrate competencies and experiences” related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. The Portfolio is intended to be the central tool for the Member-In-Discernment (MID) and the Church and Ministry Committee to follow and evaluate the MID’s spiritual growth and ministerial formation.

## **Introduction**

The Portfolio is intended to be a living document. Development should begin as soon as an individual is accepted as an MID and it should be continually updated to reflect the MID’s formational progress. An updated Portfolio should be submitted to the Church and Ministry Committee every year 30 days in advance of the MID’s Annual Review. The MID may also want to periodically review their Portfolio with their Discernment Committee and their Member-In-Discernment advisor.

Because the Portfolio is supposed to “demonstrate competencies and experiences,” it is more than a collection of essays on the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. It might better be thought of as evidence of the MID’s fitness as a minister and teacher of the United Church of Christ. In developing your Portfolio, you will want to provide evidence of your participation, interest, expertise, or passion for each of the categories under each Mark.

No one is expected to reflect expertise in all of the Marks to the same degree; we each have particular gifts, interests, and strengths as well as areas for further growth and development. Nor do any ministers ever achieve final mastery of each of the Marks. In addition, the Marks should not only serve as a tool for assessment of readiness for authorization but also as a guide for lifelong learning and ongoing professional development and continuing education.

## **Guidelines**

1. The Portfolio should be electronic rather than hard-copy. Much of the material will be written and as such should be clearly written and presented in an easy to read manner. For example, files should be in a widely used format such as PDF, Word, or html files. Hard-copy documentation should be scanned into an electronic format. The MID will also want to consider how they will distribute the Portfolio for review. Options, for example, might be handing out USB sticks with the files or using an online service such as Google Docs. Beyond this, the MID is encouraged to be creative in organizing and presenting their Portfolio (for example, by using audio or video) while taking into account the general guidelines given here.

The Portfolio is not normally distributed or shared publicly beyond the Church and Ministry Committee and whoever else the MID chooses to share it with. If an MID wishes to share their Portfolio publicly, for example, prior to their Ecclesiastical Council (this is not required or even recommended) in addition to their ordination paper, it is their sole responsibility to provide the means to do so.

2. *Provide a Table of Contents.* The Portfolio has the potential to become large and unwieldy and it is therefore important to provide reviewers with a way to navigate the information you are providing. A sample of what the Table of Contents might include for the first Mark appears below. You are not expected to present a particular number of items under each Mark sub-category but will want to give evidence for all of your experience in each area.
3. Remember that the people who will be reviewing your Portfolio will be asking themselves “Does this person have the qualifications, education, and training to be an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ?” Everything in the portfolio should, in the context of the Marks, address that question. If it doesn’t then it shouldn’t be there.
4. Be succinct. Brevity and clarity are assets. For example, it may be sufficient to know that the MID took an approved class on polity rather than presenting an essay about polity. When appropriate, consider presenting such essays and papers in an addendum to the Portfolio.
5. Provide pertinent details. For example, instead of saying “I took a class on the Hebrew Bible” give the name of the class, institution, teacher and a sentence or two explaining what the class covered. The primary goal is not to read an essay about the Hebrew Bible, but to understand what learning the candidate has engaged in and continues to engage in regarding the Hebrew Bible. On the other hand, an essay may be appropriate if the learning was self-directed rather than in a classroom setting that provided formal evaluation of the MID’s progress.
6. For particular skills provide evidence of not only training, but evidence of practical experience in conjunction with evaluation and reflection by both the MID and a supervisor or mentor. For formal education, such as Clinical Pastoral Education, these elements usually come naturally with the learning process. However, feedback and self-reflection are important in all types of learning and should be part of all aspects of the formational process.
7. Work closely with the Member-In-Discernment advisor and the Church and Ministry Committee on developing your Portfolio. There will be time for suggestions as the Portfolio is presented during the Annual Reviews, but feedback can also be requested at any time. The MID’s discernment committee would also be a good avenue for feedback.



# Sample Portfolio Table of Contents

There are eight Marks. This example gives guidance only for the first Mark.

## Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice

1. Loving God, following Jesus Christ, and being guided by the Holy Spirit; living a life of discipleship.
  1. Reading/class on discipleship
  2. Experiences of discipleship
  3. Story about relationship with God, Jesus, and/or Holy Spirit
  4. Description of assisting someone else in their journey of discipleship
2. Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices.
  1. Written prayer for worship or special service
  2. Reading/class on prayer
  3. Reference letter from pastor or mentor attesting to public prayer ability
  4. Story about experience of prayer
3. Being called to ordained ministry by God and the Church.
  1. Call story
  2. Reference letter(s) from others who sense God's call in your life
  3. Statement about what call to ordination/lay ministry means
  4. Reading/class on calls to ministry
4. Continuing discernment on one's call in community
  1. Reading/class on discernment
  2. Describe experience of discernment in another area of your life
  3. Mentor or pastor letter describing effectiveness of discernment on an issue
  4. Experience leading others in discernment
5. Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith.
  1. Reading/class on Christian worship
  2. Demonstration of liturgy that may be transformational (video, testimonial, etc.)
  3. Describe how creativity and the creative arts are connected to connecting God and creation
  4. Successful experience working with others in preparing worship
6. Exhibiting a commitment to lifelong spiritual development and faithful personal stewardship
  1. Evidence of relationship with a spiritual director over a significant period
  2. Name several people who are friends and acquaintances who have multiple or no religious affiliation
  3. Demonstrate ways that personal stewardship has been faithful over time
  4. Story about nurturing others in spiritual formation or faith development