

Preparation and Formation Plan for Members in Discernment

Overview

The Manual on Ministry understands *Preparation* as “the specific activities that contribute to a person’s development spiritually, personally, professionally, and ethically. *Formation* is an open-ended and lifelong effort; it is the ongoing array of habits and intentional practices that contribute to a person’s maturity, effectiveness and faithfulness for ministry.”¹ When a Member in Discernment candidate applies to a Committee on Ministry to be formally received into the discernment for ministry process, the Committee reviews the application materials (which include a criminal background check and agreement to undergo a psychological assessment), schedules an in-person interview with the candidate, and subsequently votes on whether to approve the candidate’s application. If the applicant is received as a Member in Discernment, an initial assessment of the candidate is done. A preparation and formation plan is developed by the Committee on Ministry, in conjunction with the Member in Discernment, based on the *Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers*² 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 for a Member in Discernment to develop their competencies, and the needs of the Church. Committees should standardize and clearly communicate any requirements of the discernment process that are expected of all Members in Discernment.”³

Ongoing adherence to the preparation and formation plan falls largely to the Member in Discernment. Progress on this plan is to be reported by the Member in Discernment to the Committee on Ministry in writing, on a minimally annual basis and be included in the Member in Discernment Portfolio. A copy is to be shared with the Local Church Discernment Committee and the Member in Discernment Advisor. The Member in Discernment builds a portfolio that is based on the Marks and responds to the preparation and formation plan in order to give evidence of competency and to comprehensively illustrate their growth (personal, professional, and spiritual). When reviewing a portfolio, consideration should be given to the person’s demonstrated experience, deep understanding, integration, passion and love regarding each Mark.

Preparation and formation plans may include, but is not limited to, some or all of the following:

- Theological and practical education for ministry, with learning outcomes oriented toward the Marks:

¹ UCC Manual on Ministry, 19.

² <https://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/MOM-Sect3-Marks-of-Faithful-and-Effective-Ministers.pdf>

³ UCC Manual on Ministry, 28.

- transcripts/courses taken (accompanied by course syllabus);
- annotated bibliography of books read that align with the eight categories of the Marks;
- reflection papers on learning gained through specific ministry experiences in and beyond the Local Church of membership (e.g., preaching, pastoral care, bible studies taught/developed, community engagement, etc.).
- Successful completion of an approved UCC History, Polity and Theology course:
 - certificate of completion/grade.
- Supervised ministry training experience (Clinical Pastoral Education, field placement, internship, etc.);
- Marks portfolio⁴: a collection of materials that demonstrate competencies and experiences related to the Marks, for example:
 - Term papers;
 - Blog entries;
 - Videos of worship leadership, community engagement, etc.;
 - Sermon transcripts;
 - Liturgies.
- Boundary awareness training:
 - certificate of completion.
- Anti-Racism training (if required by the Committee on Ministry/Conference):
 - certificate of completion.
- Evidence of active participation in the UCC Local Church of membership;
- Participation in regional or national Member in Discernment gatherings;
- Evidence of engagement with the wider Church (i.e., participation in Association annual meetings, Conference committees, General Synod, etc.);
- Progress reports on the preparation and formation plan at annual meetings with the Committee on Ministry;
- Ongoing self-assessment based on the Marks (e.g., reflections recorded in *Journaling the Journey*,⁵ feedback on sermons, insights gained from the *Discernment Travelogue*);
- Letters of recommendation from instructors/ professors, field placement supervisor, or CPE supervisor;
- Periodic meetings with the Member in Discernment Advisor:
 - record of date, time, place, topics discussed, recommended actions.
- Prior to the Ecclesiastical Council (or ordination interview), a drafted UCC Ministerial Profile.⁶

⁴ <https://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/MOM-Sect3-Member-in-Discernment-Portfolio.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.uccresources.com/products/journaling-the-journey-engaging-the-marks-of-faithful-and-effective-authorized-ministers?variant=1247860844>

⁶ https://www.ucc.org/ministers_profile

The sample preparation and formation plan that follows offers one method of documenting and tracking the Member in Discernment's progress and growth during the discernment period. Such a plan may also be drafted for use with ordained ministers throughout their active ministry to encourage continuing education and reflection. Committees on Ministry may consider reviewing a preparation and formation plan within the first year of a minister's first call, and/or as part of the Periodic Vocational Support meeting held every three to five years.

The terms used in this sample plan for competency levels are but one labeling suggestion. Whatever labels are used, the important point is consistency throughout the plan and for everyone for whom a plan is developed. It is recommended that committees on ministry layout the criteria that will be used to assign a competency level for each Mark. Again, consistency in applying the same criteria to each person will validate the process and minimize potential bias.

Preparation and Formation Member in Discernment Plan

Name of MID: _____

Date Entered MID Status: _____ Plan Start Date: _____

Discernment Path⁷: _____

Committee on Ministry Chair: _____

Association: _____ Conference: _____

Member in Discernment Advisor: _____

Lay Ministerial Standing Supervisor: _____
(if MID has Lay Standing)

Based upon an interview with _____ and a review of _____ statement of faith, psychological assessment, ministry experience, education, and résumé, the _____ Association Committee on Ministry recommends the following plan of preparation and formation for discerning a call to ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The plan considers the level of competency in the *Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers* the Member in Discernment has demonstrated as of the above date. Consideration is given to the candidate's demonstrated experience, deep understanding, integration, passion and love regarding each Mark. Progress on this plan is to be reported by the Member in Discernment to the Committee on Ministry in writing, on a minimally annual basis and be included in the Member in Discernment Portfolio. A copy is to be shared with the Local Church Discernment Committee and the Member in Discernment Advisor. This plan may be amended annually.

⁷ Each path is one of "multiple paths" to ordination; there are many fruitful pathways. It is recommended to indicate the type of path the Member in Discernment is on and that the Committee on Ministry will be assessing. Suggested descriptors: Seminary Path; Regional Theological Education Path; Individual Plan with a Mentor Pastor, etc.

Competency levels *for each Mark and Category* are rated as a) exemplary, b) proficient, c) satisfactory, d) rudimentary, or e) inadequate. Recommended action(s) is/are noted by each Mark.

Criteria for Assessment of Overall Competence for Authorized Ministry:

Each of the 8 Categories must be rated at "Satisfactory" or better.

- Exemplary:* Demonstrates substantial breadth of experience, considerable integration with other Marks and areas of ministry, deep understanding, high passion and love for the Mark.
- Proficient:* Demonstrates significant experience, sufficient integration with other Marks and areas of ministry, comprehensive understanding, considerable passion and love for the Mark.
- Satisfactory:* Demonstrates moderate degree of experience, understanding, integration with other Marks and areas of ministry, adequate passion and love for the Mark.
- Rudimentary:* Demonstrates nominal experience, elemental understanding, low integration with other Marks and areas of ministry, minimal passion and love for the Mark.
- Inadequate:* Demonstrates profound lack of experience, understanding, integration with other Marks and areas of ministry, an absence of passion and love for the Mark.

**The Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers of the United Church of Christ
EXHIBITING A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION AND ONGOING
SPIRITUAL PRACTICE**

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

	Rating
Loving God, following Jesus Christ, and being guided by the Holy Spirit; living a life of discipleship.	_____
Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices.	_____
Being called to ordained ministry by God and the Church.	_____
Continuing discernment of one's call in community.	_____
Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith.	_____

Exhibiting a commitment to lifelong spiritual development and faithful personal stewardship.

Overall Competency: _____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

Nurturing UCC Identity

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

Rating

Acknowledging Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the Church.

Communicating passion for the oneness of the Body of Christ (John 17:21).

Holding active membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ.

Participating in the various settings of the United Church of Christ, including Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, General Synod, and global ministries.

Knowing and appreciating UCC history, polity, and theology.

Exhibiting a commitment to the core values of the United Church of Christ: continuing testament, extravagant welcome, and changing lives.

Overall Competency: _____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

BUILDING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

	Rating
Empowering the Church to be faithful to God’s call, reflective of Christ’s mission, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.	_____
Strategically creating the future of God’s Church.	_____
Witnessing in the public square to God’s redeeming power.	_____
Performing necessary and appropriate administrative tasks.	_____
Working collaboratively with intercultural awareness and sensitivity.	_____
Encouraging leadership development of self and others through continuing education and lifelong learning.	_____
	Overall Competency: _____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

ENGAGING SACRED STORIES AND TRADITIONS

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

Rating

Exhibiting knowledge, understanding, and continuing study of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.

Maturing in effective proclamation and preaching.

Understanding the history of the Christian Church, from biblical times forward.

Bringing life to sacred stories and traditions in worship, proclamation, and witness.

Leading faith formation effectively across generations.

Holding the Holy with integrity especially as represented in the Sacraments.

Overall Competency: _____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

CARING FOR ALL CREATION

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

	Rating
Nurturing care and compassion for God's creation.	_____
Maintaining a basic understanding of mental health and wellness.	_____
Practicing self-care and life balance.	_____
Providing hope and healing to a hurting world.	_____
Attending to one's own spiritual and pastoral care, including engagement in supervision as appropriate.	_____
Stewarding the resources of the Church.	_____
Overall Competency:	_____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

PARTICIPATING IN THEOLOGICAL PRAXIS

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

	Rating
Practicing theological reflection and engagement as part of one's sense of ministerial identity.	_____
Integrating theological reflection in teaching, preaching, and ecclesial and community leadership.	_____
Articulating a theology and practice of ministry consistent with the UCC Manual on Ministry.	_____

Demonstrating an appreciation for and participation in the ecumenical and interfaith partnerships of the UCC.

Experiencing and appreciating a variety of theological perspectives.

Embodying the UCC Ministerial Code.

Overall Competency: : _____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

WORKING TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE AND MERCY

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

Rating

Drawing on the ministry of Jesus Christ to confront injustice and oppression.

Practicing the radical hospitality of God.

Identifying and working to overcome explicit and implicit bias in the life of the Church.

Understanding community context and navigating change with a community.

Engaging in mission and outreach.

Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence.

Overall Competency: _____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

STRENGTHENING INTER- AND INTRA- PERSONAL ASSETS

Rating scale: Exemplary, Proficient, Satisfactory, Rudimentary, Inadequate

Rating

Developing and maintaining a healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and life experiences. _____

Living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church. _____

Exhibiting strong moral character and personal integrity. _____

Respecting the dignity of all God’s people. _____

Understanding and ministering to stages of human development across the life span. _____

Demonstrating excellent communication skills. _____

Overall Competency: _____

Interpretive Comments:

Actions:

***Criteria for Assessment of Overall Competence for Authorized Ministry:
Each of the 8 Categories must be rated at "Satisfactory" or better.***

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Signatures below indicate acknowledgement and agreement with the above plan:

Member in Discernment _____
Date

Committee on Ministry Representative _____
Date