

The Member-In-Discernment Manual

**for the
Western Region Associations
of the Massachusetts Conference
of the United Church of Christ**



Berkshire Association
Franklin Association
Hampden Association
Hampshire Association

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to identify and define the Member-In-Discernment journey for students preparing for ministry in the United Church of Christ from its inception to its conclusion. This manual outlines the process of the journey to be taken by the student toward ordination in the United Church of Christ or other authorized United Church of Christ ministry. It states the relationship of the student to:

- I. The Local Church Pastor & Representative Committee
- II. The Local Church Council or Board of Deacons and Congregation
- III. The Member-In-Discernment Working Group of the Western Region¹
- IV. The Member-In-Discernment Advisor
- V. The Committees on Church and Ministry in the four Associations²

The process that the student will follow is the responsibility of the Committee on Church and Ministry in the Association in which the student's church has standing. Every Committee on Church and Ministry, made up of both clergy and lay members, is responsible for licensing, commissioning, and ordaining ministers in their specific Association within the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ. Each of the other relationships, as listed above, is monitored by the Committee on Church and Ministry in which the Member In Discernment holds his or her standing. Each relationship makes contributions toward the student's readiness for ministry and helps in discerning the student's fitness for ministry relying on the *Marks for Ministry* and the grace of God

This Member-In-Discernment Manual, with all attachments, shall be reviewed and updated if necessary every three (3) years by the MIDWG and a representative team from the four Western Region Associations. The next review year is _____ .

Throughout the manual there are references to the *United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry*. The reference will be given as section number followed by page numbers. Please refer to the *United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry* on-line at www.ucc.org/ministers/manual.

¹ The Member-In-Discernment Working Group of the Western Region will be referred to as the MIDWG for the remainder of this document. Members of the MIDWG shall be appointed by the four Committees on Church and Ministry, 2 per Association, to a term of 2 years. Each Committee on Church and Ministry may reappointment their representatives to MIDWG to a second and third term. The MIDWG is to consist of 8 people who are members of local United Church of Christ congregations. A balance shall be sought between male and female, clergy and laity. The MIDWG shall elect it's own Chairperson.

² The four Associations of the Western Region are: Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire. For the remainder of this document references to the Associations of the Western Region will mean to include these four and no others.

II. Application for Member-In-Discernment

Purpose for Seeking Member-In-Discernment Status

The purpose of being a Member-In-Discernment is to seek support and guidance in the process of discerning a call to ordained ministry or another authorized ministry of the United Church of Christ. Further, in order to be considered for ordination, a Members-In Discernment within the Western Region must be a Member-In-Discernment in one of the Western Region Associations for at least two full years unless this requirement is waived by the MIDWG.

When to Apply

A person seeking ordination in the United Church of Christ is strongly encouraged to make application to become a Member-In-Discernment upon enrollment in an accredited theological seminary. To be considered for Member-In-Discernment status a student must:

- Minimally have already acquired a high school diploma and be participating in a Bachelors degree program or its equivalent, as determined by the appropriate Committee on Church and Ministry.
- Hold an active membership in a local United Church of Christ congregation for at least one year.

Those seeking Commissioned or Licensed Ministry may make application to the MIDWG at anytime.

Length of Relationship

Normally, a person is encouraged to be a Member-In-Discernment of one of the Associations between two to three years prior to ordination, but not less than two full years in the Associations of the Western Region. Member-In-Discernment status is not automatically transferable from one Association to another. A Member-In-Discernment who wishes to move from one of the Associations in the Western Region to another Association in the Western Region must make that request in writing to the MIDWG group and give reason. This will be reviewed by the MIDWG and forwarded to the appropriate Committees on Church and Ministry for their decisions. A Member-In-Discernment who is moving from another Association in the United Church of Christ outside of the Western Region to one of the Western Region Associations and wishes to remain a Member-In-Discernment must make application as outlined in this manual to the MIDWG. In this case consideration will be given to years as a Member-In-Discernment and where the Member-In-Discernment is in her or his process. Once an applicant becomes a Member-In-Discernment this designation is reviewed by the MIDWG and renewed by the appropriate Committee on Church and Ministry on a yearly basis. A Member-In-Discernment who has completed his or her education and has been granted ordination pending call from an Ecclesiastical Council of one of the Western Region Associations may continue to be a Member-In-Discernment of the Western Region. When this is the case, the Member-In-Discernment is required to continue the annual review process as designed by the MIDWG, continue participation in his or her local church, and remain actively engaged in the search and call process.

For those seeking Commissioned or Licensed Ministry, the MIDWG will develop an individualized process of preparation, consistent with the *Manual on Ministry for the United Church of Christ*, and approved by the appropriate Committee on Church and Ministry.

III. The Member-In-Discernment Journey

The Member-In-Discernment relationship is covenantal with the purpose of helping the student in the discernment of a call to Christian ministry and the process of ordination, or other authorization of a recognized ministry of the United Church of Christ. This journey begins with an individual's seeking to clarify his or her call to ministry and moves from there to application to become a Member-In-Discernment. If a student becomes a Member-In-Discernment the journey continues until such time as the student is ordained or granted authorization in another form of recognized ministry, or the Member-In-Discernment relationship is ended by either the student or the appropriate Committee on Church and Ministry.

Throughout the journey, the *Marks for Faithful and Effective Ministry, Revised April 2009 (Appendix A)*, will be the measure against which the Member-In-Discernment is held. From the beginning to the conclusion of this time of discernment these marks will be explored and observed. Those who are entrusted to discern if a Member-In-Discernment is called to ordained or authorized ministry in, and on behalf of, the United Church of Christ, will rely on the *Marks for Faithful and Effective Ministry* for guidance.

While this manual details the entire process for those seeking ordination, it also is the basic foundation from which a process for Commissioned or Licensed Ministry is derived. For those seeking to be Licensed or Commissioned, the MIDWG will design a process that will include certain sections of this manual. This process will include specific requirements and describe the relationship between the student seeking Licensure or Commissioning and the MIDWG. Each design to become a licensed or commissioned minister is approved by the Committee on Church and Ministry where the person's congregation holds standing. In all cases, it will be this Committee on Church and Ministry that decides if an individual is to be licensed or commissioned.

It is expected that all Member-In-Discernment students will have a copy of this Member-In-Discernment Manual and will obtain a complete current copy of the United Church of Christ publication *The Manual on Ministry*. This is available on line at www.ucc.org/ministers/manual. Member-In-Discernment students are expected to be familiar with both of these publications and any updates.

All students granted Member-In-Discernment status are expected to be familiar with the *Marks for Faithful and Effective Ministry, Revised April 2009 (Appendix A)* and with the *Codes of Conduct* as outlined in *The Manual on Ministry*. As Members-In-Discernment, students are held accountable to the ethics outlined in "The Church's Expectations of Its Applicants for Student Member-In-Discernment," Section 2, p. 18, *Manual on Ministry*. Any breach of these ethics will be investigated by the MIDWG and/or the appropriate Committee on Church and Ministry. A serious or chronic breach of ethics may be grounds for terminating Member-In-Discernment status.

IV. The Local Church Pastor and Representative Committee

- A. The student will normally seek out the pastor of the local church in which she or he holds membership. The pastor will listen to and counsel the student, explaining the discernment process that may lead toward ordination or authorization in another form of recognized ministry as outlined in this document. The pastor is an important person for the student and will want to be available to him or her throughout the journey of discernment.
- B. A copy of this Member-In-Discernment Manual is given to the student and pastor upon request by the pastor to the chair person of the MIDWG.
- C. A committee, consisting of the pastor and representatives from the local congregation, with the student, will then seek to discern and clarify the call which the student has received.
- D. When both the committee and the student are in agreement that the student is prepared to enter into this covenantal relationship and begin the discernment process, the student is presented to the church council or board of deacons or congregation by the committee to request sponsorship.
- E. If the discernment of either the local church committee or the church council or board of deacons or congregation is in the negative, a student may make an appeal to the Committee on Church and Ministry of their Association or the MIDWG.

V. Local Church Council or Board of Deacons and Congregation

- A. When a student is ready to make a request for sponsorship to the local church council or board of deacons, the chair of the MIDWG will be notified by the student.
 - 1. Whenever possible, a representative from the MIDWG will meet with the pastor, the Representative Committee, the student, and the local church council or board of deacons to clearly outline the Member-In-Discernment journey and the requirements and expectations of all those in the Member-In-Discernment covenant.
- B. The local church council or board of deacons or congregation receives the request of the student for sponsorship, which includes:
 - 1. Statements about his or her Christian pilgrimage and biography.
 - 2. How the call to ministry is understood by the student at this time.
 - 3. Documentation of formal education to include a high school diploma, and/or other post-high school degrees and all post-high school academic transcripts, plus educational plans for the future.
 - 4. If the council, board, or congregation approves the request for sponsorship, the *Application for Member-In-Discernment* status form, Appendix B, should be filled out and added to the student's application materials.
- C. It is only with the sponsoring of the local church that the student may be presented to the MIDWG for the initial interview for recommendation to the Committee on Church and Ministry of the student's Association. It is expected that the student will continue her or his relationship with the sponsoring congregation.

- D. If Member-In-Discernment status is granted, the pastor and the local church is expected to stay in relationship with the student throughout the discernment journey.
1. Whenever possible, the congregation is encouraged to assist in providing annual financial tuition support. The local church is also encouraged to defray the costs of the student's travel for interviews.
 2. The congregation will be expected to share in the cost of the required psychological assessment.
 3. The pastor and congregation are expected to maintain communication with the student to remind the student of the constant prayer and support that she or he receives from many different sources. Examples:
 - a. Regular public prayers for the Member-In-Discernment may be offered by the pastor.
 - b. The pastor and/or local church members may offer spiritual direction to the Member-In-Discernment. Christian spiritual direction may be defined as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication with him or her, to respond to God, to grow in intimacy with God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship. The focus is on experience. This experience is viewed as an expression of the ongoing personal relationship God has established with each individual.
 4. While the student is in seminary, the local church is required to keep him or her on mailing lists. This may include:
 - a. Remembering him or her through prayer and cards on birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays.
 - b. Visits by local church members and the pastor when in the geographic area of the seminary are also encouraged.
 5. Whenever possible the student should be invited to participate in worship when the student is available.
 6. Continuing conversations between the local pastor, local church board, and student may discover concerns that may need to be conveyed to the MIDWG for their consideration, advice and assistance.
 7. Members of the congregation and the pastor may, if invited, participate in the student's Annual Reviews (Section III, F. See also format in *U.C.C. Manual on Ministry*, Section 2 pages 3-5, entitled *The Person and Local Church*.)
 8. The local church might create a small group of 2 to 4 parishioners who would be available as a special Support Team for the Member-In-Discernment student for her or his entire journey to ordination.
 - a. This Team should meet with the student every two or three months. A Support Team might create A Student Profile that lists the individual's past and continuing experience with his or her local church.
 - i. For example: keeping records of conferences attended, teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir, Peace & Justice Committee work.
 - ii. The Support Team, along with the local pastor, could create a plan for a year of participation when attending the local church. This plan would help fill out the profile of experience, including, but not limited to

preaching and participating in worship; learning how to do a funeral, a baptism or a wedding; working with the ministries of stewardship, evangelism and missions; and ministering to the dying and their families.

- E. At the completion of the Member-In-Discernment journey, the local church shall request, in writing, that the Association where the Member-In-Discernment has standing examine the student for ordination.

VI. The Member-In-Discernment Working Group (MIDWG)

- A. Upon the approval by the local church council or board of deacons or congregation, the student is next introduced in person by the local pastor and a lay member (the chair of the deacons or other key layperson) of the local church to the MIDWG for the initial interview and recommendation to the Committee on Church and Ministry.
- B. The Association requires certain written documents to be submitted to the MIDWG before the meeting. These are:
1. *The Application for Member-In-Discernment Status* (Appendix B).
 2. Verification of membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ.
 3. The completion of a *Questionnaire for Those Seeking Member-In-Discernment Status*, Appendix C, by three people: one of whom is the student's pastor.
 - a. The Committee on Church and Ministry has approved this questionnaire to be used in the place of or in addition to narrative recommendations.
 - b. The *Questionnaire for Those Seeking Member-In-Discernment Status* will be used as an integral part of the decision making process for Member-In-Discernment status and later, if Member-In-Discernment status is granted, as an indicator of what skills the student may need to improve during their course of preparation for the ministry.
 4. The material that was provided to the church council or board of deacons and pastor, revised if necessary as listed under Section V.
- C. The MIDWG will examine the student based upon the material submitted, as well as his or her oral presentation and dialogue.
1. It is important to note that this is a two-way interview and that the student should take the opportunity to ask questions with regard to the Member-In-Discernment relationship and any other concerns relative to the student's particular situation. This applies at any time during the Member-In-Discernment journey.

VII. Member-In-Discernment Status Decision

- A. After the initial review, the psychological assessment, and reviewing all the material presented, the MIDWG may, according to the criteria on Section 2 pages 5-8, of the *Manual on the Ministry*, decide to recommend to The Committee on Church and Ministry that the student be granted Member-In-Discernment status. If the Committee on Church and Ministry approves this recommendation, it will interview the candidate, grant Member-In-Discernment status in the candidate's Association, assign a Member-In-Discernment advisor and enter into *The Covenant with a Member-In-Discernment*, Appendix F, for which the chair of The Committee on Church and Ministry will be responsible.

- B. The Committee on Church and Ministry will present the student at an Association Annual Meeting as a student received as a Member-In-Discernment.
- C. If the MIDWG decides not to make the recommendation to The Committee on Church and Ministry, the person seeking Member-In-Discernment status will be informed and invited to discuss the MIDWG's concerns. The student may choose to address the concerns the MIDWG has outlined and may later reapply for Member-In-Discernment status. If the MIDWG decides not to recommend the student after further conversation the student has the right to appeal the MIDWG's decision to the Committee on Church and Ministry within 90 days of being informed by the MIDWG of the denial for recommendation.
- D. If Member-In-Discernment status is denied by the Committee on Church and Ministry, they will discuss with the student its reasons for denial. The student may choose to work on the problem areas the Committee on Church and Ministry has outlined and may later reapply to the Committee on Church and Ministry for Member-In-Discernment status.

VIII. Psychological Assessment

Following the initial interview with the MIDWG and if the MIDWG agrees to continue the process towards granting Member-In-Discernment status, the student is provided with the information needed to make arrangements for a psychological assessment by an examiner approved by the Committee on Church and Ministry.

The results of the psychological assessment are confidential and are sent directly to the MIDWG. Upon completion of its deliberation, the MIDWG chairperson will place this data in the student's personal file.

A copy of the psychological assessment will be available to the student, which she or he is encouraged to later share with her or his advisor.

The cost of the assessment will be shared by the student, the local church, and the student's Association. The exact amounts will be set by the Committee on Church and Ministry.

IX. Annual Reviews

- A. Annual Reviews are held with the MIDWG for the purpose of evaluating the past year and looking ahead to the next year of the Member-In-Discernment's journey. The Annual Review also seeks to maintain the covenantal relationship with the student and explores ways to improve the supportive relationship between the MIDWG and the student.
- B. Dates for each Annual Review will be determined by the MIDWG in consultation with the student.
- C. The pastor and/or a member of the student's local church and the student's Member-In-Discernment Advisor are expected to participate in each Annual Review. The Annual Review is expected to be face-to-face. If this is not possible, it is the student's responsibility to notify the chair of the MIDWG to consider other possibilities.

- D. Annual Reviews with the student and MIDWG consist of four parts:
1. Seminary transcripts, evaluations and reviews.
 2. Oral, face-to-face interview.
 3. Written responses to the questions given for each Annual Review.
 4. The *Annual Review Preparation Sheet*, Appendix E, filled out by the student and his or her Advisor.
- E. Students are asked to forward to the chairperson of the MIDWG, at least four weeks prior to each Annual Review, all grades, transcripts, field education evaluations, CPE evaluations, and any review processes initiated by the seminary or school in any area and the student's written response to the Annual Review questions, using the *Authorization & Release Form*, Appendix D, when necessary.
- Each student is asked to provide written reflections annually as outlined in the directions of each Annual Review. These reflections are to cover the subject adequately in as concise a form as possible.
- F. Several questions will be given to the student to respond to orally during each Annual Review. They may include any or all of the following:
1. What is the nature of your involvement in the life of the Church at the local, Association and Conference levels?
 2. What part of your academic program do you most value and what part do you least value?
 3. What is your understanding of the ordination requirements or authorization in a recognized ministry, and what progress do you see yourself making toward meeting them?
 4. Describe a time when your relationship with God changed or deepened this year.
 5. Name a person who has made an impact on your spiritual life and describe that impact.
 6. How do you experience the influence of Jesus in your life?
 7. What is it that inhibits you from living out your faith?
 9. What do you do to take care of your physical well-being.

G. First Year Annual Review Questions.

1. Reflect upon this past year's seminary experience in terms of expectations met and/or surpassed, disappointments and overall impressions.
2. In the midst of all the pressures of going to school, be specific about how you have been able to attend to your spiritual journey.
3. Share any significant developments in your thinking in matters of faith, style of ministry and ordination or authorization plans.
4. Name at least one area in which you see the church needing to give attention to as it moves into the next decade.
5. How are you meeting the guidelines for theological education of your seminary and/or those suggested by your Member-In-Discernment Advisor?
6. Are there physical or emotional health issues that you want to share with the MIDWG?

H. Second Year Annual Review Questions.

1. Describe a difficult real-life situation you encountered this past year. Describe the theological/spiritual concepts which apply in this situation.
2. Reflect upon this past year's seminary experience in terms of expectations met and/or surpassed, disappointments and overall impressions.
3. Describe how you make moral decisions for yourself. Demonstrate how you deal with a congregation when your decisions run contrary to the norms of the majority of the congregation using one of the issues listed or another of your choice.

abortion	AIDS	child custody
divorce	gambling	inclusive language
social justice	sexual orientation	denominational loyalty
racial issues	peace/war	women in ministry
politics	church vs. state	

4. What do you see as your special personal qualities? What will you uniquely bring to the Church that is needed?
5. How are you meeting the guidelines for theological education of your seminary and/or those suggested by your Member-In-Discernment Advisor?
6. Are there physical or emotional health issues that you want to share with the MIDWG?

I. Third and subsequent year Annual Review questions.

Questions will be developed each additional year and given to the student four weeks prior to their due date.

J. Following each Annual Review:

1. One copy of all materials is placed in the student's permanent file.
2. A vote is taken by the MIDWG to recommend to the Committee on Church and Ministry to either renew or terminate the student's Member-In-Discernment status.
3. If the MIDWG votes to recommend to terminate Member-In-Discernment status based on failure to adequately fulfill the requirements the student will be informed and invited to discuss the MIDWG's reasons. The student has the right to appeal the MIDWG's decision to the Committee on Church and Ministry within 90 days of being informed by the MIDWG of the recommendation to terminate his or her Member-In-Discernment status.
4. If Member-In-Discernment status is denied by the Committee on Church and Ministry, they will discuss with the student its reasons for denial of renewal of the student's Member-In-Discernment status. The student has the right to appeal this decision to the Executive Committee of the Association within ninety days.
5. Following a vote to renew Member-In-Discernment status, the student will be notified in writing.

X. Final Year Review

The Final Year Review between the student and the MIDWG is to be held at least two months prior to the ordination interview before the Committee on Church and Ministry or the final interview leading to the authorization of another recognized ministry of the United Church of Christ before the Committee on Church and Ministry. All materials for this Final Year Review are to be forwarded to the chair of the MIDWG or other designated person one month prior to the date of the Final Year Review.

Materials required for the Final Year Review are:

- A. The student's most recent seminary transcripts and copy of M.Div. diploma if already graduated.
- B. A final copy of the student's ordination paper, prepared in consultation with the student's advisor. In addition, a student may consult with his or her home pastor and/or seminary advisor. The MIDWG will review the paper with the student recommending any alterations deemed important prior to presenting the paper to the Committee on Church and Ministry for examination.
- C. A written reflection on what features of the current polity, program, or theological posture of the United Church of Christ the student will work hardest to support or change during his or her ministry and why. What is the theological basis for such support or change?
- D. One sermon manuscript.

- E. One video tape or DVD of a sermon.
- F. The *Annual Review Preparation Sheet*, Appendix E, filled out by the student and his or her advisor.
- G. A written letter from the local congregation requesting that the student's Association examine the student for ordination.

XI. Ordination Paper

All ordination papers will follow one of the three suggested outlines listed in Appendix F. We recommend that the paper not exceed 20 pages. We require the paper to be double-spaced, with one inch margins, using a 12 point font.

XII. Final Year Review Decision

Following the Final Year Review, the MIDWG will decide whether or not to recommend the student to the Committee on Church and Ministry for an Ordination Interview.

- A. If the decision is affirmative, the chair of the MIDWG will notify the chair of the Committee on Church and Ministry of the need of an Ordination Interview, and a written report will be prepared and presented to the full Church and Ministry Committee outlining the basis for the recommendation and the MIDWG's experience with this student. The chair of the MIDWG shall be responsible to see that the student's complete file, including all required documents, assessments, reviews and required evaluations, is given to the Chair of the Committee on Church and Ministry, along with the written report.
- B. If the MIDWG decides to deny recommendation or postpone it, the student will be informed in writing and invited to continue conversation with the MIDWG concerning what, if any, work still needs to be accomplished before a favorable recommendation can be made. The student has the right to appeal the MIDWG's decision to the Committee on Church and Ministry within 90 days of being informed by the MIDWG of the denial for recommendation.

XIII. Member-In-Discernment Advisor

- A. Upon approval of the student for Member-In-Discernment status, the Committee on Church and Ministry assigns a Member-In-Discernment Advisor who is responsible for maintaining standards for the preparation for ordained ministry and will act as a role model. The advisor is expected to incorporate issues and concerns of spiritual life into the advisor's relationship with the student.
- B. The advisor usually is an ordained, licensed, or commissioned minister in good standing with the student's Association of the United Church of Christ. On occasion, the Committee on Church and Ministry may assign a student to an ordained, licensed, or commissioned United Church of Christ minister not of the student's Association, or to a qualified lay person.

- C. The Advisor will assist the student in the following ways.
1. Be familiar with the Member-In-Discernment process outlined in the *Manual on Ministry*, Section 2, and this Member-In-Discernment Manual. The advisor will see that all guidelines in these pages are followed as they represent the procedures for the student's Association of the United Church of Christ.
 2. Hold an initial meeting with the Member-In-Discernment student soon after she or he has been assigned. Review the expectations, requirements and procedures of the Member-In-Discernment relationship as outlined in this manual, and develop an understanding of how the advisor and the student will relate and work together.
 3. Ensure that the student has a copy of this Member-In-Discernment Manual and has obtained a copy of the *Manual on Ministry* of the United Church of Christ.
 4. Inform the MIDWG and the Western Region Office if your student is not receiving appropriate mailings from the local church, Association, Conference, and the national agencies of the United Church of Christ, e.g., newsletters, annual meeting materials, and mailings to clergy.
 5. Ensure that the student maintains active participation in the life of a local church and, if that is not his or her home church, that contact be maintained with the student's home church as well.
 6. Encourage the student to take an active part in Association, Conference, and National Church activities.
 7. Encourage quarterly contact and work with the student annually to complete the *Annual Review Preparation Sheet*, Appendix D.
 8. Be prepared and attend all the Annual Reviews of the student and attend her or his Final Year Review.
 9. Provide environment and opportunity for the student to raise and explore questions about faith, the church, and the Christian ministry throughout the year.
 10. Advise the student regarding the preparation of the required materials to be provided to the MIDWG and the Committee on Church and Ministry, particularly those to be provided for use during the ordination examination. The advisor is requested to work with the student to prepare a final ordination paper prior to submission to the MIDWG Final Year Review.
 11. Accompany the student to the Ordination Interview with the Committee on Church and Ministry and will be free to participate.
 12. Provide written references when appropriate on behalf of the student when requested.
 13. Assist the student and the Committee on Church and Ministry in preparation for an Ecclesiastical Council.
 14. Provide assistance to the student and the student's Association in planning an ordination service.

XIV. Reassigning or Changing Advisors

- A. When an advisor leaves the student's Association of the United Church of Christ, or finds that his or her situation has changed, any students which he or she is currently advising may be reassigned at the Committee on Church and Ministry's discretion. If students are reassigned, all important records, transcripts, and evaluations will be returned by the advisor and placed in the students' files or destroyed.
- B. If a student desires a change of advisors after the first meeting, or at any other time during the Member-In-Discernment process, the student must:
 - 1. Meet again with his or her assigned advisor and discuss the reasons for the desired change of advisors. The student can, if the situation warrants it, speak with the Chair of the MIDWG first, especially around issues of advisor behavior.
 - 2. Following conversation with the advisor or the Chair of MIDWG, the request for a change of Advisor must be placed in writing and given to the MIDWG, through the Chair, for their consideration.
 - a. If the MIDWG agrees with the student's request for a change of advisor, then the MIDWG will make a recommendation to the Committee on Church and Ministry that a new Advisor be assigned.
 - b. If the MIDWG does not agree with the student's request for a change of advisor, the student may appeal this decision with the Committee on Church and Ministry.

XV. The Committee on Church and Ministry

- A. Relationship.

The Committee on Church and Ministry is the authoritative body that makes the final decisions concerning Member-In-Discernment status, licensing, and commissioning. They also make the final recommendation to the Ecclesiastical Councils of their respective Associations concerning candidates for ordination. They rely on the MIDWG to be in close relationship with each Member-In-Discernment student and upon the MIDWG's recommendations. Students seeking Member-In-Discernment status, ordination, licensing, and commissioning will be required to meet with the Committee on Church and Ministry at specific times during their process.

- B. Initial Interviews.

- 1. Students seeking Member-In-Discernment status will be required to meet with the Committee on Church and Ministry following the MIDWG's favorable recommendation. Following this interview, the Committee on Church and Ministry will vote to either grant the student Member-In-Discernment status in the student's Association or deny the request for Member-In-Discernment status. If Member-In-Discernment status is denied, the Committee on Church and Ministry will discuss with the student its reasons for the denial. The student may then choose to work on

the problem areas the Committee on Church and Ministry has outlined and may later reapply to the Committee on Church and Ministry for reconsideration.

2. Those seeking licensing and commissioning will meet with the MIDWG to design a process which will be presented to the Committee on Church and Ministry for their approval.

XVI. Ordination Interview

The final interview before a student is granted authorization for an Ecclesiastical Council is the Ordination Interview. This interview is conducted following the Final Year Review with the MIDWG and with their recommendation, at a meeting of the Committee on Church and Ministry. The primary purpose of the Ordination Interview is to determine the student's readiness and fitness for Christian ministry in the United Church of Christ, and either grant their recommendation for an Ecclesiastical Council of the student's Association, or deny or postpone the recommendation.

A. Preparation for the Ordination Interview.

1. A candidate for ordination needs to have completed successfully the following before seeking the approval of the Committee on Church and Ministry for an Ordination Interview:
 - a. The requirements for an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university or its equivalent as determined by the Committee on Church and Ministry, together with an appropriate seminary degree relative to her or his particular area of ministry.
 - b. The student must have passed one basic unit of Clinical Pastoral Education that is accepted by the seminary from which the student has graduated and that is accepted by the Committee on Church and Ministry.
 - c. One school year of a field education program accepted by the Committee on Church and Ministry.
 - d. A Clergy Boundary Awareness Training workshop or seminar accepted by the Committee on Church and Ministry.
 - e. The student must have passed a United Church of Christ Polity class accepted by the Committee on Church and Ministry.
2. At least four (4) letters of reference, including one from the seminary, one from the student's Member-In-Discernment Advisor, and one from an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ.
3. At least one (1) videotape or DVD of a sermon recently delivered to a congregation, delivered to the Chair of the Committee on Church and Ministry sixty (60) days before the interview.
4. Sixty (60) days before the interview, the student is to submit twenty (20) copies of his or her ordination paper, as approved by the MIDWG.

- B. Four areas of dialogue may occur at the Ordination Interview.
 1. The student's personal faith and her or his journey to this day.
 2. The student's theological knowledge and perspective on:
 - a. The Bible.
 - b. Theology.
 - c. Pastoral Care.
 - d. Ecumenism.
 - e. Worship and Sacraments.
 - f. Christian Education.
 - g. Stewardship.
 - h. Ministerial Ethics.
 - i. Mission.
 3. The student's knowledge of the history and polity of the United Church of Christ.
 4. The candidate's ability to articulate thoughts and feelings meaningfully and to be authentic to one's personhood.

- B. The Member-In-Discernment Advisor will accompany the student to the interview and will be free to participate.

XVII. Ordination Status Decision

Upon completion of the Ordination Interview, a vote is taken by the Committee on Church and Ministry granting or denying approval for an Ecclesiastical Council.

- A. If there is a negative vote by the Committee on Church and Ministry, the student is brought back into the Committee meeting where concerns are expressed.
 1. The Committee on Church and Ministry may decide that there are areas the student needs to work on before a recommendation can be made, such as a rewrite of the ordination paper. The student may then choose to work on the areas of concern the Committee on Church and Ministry has outlined and return for further examination or the student may terminate his or her Member-In-Discernment status.
 2. The Committee on Church and Ministry may decide that their decision to deny a recommendation is final. In this case the Member-In-Discernment status is terminated with regret.

- B. If the vote is favorable, the candidate is recommended for an Ecclesiastical Council of the student's Association and is authorized to circulate her or his profile.

XVIII. Ecclesiastical Council

- A. After the student passes the Ordination Interview, The Committee on Church and Ministry and the student set the date and time for the Ecclesiastical Council. Usually the Ecclesiastical Council is held at the student's sponsoring church.

- B. The chair of The Committee on Church and Ministry contacts the Scribe of the Association, who sends out the missive and one copy of the ordination paper to each church in the Association. This process may differ from Association to the next.

- C. The Ecclesiastical Council is held in accordance with the by-laws of the council's Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ.
- D. If the vote of the Ecclesiastical Council is in the affirmative, and the candidate already has a call, the ordination date may then be set by the chair of The Committee on Church and Ministry in conjunction with the student and the sponsoring church. If the candidate does not have a call, then "ordination pending ordainable call" status may be granted.

XIX. Ordination Service Process

- A. When the student receives a call, the ordination date is set by the chair of The Committee on Church and Ministry in conjunction with the ordinand and the sponsoring church.
- B. Coordination of the event, the order, liturgy and the covenant for the service is handled by the ordinand, the Member-In-Discernment Advisor, The Committee on Church and Ministry and the local church.
- C. The ordination liturgy is found in the United Church of Christ Book of Worship. The ordinand might look at sample ordination bulletins for ideas.
- D. Notifying Association churches through a letter missive or other means done in accordance with each member Associations procedures. Questions concerning this should be addressed to the chair of the appropriate Committee on Church and Ministry.

Appendix A

Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ Revised April 2009



Spiritual Foundation for Ministry

1. A lived faith showing love of God, trust in Jesus, and openness to the Holy Spirit.
2. Devotion to the word of God as revealed through scripture and Christian traditions.
3. Commitment to life-long spiritual growth and practice, individually and in community.
4. A sense of being called by God and the community to authorized ministry in the church.
5. Openness to continuing discernment of one's call in community.

UCC Identity For Ministry

1. Acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as sole Head of the Church.
2. A passion for the oneness of the body of Christ as expressed through commitment to ecumenism, justice, and the full embrace of all persons in the radical hospitality of God.
3. Active membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ.
4. An understanding of the concept of covenant and how it informs the nature, purpose, and polity of the United Church of Christ.
5. A willingness to live in the covenants of mutual accountability that characterize authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ.
6. Ongoing demonstration of commitment to the United Church of Christ.
7. Stewardship of resources, including financial support of the church in all of its settings.
8. Participation in the various settings of the United Church of Christ, including the conference/association and local church.

The ability:

9. to articulate diverse histories that comprise the United Church of Christ, to situate them in the broader evolution of faith traditions and to relate them to the theology, polity, and practices of the Member's local church, association, and conference.
10. to explain and work within the current polity of the UCC and its denominational structure, and to describe the covenantal relationships among the General Synod, national setting, conferences, associations, and local congregations of the UCC.

11. to share key elements of the UCC's statement of faith, constitution with its preamble, and bylaws regarding the governance, mission, and theologies of the UCC and their implications for the life of the church.

12. to articulate the UCC's commitment to being a united and uniting, multiracial and multicultural, open and affirming, accessible to all and just peace church.

13. to envision how the UCC in its various settings may respond to religious, social, economic, and political trends, changing demographics, and other emerging factors.

14. to use and promote the informational and educational resources available through UCC publications and websites.

Personal and Professional Formation for Ministry

1. A healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and personal experience.

2. A sense of theological identity and authority, while being responsive to the opinions and values of others, including those whom the Member will serve.

3. A healthy awareness of strengths, weaknesses and limits, and assumption of responsibility for one's body, mind and spirit.

4. Knowledge and observance of personal and professional boundaries in interpersonal, congregational, and community settings.

5. A commitment to continuing education, professional development, and life-long learning.

6. Demonstrated moral maturity, including integrity in personal and public life and responsibility to self, family, church, and community.

The ability:

7. to affirm the identities of others, including others very unlike oneself.

8. to engage in self-reflection and to seek and use feedback from others appropriately.

9. to engage productively in public discourse, expecting to grow and be transformed through the exchange of viewpoints.

10. to take initiative in leadership, and to frame and test a vision in community.

11. to listen empathically, communicate appropriately, and keep appropriate confidences.

12. to function as part of a team, to give and receive supervision, and to mutually equip and motivate the community of faith.

13. to be resourceful and adaptable, and know where to locate additional resources and seek consultation when needed.

14. to accept and promote diversity, to inspire others to do so, and to minister in a multicultural and multiracial, open and affirming, just peace, accessible to all, united and uniting church.

Knowledge and Skills for Ministry

General Knowledge and Skills

The Ability:

1. to understand and appreciate a variety of perspectives of life.
2. to understand the profound differences that physical, psychological, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, class, cultural, religious, racial, and ethnic factors make in the ways that human beings experience the world.
3. to comprehend the impact of historical change upon the thoughts, feelings, and actions of individuals and societies.
4. to perceive how a person's perspectives and interests shape communication, and to appreciate the virtues and limitations of those perspectives and interests.
5. to grasp and evaluate the justifications that people give for their opinions.
6. to apply basic concepts of psychology to the understanding of oneself, others, and human interactions.
7. to appreciate the importance of symbols and images in human culture(s).
8. to understand various meanings and purposes of the arts.
9. to analyze social, political, environmental, and economic dynamics, using the tools of the social and natural sciences.
10. to use respectfully and relationally a basic knowledge of specific human cultures.
11. to communicate clearly and effectively with appropriate media and technologies.

Knowledge and Skills Specific to Authorized Ministry

1. A thorough knowledge of, and personal engagement with, the Bible.
2. Skill with methods of biblical interpretation, including the historic interpretive traditions of the church and contemporary methods, particularly those from historically underrepresented communities.
3. A deepening familiarity with the global history of the Christian churches through the ages and across cultures, including the newest Christian populations, and an understanding of the evolution of Christian communities in the United States.
4. A deepening familiarity with contemporary theological ways of thinking and with the rich and varied theological heritages, creeds, liturgies, and spiritual practices of the Christian churches.
5. An understanding of other religions and their foundational documents.

The ability:

6. to articulate a theological understanding of authorized ministry, and to relate it to the practice of ministry.
7. to analyze, evaluate, and integrate the biblical, historical, theological, and pastoral disciplines and practices in ways that contribute to fruitful and faithful Christian ministry.
8. to understand the nature, use, and misuse of power and authority, and to exercise them appropriately and effectively in authorized ministry.
9. to engage in community leadership that is collaborative and transformative.
10. to engage in respectful ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.
11. to celebrate the unique features of local faith communities while encouraging them to be receptive to perspectives from the broader church and world.
12. to appreciate, practice, and pass on traditions of faith while interpreting them in light of the context of a diverse and changing world.
13. to adapt the practices of ministry to the unique social, cultural, environmental and ecclesiastical aspects of particular settings.
14. to discern God's mission in the world and, in response, to lead ministries of compassion, nurture, justice, and proclamation that support fullness of life for all people.
15. to preach the good news, lead worship and participate in the sacraments in a manner faithful to the broader Christian heritage and appropriate to the characteristics of a specific culture and setting.
16. to provide effective and appropriate pastoral care and Christian education, and to equip and motivate others to share in these ministries.
17. to organize and implement programs, administer the operations of a complex organization, and initiate change when appropriate.
18. to read the contexts of a community's ministry and creatively lead that community through change or conflict.
19. to lead and encourage ministries of evangelism, service, stewardship and social transformation.
20. to understand and participate in the financial administration of the church and other religious organizations.

Appendix B

Application for Member-In-Discernment The Western Region of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ



We, _____
(Name of Church)

(Address and Phone of Church) Telephone _____

Email _____

request that _____
(Name of Student being Sponsored)
of _____ Telephone _____
(Address and Phone of Student) _____
_____ Email _____

be accepted as a Member-In-Discernment of the _____ Association
of the United Church of Christ.

At an official meeting of the _____
(Name of Board, Council, or the Congregation)

on _____, 20__, it was voted to inform the _____ Association Committee
on Church and Ministry of our desire that

_____, a member of this church, be examined, and if found
(Name of Student)

Fit be recommended to the _____ Association of the United Church of Christ
for reception into Member-In-Discernment status.

Signed _____ Date _____
(For the Local Church)

(Printed Name)

(Official Position)

Action by the _____ Association Committee on Church and Ministry:

Hearing: _____, 20____
Voted: _____
Advisor: _____

Appendix C
Questionnaire
For Those Seeking to Become a Member-In-Discernment



On behalf of _____, who has given your name as an evaluator, please return this questionnaire to Chair of the Western Region Member-In-Discernment Working Group. This evaluation is intended to assist the process of selection and preparation of candidates for ministry in the United Church of Christ. As best you can, please rate this person on the following characteristics. Please circle the number you think fits best using the following criteria:

X = you are unable to rate because of insufficient data on this trait.
 1 = POOR
 2 = FAIR
 3 = AVERAGE
 4 = EXCELLENT
 5 = SUPERIOR

In addition, your comments will help. If your anecdotes or comments exceed the space provided, please attach an additional page.

RATING **TRAIT**

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Academic Potential**
 Intellectual alertness, curiosity and ability, openness of mind, and likes to learn.
Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Communication Skills**
 Capacity to clearly express oneself verbally and in writing.
Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Psychological Stability**
 Does this person establish and maintain harmonious interpersonal relationships with others; cope well with stressful situations, and display adequate emotional control?
Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Leadership Ability**
The capacity and confidence to lead.

Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Sensitivity to and Awareness of Needs and Motives of Others**
Does this person care about and consider others feelings? Does the person attempt to understand why people behave as they do? Is he or she concerned about social issues?

Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Resourcefulness and Capacity to Assume Responsibility**
Does this person deal effectively and creatively with problems? Can he or she be counted on to fulfill responsibilities?

Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Physical Health**
Is this person well energetic, possessed of physical vigor?

Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Interpersonal Relationships**
Can this person relate intimately to others socially, spiritually, and emotionally?
Does he or she elicit trust from others?

Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 **Breadth of Interest**
Does this person have varied interests, hobbies, leisure, and creative pursuits?

Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 Ability to Articulate and Share His or Her Spiritual Journey
Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 Awareness of Physical, Emotional, and Spiritual Needs
Comments or Anecdotes:

X 1 2 3 4 5 How Would You Rate this Person's Overall Potential for
Ministry in the United Church of Christ?
Comments or Anecdotes:

What are the first words which come to mind to describe this person?

To the best of your knowledge, has she or he experienced any current crises or problems (vocational, financial, marital, familial, etc.)?

Please give any additional perceptions which might be relevant (work experience, health record, personal lifestyle, etc.) on an additional page.

Evaluator's Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

How long have you known this person and in what capacity?

Please check the appropriate statement:

- Please keep this strictly confidential and do not share my perceptions with the candidate.**
- You may share my perceptions with the candidate if appropriate.**

This information is for the exclusive use of the Committee on Church and Ministry and the Member-In-Discernment Working Group of the Western Region of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Appendix D

Western Region of the Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ



Authorization & Release Form

I, _____, hereby authorize
(Name of Student)

_____ to release the
(Evaluation Person, Program, School)

either written or oral of my performance (academic transcripts and reviews, field education evaluations, spiritual development reviews, psychological assessments, Clinical Pastoral Education evaluations) to the _____ Association United Church of Christ.

I acknowledge that this evaluation will provide the _____ Association United Church of Christ with insights into my fitness for ordained or otherwise authorized ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

I authorize the release of this evaluation to the _____ Association United Church of Christ, its staff, officers, committee members, attorneys, and consultants. I further authorize the evaluator(s) to answer questions, give opinions, and provide further information related to this evaluation to the _____ Association United Church of Christ, its staff, officers, committee members, attorneys, and consultants, to share this evaluation with ecclesiastical officers of other associations or denominations, where I may apply for employment, standing, or authorized minister status.

I release, indemnify, and agree to hold harmless the _____ Association United Church of Christ, its staff, officers, committee members, attorneys, and consultants from any action of cause of action arising from any action taken under the above authorization, or from any use of the evaluation and further information in reviewing my fitness for ordained ministry, or from the dissemination of the evaluation or further information to or among the persons authorized, or from the unintentional dissemination of the evaluations or further information to other persons.

Any documents provided to the _____ Association United Church of Christ in accordance with the Authorization & Release shall become its sole property and may be retained by the Association, notwithstanding any subsequent withdrawal of my application for, or resignation from, authorized ministry status. This Authorization & Release may not be rescinded or modified, except with the express written agreement of the _____ Association United Church of Christ

Executed as a sealed instrument.

(Signature of Student)

(Date)

Appendix E

Western Region Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ



Annual Review Preparation Sheet

Member-In-Discernment and Member-In-Discernment Advisor Form:
to be filled out together prior to a student's annual review with the Western Region MIDWG

Student's Name: _____

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Date: _____

Is the student knowledgeable and familiar with current Member-In-Discernment process and requirements?

What year and semester is the student currently in?

Is the student on track (in your judgment) in meeting seminary and/or Association required educational standing? Please explain.

If no, please list areas of suspected or acknowledged deficiency.

- Biblical Exegesis
- Old Testament
- New Testament
- Systematic Theology
- Ethics
- Liturgies
- Church History
- History and Polity of the United Church of Christ
- Attention to Spiritual Direction
- Christian Education
- Personal Fitness for Ministry
- Other

Please also refer to the student's progress in courses.

Any deficiencies? _____

How does the student rate overall in academic experience to date?

Excellent Good Fair Poor

Are there any concerns that should be raised at the student's yearly interview?

Are there physical or emotional health issues that should be raised?

How do you experience the student in his/her spiritual development?

Is the student accepting of you as Advisor?

Is student accepting of relationship to his or her Association?

Other comments or concerns?

Please give this form to the Chair of the Member-In-Discernment Working Group Chairperson after completion.

Appendix F

Western Region Massachusetts Conference United Church of Christ



Recommended Ordination Paper Outlines

The following three outlines for ordination papers are accepted by the Committees on Church and Ministry of four Associations of the Western Region. Any other outlines must be approved by the Church and Ministry Committee upon recommendation of the Member-In-Discernment Working Group before writing the paper.

Outline I

Based on the *Manual on Ministry*, Section 3 pages 3-6

- I. Theological Perspectives
 - A. What is your understanding of the historic Christian faith?
 - B. What is your own theological perspective? Refer to the UCC Statement of Faith and paragraph two of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

- II. The United Church of Christ
 - A. How do you understand the historical and theological roots of the United Church of Christ?
 - B. How would you explain the polity and practice of the United Church of Christ? (Please address the issues of covenant, unity, autonomy, etc., and discuss paragraphs 3, 7, 14, 15, and 16 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.)

- III. Ministry and Pilgrimage
 - A. How would you relate the previously discussed issues to your own faith pilgrimage?
 1. What is your understanding of call, ordination, church, mission, and ministry?
 2. What is the challenge and vision of your own ministry?
 3. How do you see your gifts fitting into your call?
 4. What is the meaning of ordination in the United Church of Christ?
 - B. How do you understand your commitment to the United Church of Christ and the ecumenical church?
 - C. What aspects of the history, polity, and practice of the United Church of Christ are most valued by you?

Outline II

Based on the United Church of Christ *The Book of Worship*, pages 407-408

- I. Are you persuaded that God has called you to be ordained a minister in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are you ready to enter this ministry and faithfully serve in it?
 - A. Briefly relate a summary of your faith journey and your call to the Christian Ministry in the United Church of Christ.
 - B. Within the context of the universal ministry of God's people, why have you chosen to seek ordination, and what particular gifts do you bring to this ministry?

- II. Do you, with the Church throughout the world, hear the Word of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and do you accept it as the rule of Christian faith and practice?
 - A. How do you understand the nature of the Word of God as it is revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments?
 - B. What does it mean to accept this Word as the rule of Christian faith and practice?

- III. Do you promise to be diligent in your private prayers and reading of the scriptures, as well as in the public duties of your office?
 - A. How do you practice your devotional life and what is the place of prayer in your life?
 - B. How do you intend to find rest and renewal in the context of the Biblical theme of Sabbath within the context of the "public duties of your office," and how do the present (or future) demands of family life (or of single life) fit within the context of those duties?

- IV. Will you be zealous in maintaining both the "truth of the gospel" and "the peace of the Church," speaking the truth in love?
 - A. Concerning the "truth of the gospel," what is your understanding of the doctrine of salvation: the person of Christ, the incarnation, the Cross and Resurrection, sin, repentance, forgiveness judgment, grace, and eschatology?
 - B. Concerning the "peace of the Church," how would you deal with those conflict situations when you are called to speak the prophetic word of "truth in love," both in personal and social justice situations?

- V. Do you accept the "faith and order" of the United Church of Christ; and will you, as an ordained minister in this communion show compassionate affection toward all who are in Christ?
 - A. How do you understand the "faith and order" of the United Church of Christ, specifically concerning the Trinity, Baptism, Communion, Covenant, and the Statement of Faith?
 - B. What is your understanding of "The Church," local church, covenant, the wider church, and how does "The Church" relate to the world through evangelism, social action, and mission?

Outline III

- I. Statement of Christian Experience
 - A. Home and local church
 - B. Education
 - C. Call to the Ministry
- II. Statement of Christian Beliefs
 - A. God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit
 - 1. Creation and providence; judgment and grace
 - 2. Person of Christ; incarnation, atonement (problem of evil), salvation, resurrection
 - 3. Holy Spirit and the Holy Scriptures
 - B. Humanity
 - 1. Sin, Repentance, Forgiveness
 - 2. Prayer
 - 3. Eternal Life
 - C. The Church and the Kingdom
 - 1. Doctrine of history and the second coming
 - 2. Church and the world (including evangelism, social action, and mission)
 - 3. My denomination and the Church
 - 4. Baptism and the Lord's Supper
 - 5. The ministry (lay and ordained)
- III. Summary and Conclusion: Including "Why I desire ordination in the United Church of Christ"

Appendix G

A Covenant Between a Member-In-Discernment and the Member-In Discernments Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ



Preamble

A covenant is "an intentional agreement made between or among parties in the name of God. (It) has both horizontal and vertical dimensions and is not accidental, but deliberate."³

Recognizing that carrying out the Covenant of Ministry in the United Church of Christ is both delicate and demanding, calling us to live by relationship with God and each other and not by rules - by grace more than law - still the _____ Association Committee on Church and Ministry feels the need for minimum guidelines for candidates for ministry. These minimal guidelines follow.

The Covenant

The _____ Association of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ has accepted _____ into the Member-In-Discernment relationship. If the Member-In-Discernment process leads to a request for ordination, a minimum of two years under guidance and care of the Committee on Church and Ministry and its qualified advisors will be required prior to ordination.

Part 1

The _____ Association covenants:

1. To provide an advisor to guide the candidate toward a vocational understanding consistent with the faith and mission of the United Church of Christ.
2. To provide financial assistance (within the limits of available Association funds) in support of seminary preparation for ministry.
3. To provide advice and counsel regarding the skills and gifts required for the practice of ministry.
4. To provide the opportunity for assessment of personal and psychological gifts (as indicated in the *Manual of Ministry*, Section 2 pages 5-6), sharing the costs for the same with the Member-In-Discernment and with the local church sponsoring Member-In-Discernment student.
5. To review and consider annual renewal of the Member-In-Discernment relationship.

³ "Covenant" definition by Elizabeth Nordbeck, Dean of the Faculty and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Andover Newton Theological School.

Part 2

_____ (Name of Student), as a candidate preparing for ministry in the United Church of Christ, agrees to follow the guidelines for the Member-In-Discernment process, to accept the fellowship, counsel, evaluations, support and guidance of the Association and its Committee on Church and Ministry, and covenants:

1. To meet with the appointed advisor to share academic progress and faith, vocational and personal development.
2. To complete an assessment of personal and psychological fitness for ministry administered by a professional chosen by the Church and Ministry Committee.
3. To worship regularly according to the faith and order of the United Church of Christ, and to participate in the life and work of a local UCC church, an Association and the Conference.
4. To offer the MIDWG evidence of developing skills for ministry and continuing growth in faith.
5. To meet with the MIDWG at least once annually for a review of the Member-In-Discernment relationship and process.

Part 3

The sponsoring congregation, _____, covenants:

1. To support and hold in prayer the student, as he or she continues the journey of ministerial preparation.
2. To share in the fees for the required assessment of personal and psychological fitness for ministry.
3. To meet periodically with the candidate to share gifts and experiences which might be mutually beneficial.
4. To consider financial assistance to the candidate toward meeting the high cost of seminary education.
5. To remain faithful to the processes for a sponsoring congregation as described in the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry*.

So Signed:

(Member-In-Discernment)

(Chair, Committee on Church & Ministry)

(Member-In-Discernment Advisor)

(Chair, MIDWG)

(Sponsoring Church Representative)

(Date)

One (1) Copy each for:

- The Western Region MIDWG
- The Member-In-Discernment
- The assigned advisor
- The Committee on Church and Ministry
- The United Church of Christ Area Minister
- The Local Sponsoring Church

Appendix H

Pre- Ordination Agreement The Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ



I have read the information regarding the Annuity Plan-United Church of Christ, UCC Medical and Dental Benefits Plans, UCC Life Insurance and Disability Income Plan, Social Security and Worker's Compensation.

I understand that it is my responsibility to contact the appropriate agencies and make arrangements for applying or opting out of membership in the above programs within the timelines stated for each.

Ordinand

Date

Church & Ministry Representative

Date

Area Conference Minister

Date

NOTE: *1 copy is retained by the Ordinand*
 1 copy is kept in the Regional Office

02-12-BD-17
PRE-ORDINATION AGREEMENT

You are eligible for the following benefits when you are employed by a UCC church or UCC-related entity. This document: (1) serves as a reminder of those benefits and (2) provides them to you in writing. To receive applications or additional information on any UCC plan, contact:

The Pension Boards – UCC
475 Riverside Drive
New York, NY 10115

(212) 729-2700
(800) 642-6543
www.pbucc.org

I. THE ANNUITY PLAN – UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

As a member of this national plan, it is recommended that your employer contribute a minimum of 14% of 130% of your cash salary if you live in a parsonage – or 14% of cash salary plus housing allowance – as annuity dues toward your account in a fund invested in accordance with your directions by the Pension Boards. At the time of retirement (age 55 or later), you receive a monthly benefit for your lifetime based upon the value of your account and a number of other factors, such as your age and the benefit option you select. If you leave ministry or choose to stop contributing to the Annuity Plan, the amount in your account remains vested and will provide a benefit to you on a monthly basis at the time of retirement. At retirement, you may elect to receive up to 20% of the account in a lump sum, but you must convert to an annuity at least 80% of the employer contributions (including earnings) to your account. You may also make tax-sheltered contributions from your salary to your account. Tax-sheltered contributions are always fully vested, may be withdrawn if you leave church employment, and are not required to be annuitized at retirement.

You can enroll as a lay person in this plan prior to ordination if you are employed in a UCC church or entity – then change your status in the plan to “clergy” following ordination. While there is no deadline for joining this UCC plan, it is advisable to become a part of it as early in your career as possible in order to realize the greatest benefits at the time of retirement.

Seniors in seminary who are in-care or licensed by a UCC Conference or Association should apply for a Herring and Stark Memorial Fund grant. These are grants that help to fund your annuity account. If you become ordained within 5 years of the grant, receive standing as a UCC minister and have contributions made to the Annuity Plan at the 14% level for at least two years, the Herring and Stark grant will remain in your pension account and contribute to your income in retirement.

The Annuity Plan - UCC has an excellent record of investment growth and clergy members receive special tax benefits after retirement. Some of the cost of managing the Annuity Fund is borne by endowment income.

II. UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST MEDICAL AND DENTAL BENEFITS PLANS

These national plans allow clergy to enroll without a physical exam or other proof of good health within a period of 90 days of initial eligibility (usually the first full-time (20 hours/week or more) employment by a UCC entity). After that 90-day period, enrollment in the Medical Plan will depend upon evidence of good health by the member and each eligible dependent. Subsequent enrollment in the Dental Plan can only occur during an open enrollment conducted periodically by the Pension Boards.

It is not necessary to belong to the Annuity Plan-United Church of Christ to participate in the UCC Medical Plan, nor is it necessary to participate in the Medical Plan in order to participate in the Dental Plan. They are “stand-alone” plans.

Clergy who elect to have the United Church of Christ Medical and Dental Benefits coverages may at any time leave the programs to be covered by another major carrier or Health Maintenance Organization (HMO), but re-admission into the UCC Medical Plan at a future date will only be allowed if the applicant and dependents provide proof of good health satisfactory to the underwriter employed to make such determinations. In these cases, enrollment in the UCC Dental Plan must await an open enrollment period.

While some other programs – especially HMOs – may offer health services for a lower premium, it should be remembered that if you belong to an HMO and move to another area or state, you may not be able to join either the UCC Plan or another HMO if you have a pre-existing medical condition, whereas if you belong to the UCC plan, you coverage will be transferred to a new place of employment.

III. FLEXIBLE BENEFIT PLAN FOR UCC MINISTRIES

This plan, commonly known as a “Flexible Savings Account” plan, allows members to pay for eligible medical and dependent care expenses on a pre-tax basis. Before each calendar year, members elect how much they want to contribute to the medical account and the dependent care account. These contributions are deducted throughout the year from their paycheck and taxes are not withheld and are not payable on these amounts. Members then submit claims for reimbursement of eligible claims directly to the plan administrator.

Individual churches and UCC-related entities must pay a one-time administrative fee of \$100 in order to participate in this plan. Members who do not participate in the UCC Medical Plan must pay a \$12 per month administrative fee. There is no administrative fee for members who participate in the UCC Medical Plan.

IV. UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST GROUP LIFE INSURANCE AND DISABILITY INCOME PLAN

The yearly contribution for this plan is 1¹/₂% of the salary basis (cash salary plus housing) used in the determination of the Annuity Plan dues. This plan includes short and long-term disability income and term life insurance components for the member and a small life insurance benefit for a spouse or same-gender domestic partner. There is a reduced life-time life insurance benefit for retirees at age 65 at no additional member cost. If the member becomes disabled before retirement, the plan provides, after a 30-day waiting period, that short-term disability benefits are payable weekly for 5 months, or the cessation of disability, if earlier. If the disability continues, long-term disability benefits are payable monthly until age 65, or cessation of disability, if earlier. While on long-term disability, the plan also makes annuity contributions at 7% of the pre-disability salary basis until retirement (usually age 65) and pays the medical and dental premiums if the member was a participant in the UCC plans. Contact the Pension Boards for more information because the terms of the plan control in all situations.

You can join this plan **within 90 days of initial eligibility (usually the first full-time employment (20 hours/week or more) by a UCC entity)** without a physical exam and proof of insurability. After that 90-day period, you may not be eligible for coverage if you have a pre-existing medical condition or if you are not insurable.

V. SOCIAL SECURITY

According to the Social Security Act, all ordained ministers are required to belong to the Social Security system and make regular contributions through the Internal Revenue Service. The only exception is that an ordained minister can apply to be exempted from Social Security on the grounds of being conscientiously opposed to the acceptance of public insurance – **“by filing for an exemption on or before the due date of the 2nd tax year for which you have had church related earnings.”** After that time, it is not possible to be exempted from the system or cease payments.

You should review your social security account every year to make sure you're being properly credited with your payments. The Social Security Administration will send you a statement of earnings and a benefit estimate each year, about 3 months before your birthday.

While some investors suggest that there are other ways to invest a sum equal to Social Security payments that would yield greater earnings, one should know that your participation in Social Security is assumed in the design of the Annuity Plan – UCC and other UCC benefit plans. The benefits provided by the Annuity Plan – UCC (where contributions were made at 14% of salary basis over a full career) **plus** Social Security are estimated to provide a retirement income that will be sufficient to maintain your standard of living in retirement. ***For further information about Social Security, contact the nearest Social Security Administration Office, listed in your phone book or their website at www.ssa.gov.***

VI. WORKER'S COMPENSATION

Each church should carry Worker's Compensation for all employees – full and part-time. As you begin to search for your first pastorate, please keep in mind that this insurance is carried by the church for its – and your – protection. Health insurance and the church's property/liability insurance will not cover any church employee who is injured on church property. A word to the wise – make sure any church to which you are called carries this insurance!

Member-In-Discernment Application
Checklist
Western Region
Massachusetts Conference
United Church of Christ



For those seeking to be a Member-In-Discernment status in
the Berkshire, Franklin Hampden or Hampshire Associations

Sponsorship By Local Church

- Meeting with local pastor.
- Meeting with Representative Committee.
- Documents necessary for local church approval from the local church council or Board of Deacons.
 - Statements of faith pilgrimage, biographical information, current understanding of call.
 - Documentation of formal education: High School diploma, all post High School transcripts and Graduate degrees.
 - Statement of current educational plans.
- Meeting with local church council or Board of Deacons, Pastor Representative Committee, and representative from the MIDWG.
- Meeting with local church council or Board of Deacons and Pastor for sponsorship. (May be held following meeting with representative from the MIDWG)
- Letter of sponsorship granted from local church council or Board of Deacons. (Appendix B of Member-In-Discernment Manual)

Initial Interview By The Member-In-Discernment Working Group

This interview is to include the student, the local pastor, and one lay member of the local congregation.

Documents to be submitted to the Member-In-Discernment Working Group Chair before interview is scheduled:

- Application For Member-In-Discernment Status Form.* (Appendix B of Member-In-Discernment Manual)

- Letter of verification of membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ for at least one year. (From church clerk or pastor)
- Letter of sponsorship from local church council or Board of Deacons.
- Completion of the Questionnaire *for Those Seeking Member-In-Discernment Status* by three people, one of whom is your pastor. (Appendix C of Member-In-Discernment Manual)
- Documentation that you provided the local church. (See above listing under approval by local church)

Psychological Testing

After the initial interview, if the Member-In-Discernment Working Group agrees to continue the process, the student is provided with the information needed to make arrangements for a psychological assessment by an examiner approved by the Committee on Church and Ministry.

- Fill out and submit to the examiner the *Authorization & Release Form*, Appendix D. A summary of the testing is then sent to the chair of the MIDWG.

Committee on Church and Ministry

Once the applicant's documentation is complete and initial interview with the Member-In-Discernment Working Group is accomplished, the applicant will be contacted by the Chair of the Committee on Church and Ministry to schedule an interview with them.

Member-In-Discernment

Following the interview with the Committee on Church and Ministry a decision is made concerning the application. If applicant is approved to become a Member-In-Discernment , an Advisor is assigned and the Member-In Discernment is brought into covenant.

- Member-In-Discernment.
- Advisor assigned.
- Covenant signed. (Appendix G)

Please consult the Member-In-Discernment Manual for the details of this process. Questions may be addressed to the Chair of the Member-In-Discernment Working Group.

**Member-In-Discernment Journey
Annual Reviews
Western Region
Massachusetts Conference
United Church of Christ**



Documentation

To be supplied to the chair of the MIDWG one month before each review.

- Official Transcripts from Seminary (required every year)
 - First year
 - Second year
 - Third year
 - Fourth year
 - Fifth year
- CPE Evaluations: required when completed
- Field Education Evaluations: required as completed
- Mid Year Program Review: required when completed
- Reviews Initiated by Seminary: required when completed
- Yearly Written Reviews: one per review
 - First year
 - Second year
 - Third year
 - Fourth year
 - Fifth year
- The *Annual Review Preparation Sheet*, Appendix E, filled out by the student and his or her advisor. (required every year)

Annual Reviews

First Year:

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- First Year Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Second Year:

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Second Year Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Subsequent Years:

For all the years following the second Annual Review up to the ordination Interview. Questions for each additional written review will be specified by the Member-In-Discernment Working Group.

Year: _____

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Yearly Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Year: _____

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Yearly Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Year: _____

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Yearly Annual Review

Date of review: _____

Year: _____

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Yearly Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Year: _____

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Yearly Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Year: _____

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Yearly Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Year: _____

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Yearly Annual Review
Date of review: _____

Final Year:

- Quarterly meetings with advisor
Dates of meetings: _____

- Final Year Annual Review With The MIDWG
This must take place at least two months before the Ordination Interview with the Committee on Church and Ministry.
Date of review: _____

The following documentation must be provided to the Chair of the MIDWG one month prior to the Final Year Review:

- Most recent official seminary transcripts and copy M.DIV diploma if already graduated.
- The *Annual Review Preparation Sheet*, Appendix E, filled out by student & advisor.
- Final copy of Ordination Paper
- Written Reflection Paper
- Written letter from the local congregation requesting that the Association examine the student for ordination.
- Approved for Ordination Interview by the MIDWG

Set Time Table:

- Ordination paper completion date for the MIDWG.
- Review educational requirements and graduation dates.
- Set date for Ordination Interview with the Association Committee on Church and Ministry.
- Set time table for completion of United Church of Christ professional profile. Please note that the United Church of Christ profile cannot be released until approval for an Ecclesiastical Council is granted by the Committee on Church and Ministry.

**Member-In-Discernment Journey
Ordination Process
Western Region
Massachusetts Conference
United Church of Christ**



Following the approval of the MIDWG for an Ordination Interview, the Member-In-Discernment will prepare for this interview with the Committee on Church and Ministry.

Ordination Interview Check List

The following requirements must be completed before the Ordination Interview with the student's Association Committee on Church and Ministry.

- In Care Status for at least two years, or 2 year requirement waived by C&M.
- Recommendation from the MIDWG for an Ordination Interview.
- Reviewed signed and submitted the Pre-Ordination Agreement from the United Church of Christ Pension Boards. (Appendix H)
- Undergraduate degree from accredited college or university or its equivalent as determined by the Committee on Church and Ministry.
- Seminary degree(s) or Graduate degrees appropriate to area of ministry.
- Certificate of completion of one (1) Basic Unit of Clinical Pastoral Education.
- Completion of one (1) academic year of Field Education.
- Completion of a Clergy Boundary Training workshop or seminar.
- Completion of a United Church of Christ Polity course.
- Video tape or DVD of recent sermon.
- Twenty (20) copies of the ordination paper submitted sixty days before interview.
- Four letters of reference.

Interview Preparation

- Interview date set: _____
- All requirements completed.
- Copies of required documents listed above and video tape or DVD mailed sixty days prior to interview date to the chair of the Committee on Church and Ministry .
- Review interview format and areas to be covered with advisor.

Interview Outcome

- With a favorable vote, you are recommended for an Ecclesiastical Council of your Association and you are authorized to circulate your profile.
- With the Committee on Church and Ministry, set a date for the Ecclesiastical Council.
 - Date of Council: _____
- United Church of Christ profile completed.
- With an unfavorable vote, return to work on concerns, or terminate Member-In-Discernment status.

Ecclesiastical Council

The Ecclesiastical Council is held. If the vote of the Ecclesiastical Council is in the affirmative, and there is an ordainable call, an ordination date is set. If the vote of the Ecclesiastical Council is in the affirmative, and there is not an ordainable call, approval for “ordination pending an ordainable call” status is granted.

Ordination Service Process

- Receive call to approved site of ministry.
- Once a call has been received and approved, contact the Chair of the Committee on Church and Ministry to set an ordination date and begin designing service of ordination with the Advisor and the Committee on Church and Ministry.
 - Date of Ordination: _____

Please consult the Member-In-Discernment Manual for the details of this process, as well as the United Church of Christ Manual on the Ministry. Questions may be addressed to the Advisor, the Chair of the Member-In-Discernment Working Group, or the Chair of the Association’s Committee on Church and Ministry.