



MANUAL ON MINISTRY

A Guide to Authorizing Ministry
in the United Church of Christ



Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization
Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry
of the United Church of Christ

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I will stand at my watchpost to see what the LORD will say. Then the LORD answered and said, “Write the vision; make it plain so a runner may read it. For there is still a vision.”

— *Habakkuk 2:1-3*



Manual on Ministry

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The United Church of Christ locates authority for the authorization and oversight of ministers, including ordination and continued standing, in Associations through Committees on Ministry. In the work of authorization and oversight, Committees on Ministry discern collectively the wisdom of the Spirit, the call of Christ, and the mission of God, on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The Manual on Ministry is a set of processes, guidelines, and best practices recommended to Associations and their Committees on Ministry in carrying out their work. Common guidelines are essential to shared expectations in ministry.

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O Holy One, as we become an expression of your presence in our midst, we ask for your Spirit to be present in our discernment of your call in our lives. As your Church gathers, guide and strengthen us in the ways we serve your name with our gifts and passions. Throughout history, you have emboldened leaders in your effort to energize people to serve creation. May we sense your Spirit moving within our efforts to raise up and support leaders for your Church's ongoing work in the world. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

1 Theological Grounding

COVENANTAL POLITY

As members of the United Church of Christ, we testify to the deeds of God, saying together in the words of the Statement of Faith:

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages,
tongues, and races.

You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world and
resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.¹

God "calls the worlds into being," giving life and purpose to creation, to persons, and to communities. Throughout the biblical stories and across generations, God calls us to belong to God and to respond to God's grace by belonging to one another. Such

¹ United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, doxological version.

Section 1 Theological Grounding

The work of ministry and of the Church begins and ends in community. Our shared love of Christ and our response to God's grace compel us to work for and beside one another for the sake of God's mission. In the United Church of Christ, these relationships of working together for God's sake are called covenants. We speak highly of covenantal relationships though at times we prefer individualism, in effect saying to other members of the Body, "I have no need of you" (I Corinthians 12). Our covenantal relationships are rarely perfect, but we believe that—when we govern our common life as the United Church of Christ with commitment to one another and Christ—then we demonstrate Christ's love and the Spirit's wisdom at work through us in life-giving ways.

belonging together (being in covenant² with one another) relies on the initiative and grace of God, the One who gives and renews life. In Jesus Christ, the covenant is made new. By the Holy Spirit, the covenant is widened and strengthened. With the sacraments of baptism and communion, the Church celebrates God's renewing power and knows again the new life and identity given to God's people. As God gives God's self to humanity for the sake of all, so Christians are called into covenant for the sake of one another rather than for one's self.

Covenant—the commitment of God to God's people, of the people to God, of the people to one another as the Body of Christ—is foundational to UCC identity and is at the heart of our governance. God's covenant with creation and humankind inspires deep and binding commitment in relationships within and beyond the Church, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). The Church is called together by God; all members and settings of the Church are interrelated, sharing a common identity as the Body of Christ. The covenantal relationships between parts of the Body of Christ are characterized by mutuality, transparency, accountability, and a desire to represent Christ together for the glory of God.

In the United Church of Christ, the settings of the denomination are separate in governance and individual in conscience yet belong to one another in Christ's name for the mission of God. They honor one another's integrity, listen carefully to each other, and "seek to walk together in all God's ways."³

As a covenanted body, the United Church of Christ authorizes ministers to serve on its behalf. To do so faithfully requires accountability of all members and settings to one another and to God for the ministry of the Church. Clear communication is essential. The covenantal partners in UCC ministerial authorization include:

² Covenant: Sacred commitments to relationship.

³ Article III, Paragraph 6, of the UCC Constitution and Bylaws.

- the individual;
- the Local Church where the individual is a member;
- the Association through its Committee on Ministry;
- the ministry setting to which the individual is called.

THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY AND ORDINATION

The United Church of Christ believes that God calls every Christian to be a servant of God, a minister⁴, living and serving in Christ's name. This call is celebrated sacramentally in baptism as persons are claimed for Christ by the Holy Spirit and the Church; all who are baptized spend the rest of their lives responding to God's call and claim. The particulars of each person's call and ministry vary with time, place, talents, experience, personal situation and responsibilities, and, importantly, the needs of the world. Ministry is lived in every aspect of one's life as God's love is shown in word and deed.

The particular ministry of reconciling all God's children with one another, with creation, and with God, was given to God's people in scripture: "All this is from God, who reconciled us...through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). This ministry is claimed daily by the United Church of Christ as it is called to love God, neighbor, and self, and to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Matthew 22:36-50 and Micah 6:8).

Christians are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, under the sole headship of Jesus Christ. This is a living body (1 Corinthians 12), called, formed and sent into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. Loving and serving God, the Church has multiple purposes:

⁴ Minister: Any Christian, regardless of employment or title, created by God, called by Christ and gifted by the Spirit; all Christians are in ministry when serving the needs of the world in God's love and grace.

- embodying and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to all;
- nurturing and empowering the gathered Church through worship and sacraments, fellowship and mutual care, education and spiritual formation;
- acting in the world through deeds of justice and lovingkindness.

The Church is a covenantal community; members belong to God in Jesus Christ and therefore to one another in Jesus' name.

The Church acknowledges that its members have many diverse ministries in the world and in the Church. It also recognizes a specific need for representative servant leaders “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). The United Church of Christ, along with the Church Universal through the ages and throughout the world, affirms God's call to some individuals to be such leaders who help the Church to be what God intends it to be. These persons are set apart through prayer and the laying on of hands in the rite of ordination.

In ordination, the individual makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic ministry,⁵ they continue the witness of Christ's followers from New Testament times. They receive authority from the Triune God to serve in Jesus' name. Ordained Ministers have particular responsibilities for the proclamation and practice of the Christian faith and for the life of the Church itself.

Ordained Ministers are authorized to serve and to lead on behalf of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal, a ministry

⁵ Apostolic ministry: The United Church of Christ “claims as its own the faith of the historic church” and joins the witness of Jesus' apostles, at the same time challenging each generation “to make this faith its own.” Ordained Ministers witness to this faith as they engage in the ministries of Word and Sacrament within the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal.

that encompasses the fullest range of leadership ministries: priestly and prophetic, representative and servant. They are called to embody the love of God for the world and to proclaim the good news on behalf of the Church, personally and publicly pointing the Church to its dependence on Jesus Christ, the source of its faith, mission, and unity.

Ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ is in accord with the Church Universal as this ministry serves the unity of the Church and continues to witness to the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth and his followers across generations. As did prophets and priests of the Hebrew Scriptures and disciples and apostles of Jesus in the New Testament, Ordained Ministers stand with the people before God and carry the Word of God to the people. Ordained Ministers belong to both God and the people. They are nurtured and sustained by both; they are responsible to both. In the United Church of Christ, this relationship and responsibility is called Ordained Ministerial Standing.⁶ It is embodied in a covenant under God among the Association, the Ordained Minister, the Local Church of membership, and the ministry setting.

Because both the demands upon Ordained Ministers and the needs of the Church are multiple, no person will have all the needed gifts to offer to all people in all situations. Nevertheless, all Ordained Ministers are servants of God in their ministry on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ. Ordained ministry is ministry of the Church entrusted to individuals; it is not the ministry of individuals acting independently. Ordained Ministers are persons of faith, claimed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and committed to the Church and its ministry. They seek to serve God and the world in humility, able and willing to offer and receive wisdom. The Church looks to them to be learned persons and to have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Church historically and ecumenically.

For a variety of reasons, there are instances when an Ordained Minister is not available to represent and serve the Church. In

The “needs of the Church”—a phrase often used when considering the authorization of a person for representative and sacramental ministry—should be understood as a question of the Church Universal’s needs, not only or primarily of a particular Local Church or individual member. Many needs of the Church are met well and faithfully by laypersons and their ministries.

⁶ Ordained Ministerial Standing: Formal relationship between an Ordained Minister and the United Church of Christ through an Association.

such circumstances, an Association of the United Church of Christ may identify one of its lay members as having gifts and graces appropriate for that ministry setting, as well as a call from God, and grant them Lay Ministerial Standing. Lay Ministerial Standing is a temporary, accountable covenantal relationship among the Association, the individual member, and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ. Lay Ministers are, for a season, charged with particular roles and tasks in which they are in service to or on behalf of a particular congregation as representative servants of the United Church of Christ. During a Lay Minister's service, the Local Church, the Lay Minister, and the Association Committee on Ministry should be in discernment together as to whether the Lay Minister's call by the Holy Spirit is to a life of ministerial leadership as an Ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ.

MARKS OF FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS

Those who hold ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ are entrusted with and accountable for the faithfulness and effectiveness of their lives and ministries on its behalf. The development and demonstration of such faithfulness and effectiveness are guided by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ (the Marks), a tool created to meet the aims of the 2005 Ministry Issues Pronouncement of General Synod. The Ministry Issues Pronouncement sought to expand UCC definitions of learnedness and leadership in authorized ministry and to emphasize excellence in ministerial formation. Therefore, the Marks strive to highlight the complex combination of talents, understandings, and skills needed for ministerial leadership in the United Church of Christ. Committees on Ministry are guided in their work of authorizing and overseeing Ordained Ministers by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

The Marks also have usefulness to Local Churches, ministry settings, Associations, and individuals as a discernment tool. The

Marks are to be interpreted carefully within the many and varied contexts of particular UCC communities and ministries.

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers,⁷ arranged in eight categories, are:

Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practices

- 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.

Nurturing UCC Identity

- 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.

⁷ See Section 3 for tools to use with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers affirm that the 21st century Church needs wise, knowledgeable, and ever-curious ministers. Consistent with the 2005 Ministry Issues Pronouncement of General Synod, the Marks convey that such learnedness is shaped through diverse educational experiences, lessons of life's journeys, personal character, and the Spirit's inspiration.

Building Transformational Leadership Skills

- 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.

Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions

- 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.

Caring for All Creation

- 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.

Participating in Theological Praxis

- 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 United Church of Christ.
- Experiencing and appreciating a variety of theological perspectives.
- Embodying the UCC Ministerial Code.

Working Together for Justice and Mercy

- 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.

Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets

- 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.

In the United Church of Christ, Associations⁸ have the authority to ordain ministers on behalf of the whole Church and to grant ministerial standing for the United Church of Christ. Associations, through their Committees on Ministry, work to discern God's call on a person's life for ordained ministry, both initially with a Member in Discernment and throughout an Ordained Minister's journey. While ordination itself is understood to be for a lifetime, ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ is a covenant that may be concluded by the person or the Association for a variety of reasons.

Associations determine, usually through the work of Committees on Ministry and Ecclesiastical Councils, whether and when a person is to be ordained and/or received into Ordained Ministerial Standing. Associations are responsible, too, for oversight of all those with ministerial standing. Oversight includes the continuing support and accountability of those with standing, so that the United Church of Christ, in all its settings, may be led by faithful and effective servants.

COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY

While all covenant participants across the United Church of Christ willfully and prayerfully join together in ministry, the work of accountability requires a particular body

⁸ Associations or Conferences acting as Associations.

to hold authority in relationship to those participants. The need for authority and accountability reflects our human failings as well as our human graces; we are blessed to be encouraged and challenged by one another to grow in faith and in relationship.

The United Church of Christ locates the authority for overseeing ministerial leaders with our Associations through Committees on Ministry, believing that the gifts of the Spirit and the call of Christ to ministry are best discerned by a designated group of persons who are deeply faithful, perceptive of the Spirit and of persons, committed to the United Church of Christ, and collectively wise with varied experiences of the Church in the world. In this work of authorization as in all work of the Church, we are grateful to Jesus Christ who is our Authority as the Head of the Body of Christ.

In both practice and polity, Committees on Ministry are a vital embodiment of our covenantal relationships across the United Church of Christ. On behalf of and through their respective Associations and Conferences, Committees have a relationship with Local Churches, Members in Discernment, all those who seek or hold ministerial standing, every other Committee on Ministry, the United Church of Christ, and the Church Universal. In this role, the overarching ministry of Committees on Ministry is the mindfulness of the Church's well-being and the discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit in authorizing ministers on behalf of the United Church of Christ.⁹

The Committee on Ministry has the role of support and accountability for those seeking or holding standing. On a regular basis, the Committee attends to the operative covenantal relationships among those with standing, the Association, the Local Church, and the ministry setting, in order to nurture faithfulness and to ensure ongoing growth in ministry according to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. A ministry setting—whether a UCC institution, an ecumenical

⁹ For guidance in developing practices of discernment as a Committee, see the Discernment Travelogue in Section 3.

ministry, or a secular setting—is drawn into the covenantal relationship when it calls a minister into servant leadership on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Serving on a Committee on Ministry is a ministry in itself. For this reason, the Committee’s membership should be intentionally diverse, include lay and ordained persons, and be trained and resourced to work for the empowerment of excellent authorized ministry. The core competencies and essential functions of a Committee on Ministry and its members¹⁰ can be outlined to correlate with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers:

Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice

- Practicing discernment and prayerfulness.
- Modeling discernment to the wider Church.

Nurturing UCC Identity

- Understanding and practicing UCC polity in relationship and accountability.
- Articulating an ongoing commitment to the ministry of the Committee on Ministry and to the core values of the United Church of Christ.

Building Transformational Leadership Skills

- Demonstrating integrity and trustworthiness.
- Willing to make difficult decisions through collaboration; saying “yes” as well as “no” for the sake of a healthy United Church of Christ.

Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions

- Engaging important moments of storytelling during seasons of ministry, such as incoming/exiting interviews, installations, etc.

¹⁰ See the Committee on Ministry Orientation Booklet in Section 3 for best practices.

- Holding confidentiality as appropriate, including the secure maintenance of ministerial files.

Caring for All Creation

- Empowering and safeguarding ministries that nurture God's mission throughout creation.
- Practicing support of Members in Discernment, Ordained Ministers, Lay Ministers, and Local Churches.

Participating in Theological Praxis

- Engaging questions of authority, covenant, and accountability with care and wisdom.
- Participating regularly in Committee on Ministry training with receptivity to best practices.

Working Together for Justice and Mercy

- Practicing hospitality to all persons.
- Demonstrating and encouraging accountability from all who seek and all who hold ministerial standing.

Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets

- Communicating in a timely and clear manner.
- Holding a healthy sense of self as members and as a Committee, and crafting space in which those meeting with the Committee can do the same.

2 Ministerial Authorization

ARTICLE 1: MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT

LOCAL CHURCH AS LOCUS OF MINISTRY

At the heart of the understanding of Christian ministry in the United Church of Christ is the theological conviction that God calls all disciples to serve Christ in their work and to witness in daily life. The Local Church of the United Church of Christ—in polity and in mission—is called to equip and empower the ministry of disciples. No matter the size or circumstance of a congregation, several habits reflect a culture of call:

- The congregation actively affirms a belief in the priesthood of all believers¹¹ and in the call of all Christians to be ministers (using their gifts and presence to serve the world with God’s grace and love).
- The congregation has an identifiable mission providing many and varied opportunities for persons to have meaningful involvement in that mission.
- The congregation as a whole is connected to the life of the wider Church, including a familiarity with the processes by which congregants may explore vocational ministry in the United Church of Christ.

For some members, the call of discipleship may include specific preparation and formation in order to respond faithfully and effectively with their work and lives. For some members, the call of discipleship may include the exploration of ordination, to serve as a representative servant of Christ on behalf of the United Church

“Preparation” refers to 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.

¹¹ Priesthood of all believers: The understanding that all persons have access to God without an intermediary and that all persons have the potential to show God to others (to minister for God).

of Christ. The Local Church’s culture of call takes a particular focus when a member feels called to ordained ministry, providing discernment support as well as connection to the Association for engagement with its formal discernment processes. A member of a Local Church who is approved by an Association’s Committee on Ministry to enter a discernment relationship is called a Member in Discernment (MID). Member in Discernment is an ecclesial status within the United Church of Christ.

DISCERNMENT PARTNERS

The Member in Discernment process involves interdependent and covenantal relationships, in support of the member as well as the Committee on Ministry making decisions on behalf of the United Church of Christ. These relationships help to form and examine the person’s capacity for ordained ministry, and they provide accountability so that discernment is not practiced in isolation.



- **Local Church.** To become a Member in Discernment, a person must first be an active member of a Local Church of the United Church of Christ for at least one year, in order to establish and demonstrate commitment to a particular faith community's ministry and to the United Church of Christ. The relationships developed through membership and the experiences of Local Church life allow the person, the pastor, and the congregation to pay attention together to the person's call. The pastor and a Local Church Discernment Committee¹² are the person's first and ongoing discernment partners. If these discernment partners agree that there is a potential call to ordained ministry to be explored formally, the Local Church's governing body recommends the person to the Committee on Ministry.
- **Committee on Ministry.** The Committee on Ministry of an Association, acting on behalf of the United Church of Christ, provides support, assessment, and accountability for the person's continuing journey of discernment, and the Committee engages in its own discernment to determine whether the person's call requires ordination. The Committee's discernment in relationship with the Member in Discernment should not take longer than seven years.
- **MID Advisor.** The Member in Discernment Advisor, assigned by the Committee on Ministry, is a UCC member (lay or ordained) whose familiarity with the polity of and commitment to the ministry of the United Church of Christ position them to serve as an effective process guide for the Member in Discernment. The MID Advisor meets with the Member in Discernment between the person's annual reviews with the Committee as a checkpoint on the Member in Discernment's adherence to formation and preparation plans, and as a resource to clarify the discernment process as needed.

The guideline of seven years is intended to allow ample time for long-term experiences of formation (such as mentoring and part-time academic studies), while limiting the endless "limbo" of discernment without decision. Committees on Ministry may modify this timeframe in discernment with a MID, depending on particular circumstances, however a clear and gracious boundary of time serves both the MID and the integrity of the process.

¹² Local Church Discernment Committee: A small group of Local Church members who gather with the person exploring their call, in order to listen, encourage, and provide feedback before and during the MID process. The Local Church Discernment Committee may be a standing committee (elders, deacons, council, etc.) or an ad hoc group formed for this purpose.

Ministry training experiences may include such opportunities as field education, clinical pastoral education (CPE), internships, and more.

- **Theological Education.**¹³ Seminaries, field education sites, regional theological education programs, mentoring programs—and those who serve in such settings—offer knowledge and insight to the Member in Discernment and to Committees on Ministry. Professors and teachers are those persons directly involved in theological and educational development. Supervisors are those who oversee ministry training experiences.
- **Ministry Development Centers.** Development Centers are organizations that are called upon for psychological assessments, personality and gifts inventories, etc. A Committee on Ministry may require feedback from these professionals regarding the preparation and readiness of a person for ordained ministry.
- **Mentors.** Mentors are persons whose ministry experience and personal relationship with a Member in Discernment afford them opportunities to provide candid feedback and professional wisdom. Mentors are not assigned to Members in Discernment by Committees on Ministry and therefore are not required to submit feedback. Committees can encourage Members in Discernment to seek out mentors as informal but critical sources of support.
- **Peer Networks.** The connection—formally and informally—of Members in Discernment to one another is encouraged for support and networking. Denominational gatherings of Members in Discernment can be hosted by Associations, Conferences, and the National Setting.
- **National Setting.** The National Setting of the United Church of Christ provides guidance to Committees on Ministry, Associations, and Conferences in order to support Member in Discernment processes and to ensure the development of faithful and effective ministers.

¹³ See Section 3 for sample educational plans that follow multiple paths of theological formation and professional development.

SUMMARY OF THE MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT PROCESS

The Member in Discernment process is intended to engage all discernment partners in reflection, conversation and assessment, so that the need of the Church for excellent and faithful ministers may be met through wise decisions of Committees on Ministry, informed by all partners in the discernment process. The process unfolds in the following sequence:

1. exploration of call with Local Church;
2. initial meeting with Committee on Ministry;
3. psychological assessment, signed self-disclosure statement, and criminal background check;
4. preparation and formation plan developed between the Member in Discernment and the Committee on Ministry, based on the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers as well as assessment reports;
5. ongoing preparation and formation with development of the Marks Portfolio; meetings with the MID Advisor;
6. annual reviews with the Committee on Ministry, making adjustments to the preparation and formation plan as necessary;
7. successful completion of all COM requirements and the Committee on Ministry ordination interview;
8. Ecclesiastical Council.

Based on discernment between the partners involved at each step of the process, decisions by Committees on Ministry must ultimately have a *Yes* or a *No* but may include intermediate decisions of *Yes, but* and *No, but*. A *Yes* decision indicates unhesitant affirmation and continuation of next steps. A *Yes, but* decision indicates continuation of the process with recommendations that must be prioritized and met by the Member in Discernment. A *No, but* decision terminates the process but expresses potential for a new start to the discernment process at a future date and offers

Committees on Ministry that are structured with subcommittees or organized Conference-wide should understand "Committee on Ministry" to indicate whichever committee is assigned to the process of discernment.

recommendations for the person's growth. A *No* decision indicates a termination of the process, recognizing that the person, like all Christians, is called by God into ministry but not to ordination.

Administrators serving Committees on Ministry, Associations and/or Conferences are expected to keep current records of the initiation and termination of Member in Discernment statuses in the UCC Data Hub, based on timely reports from Committees on Ministry.

STEP-BY-STEP MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT PROCESS

1. Exploration of Call with Local Church

For those exploring a sense of call to ordained ministry, the first place to engage that call and listen for feedback is the Local Church. A person must be an active member of a Local Church for at least one year before applying to a Committee on Ministry to enter the Member in Discernment process.

Meetings between a person considering ordained ministry and their Local Church pastor should explore the person's sense of vocation and consider what it means to be called to ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The pastor can also provide information on the UCC process of discernment and support the development of a Local Church Discernment Committee if one does not already exist.

The Local Church Discernment Committee helps the person listen to and test their sense of call.¹⁴ The goal of discernment for the Local Church Discernment Committee in reflection with the person is to determine if the person has the inherent gifts, character, and potential to serve faithfully and effectively as an Ordained Minister in and on behalf of the denomination. Following a time of discernment between the person and the Local Church Discernment Committee, and in conversation with the pastor and the Discernment Committee, a congregation's governing body makes a *Yes* or *No* decision to recommend the person to the Committee on Ministry for consideration to become a Member in Discernment.

¹⁴ See Section 3 for best practices of Local Church Discernment Committees.

If, after prayerful discernment with the person, the Local Church Discernment Committee or the governing body does not believe that a call to ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ is present, the process of discernment towards ordained ministry ends here. The *No* decision is made known to the person with appropriate pastoral support. The Local Church continues to support the person's vocational exploration and the appropriate exercise of the person's gifts as a lay person, consistent with its encouragement of all members' gifts in service to God's mission.

If the decision is *Yes*, the Local Church governing body writes a letter of recommendation to the Committee on Ministry and requests that the person be received as a Member in Discernment. This recommendation does not presume a specified outcome but is an affirmation of continued discernment and ongoing support for the person's process. Accompanying the governing body's recommendation, the person submits a completed Member in Discernment application form to the Committee on Ministry.¹⁵

Additional documentation that may be required by the Committee on Ministry at the time of initial application may include:

- statement of the person's spiritual journey;
- statement of the person's understanding of their call in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ;
- resume or portfolio, written with reference to the Marks;
- documentation of educational and professional training (such as transcripts);
- three written references of support for the person to enter the Member in Discernment process;
- criminal background check (may be required by the Committee on Ministry as part of the application or following the initial meeting);

¹⁵ See Section 3 for the Member in Discernment application form, including self-disclosure statement.

- psychological assessment (may be required by the Committee on Ministry as part of the initial application or following the initial meeting);
- other requirements as established by a Committee on Ministry for all of its applicants to the Member in Discernment process.

2. Initial Meeting with Committee on Ministry

Upon receipt of the letter from the Local Church requesting that a person be received as a Member in Discernment (accompanied by the application materials from the person), a Committee on Ministry schedules an initial meeting with the person. Representatives from the Local Church Discernment Committee and the applicant's pastor are encouraged to accompany the person and to contribute to the meeting. As appropriate, a cultural consultant¹⁶ may be invited to this and future meetings with the person. Prior to the meeting, the Committee on Ministry thoroughly reviews the submitted materials, which form the beginning of a file in the Committee on Ministry's records of the person.

The purpose of this initial meeting is to offer hospitality to the person and the Local Church, to listen prayerfully to the movement of the Spirit, to engage in conversation about the person's spiritual journey and call, to outline expectations of the process, and to clarify any questions. Following the meeting, the Committee determines whether to accept the person as a Member in Discernment and communicates this decision in a timely manner to the person and the Local Church.

If the Committee's decision is *No*, the discernment process toward ordained ministry ends here.

¹⁶ Cultural consultant: A person who helps to observe differences in cultural norms, when those attributes are not already present within the Committee on Ministry. In a meeting between a person and a Committee on Ministry, the cultural consultant might take a teaching role to help the Committee understand the person's context so that the person is freed from that role.

If the Committee's decision is *Yes*, the person is received as a Member in Discernment and entered in the UCC Data Hub. A Discernment Covenant¹⁷ is written among the person, the Local Church of membership, and the Committee on Ministry, outlining expectations for the discernment process. The Committee assigns the MID Advisor.¹⁸ If not already submitted in the application process, instructions are given for the person to complete a criminal background check, to schedule a psychological assessment, and to sign the self-disclosure statement. The costs of the criminal background check and psychological assessment are recommended to be shared by the person, the Local Church, and the Association.

3. Psychological Assessment, Signed Self-Disclosure Statement, and Criminal Background Check

The Committee on Ministry directs the Member in Discernment to sign the self-disclosure statement and to complete the required criminal background checks, the results of which are sent to the Committee. Likewise the Member in Discernment is guided to an appropriate ministry development center for psychological assessment.¹⁹ The report of the results from the psychological assessments is sent to the Committee on Ministry with recommendations from the assessor. These recommendations may include questions for further exploration with the Member in Discernment and suggestions for psychological growth suitable for one who would seek to serve as an Ordained Minister. If serious pathologies are identified that would preclude one from having the potential to serve as an Ordained Minister in a healthy manner, the Committee on Ministry takes these under consideration when determining whether (and how) to continue the discernment process.

Member in Discernment is an ecclesial status. Ecclesial statuses exist in the United Church of Christ for those persons who are engaged in discernment processes to seek Ordained Ministerial Standing. Persons holding ecclesial statuses are in relationships of mutual discernment with Committees on Ministry but do not have the authority to represent the United Church of Christ. Statuses are non-transferable across Associations and may be terminated at any time by a Committee on Ministry.

¹⁷ See Section 3 for sample Discernment Covenant.

¹⁸ See Section 3 for guidance on selecting and training MID Advisors.

¹⁹ See Section 3 for best practices with regard to psychological assessments.

After prayerful review of the results of the psychological assessment, self-disclosure statement, and criminal background check, the Committee on Ministry makes a decision whether the person will continue as a Member in Discernment. The decision is communicated in writing, and a copy of the decision is kept in the person's file. If the Committee's decision is *No*, the process of discernment towards ordained ministry ends here. If the decision is *Yes*, the discernment process continues and a preparation and formation plan is developed.

A preparation and formation plan should include opportunities for Members in Discernment to acquire the competencies represented in the Marks: the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for faithful and effective ordained ministry. Theological education (through an accredited seminary, a recognized regional theological education program, a mentoring program, or some combination of these), with outcomes oriented toward the Marks, should be identified as part of a Member in Discernment's preparation and formation plan.

4. Development of Preparation and Formation Plan

A preparation and formation plan is developed by the Committee on Ministry, based on the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers 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. These may include some or all of the following:

- theological and practical education for ministry, with learning outcomes oriented toward the Marks;
- the development of a Marks portfolio²⁰ to document competencies around the Marks;
- successful completion of an approved UCC History, Polity and Theology course;
- ministry training experience under supervision (Clinical Pastoral Education, field placement, internship, etc.);

²⁰ Marks portfolio: A collection of materials that demonstrate competencies and experiences related to the Marks; this collection may take many forms. If the MID process moves toward an Ecclesiastical Council, the Marks Portfolio becomes the basis of an ordination paper or portfolio presentation. See Section 3 for sample outlines of Marks Portfolios.

- successful completion of boundary awareness training;
- successful completion of anti-racism training;
- participation in regional or national MID gatherings;
- engagement with the wider Church, such as 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;
- periodic meetings with the MID Advisor;
- prior to the Ecclesiastical Council, a drafted UCC Ministerial Profile.

5. Ongoing Preparation and Formation with Development of the Marks Portfolio; Meetings with the MID Advisor

With the establishment of a preparation and formation plan, the ongoing adherence to that plan falls largely to the Member in Discernment. Building a Marks portfolio serves as a method to demonstrate and integrate one's growth (personal, professional, and spiritual).

The MID Advisor provides clarity about the process as needed to the Member in Discernment and encourages the Member in Discernment's attentiveness to their progress through (and options for) the preparation and formation plan.

Members in Discernment are also expected to remain actively involved in their Local Church of membership, turning to the Local Church Discernment Committee for ongoing conversation about vocation and readiness for ministry.

The geographic residence of a Member in Discernment may change temporarily or permanently during the discernment process as a result of employment, education, or life circumstance. When geographic distance prohibits a Member in Discernment from meeting in person with their MID Advisor, Local Church

Discernment Committee, and/or Committee on Ministry, creativity and the use of technology are encouraged.

- As needed, it may be appropriate for a Committee on Ministry to seek out and assign a MID Advisor who is located in proximity to the Member in Discernment; the Committee makes this assignment by collaborating with the Association where the Member in Discernment resides, with the understanding that the MID Advisor reports to the Committee on Ministry overseeing the discernment process.
- When distance keeps a Member in Discernment from participating regularly in their Local Church of membership, mutual intentionality is encouraged to continue the relationship; it may be appropriate for the MID to participate in a nearby UCC congregation for additional community.
- Though the annual meeting between a Committee on Ministry and Member in Discernment is best held in person, the use of online video conference and other technologies may be deemed appropriate when geography represents a barrier to that meeting.

As geographic challenges and opportunities are navigated, the status of a Member in Discernment must be held in the same Association as the Local Church where the Member in Discernment has membership. If Local Church membership moves into another Association, the Member in Discernment process cannot transfer. If the Member in Discernment applies to enter the discernment process in a different Association for any reason, the file developed by the Committee on Ministry that first granted MID status to the person is shared with the Committee on Ministry where the person has made a new application to be a Member in Discernment. Committees on Ministry review a person's previous discernment process in another Association before agreeing to begin a new Member in Discernment process.

6. Annual Review with Committee on Ministry

Members in Discernment meet annually with their Committees on Ministry to continue to listen together to God’s call, to review their progress with the preparation and formation plan, to make adjustments or changes to the plan that may be needed, and to determine next steps in the discernment process. The annual meeting is an opportunity for both discernment and assessment. Partners in the discernment process—such as professors, supervisors, representatives of the Local Church Discernment Committee, MID Advisors, and others—may be encouraged to contribute to this review.

Following the annual review, the Committee on Ministry prayerfully makes one of the following decisions:

- *Yes.* The Committee affirms the person’s continued status as a Member in Discernment and ongoing progress in formation and preparation.
- *Yes, but.* The Committee continues the person’s MID status and adds particular learning or behavioral goals within a given time frame as a requirement for the discernment process, with a date set for reassessment.
- *No, but.* The Committee terminates the MID status due to the Member in Discernment’s lack of progress and/or substantial need for growth, with constructive feedback offered that could help the person begin the discernment process again at a future undetermined date.
- *No.* The Committee determines that the person is not called to or suited for ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

All decisions that result from the annual review should be communicated in writing and added to the Member in Discernment’s file. If Member in Discernment status is terminated, either with or without bias, the results are to be recorded in the UCC Data Hub.²¹

²¹ See Section 3 for best practices of Committees on Ministry, including how to say “no” well, how to review Committee processes for signs of bias, and more in the Committee on Ministry Orientation Booklet.

The Committee on Ministry has the ability to terminate MID status at any time. Should questions arise regarding a Member in Discernment’s violation of or capacity to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code, the Committee on Ministry considers the concerns and determines the ecclesial status accordingly. A Fitness Review cannot be initiated for a person with an ecclesial status (such as Member in Discernment).

When Member in Discernment status is terminated, the phrase “without bias” may be entered in the UCC Data Hub to indicate that the Committee has no concerns about the person applying to re-enter the discernment process at a later date. The phrase “with bias” may be entered in the UCC Data Hub to indicate that the Committee has concerns about the person’s fitness or capacity for another discernment process.

7. Committee on Ministry Ordination Interview

Once the Committee on Ministry assesses that a Member in Discernment has completed their preparation and formation plan and has developed their competencies related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers satisfactorily, the Member in Discernment prepares an ordination paper or portfolio presentation²² for an ordination interview. The MID Advisor may be asked to guide the Member in Discernment in shaping the Marks portfolio into the final form of an ordination paper or portfolio presentation. At the same time, the Committee solicits final assessments from all partners in the discernment process.

Upon review of the Member in Discernment's portfolio presentation or ordination paper, the Committee on Ministry schedules an ordination interview with the Member in Discernment. In an atmosphere of prayer and openness to the Holy Spirit, the Committee on Ministry holds the ordination interview and discusses with the Member in Discernment their sense of call and journey of preparation, reflecting together on the ordination paper or portfolio presentation alongside the Marks. Following the interview, the Committee decides if it is time to move from the discernment process to a final authorization decision. Options for this decision are:

- *Yes.* The Committee commends the Member in Discernment to the Association for an Ecclesiastical Council.
- *Yes, but.* The Committee continues the process of discernment and defines certain learning outcomes or skillsets that must be demonstrated and reassessed by a specified time.
- *No.* The Committee on Ministry does not recommend the Member in Discernment for ordination in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ and concludes that its process

The use of Ecclesiastical Councils varies by Association. Although discernment processes are delegated by an Association to a Committee on Ministry, the purpose of an Ecclesiastical Council is for an Association to exercise its authority to approve (or not) one of its members for ordination in the United Church of Christ.

²² The ordination paper and portfolio presentation represent diverse methods for a Member in Discernment to demonstrate their competencies related to the Marks. The use of the Marks provides the means for consistency of subject matter across different styles. See Section 3 for examples.

of discernment is complete with this decision. Member in Discernment status is terminated.

All decisions are to be communicated to the Member in Discernment in writing and added to their file. If Member in Discernment status is terminated, either with or without bias, the results are recorded in the UCC Data Hub.

8. Ecclesiastical Council²³

In the United Church of Christ, the authority to ordain ministers and to grant ministerial standing is given to Associations. The Ecclesiastical Council is a gathering of delegates on behalf of an Association to decide, on behalf of the United Church of Christ, for or against the ordination of a Member in Discernment (pending the receipt of an ordainable call²⁴) following the affirmative recommendation of a Committee on Ministry. Members in Discernment who receive negative recommendations (a *No* decision) from Committees on Ministry are not considered by Ecclesiastical Councils.

At the Committee on Ministry's recommendation, the Association schedules an Ecclesiastical Council and shares the Member in Discernment's ordination paper or portfolio presentation with the Association for its consideration. Delegates from Local Churches in the Association gather as an Ecclesiastical Council to examine the Member in Discernment and to vote for or against their ordination.

If the outcome of the Ecclesiastical Council is *No*, Member in Discernment status is terminated, with or without bias, and updated in the UCC Data Hub. If the vote is *Yes*, the UCC Data Hub is updated to indicate that the Member in Discernment is "approved for ordination pending call." At that time, the Member in Discernment may begin to circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile.

A Member in Discernment who is "approved for ordination pending call" continues to meet annually with the Committee on

The criminal background check on the UCC Ministerial Profile has a lifespan of eighteen months. Providing up to four years for a Member in Discernment to remain "approved for ordination pending call" allows for two full lifespans of the UCC Ministerial Profile (three years) and an additional year for the Committee and the Member in Discernment to review prayerfully the appropriateness of a continuing search. Depending on a Member in Discernment's particular circumstances, the Committee on Ministry may modify this period of time to ensure sufficient opportunity for the Member in Discernment to find their first call.

²³ See Section 3 for best practices for Ecclesiastical Councils.

²⁴ See Section 2 Article 5 for additional reflection on ordainable calls.



Section 2:1 Members in Discernment

Ministry. These meetings must include a vote by the Committee on Ministry, acting on behalf of the Association, to renew the status of “approved for ordination pending call.” Annual renewal of “approved for ordination pending call” permits a Member in Discernment’s UCC Ministerial Profile to continue its circulation and to be updated as needed. If a decision is made to decline renewal of “approved for ordination pending call,” then Member in Discernment status is terminated, the UCC Data Hub is updated accordingly, and the UCC Ministerial Profile is withdrawn from circulation. A Committee may terminate “approved for ordination pending call” at any time based on lack of an ordainable call and/or unsatisfactory demonstration of the Marks or Ministerial Code.

A Member in Discernment may be categorized as “approved for ordination pending call” for a recommended maximum of four years.

2 Ministerial Authorization

ARTICLE 2: ORDAINED MINISTERS FROM ECUMENICAL BODIES

WELCOMING ECUMENICALLY ORDAINED MINISTERS

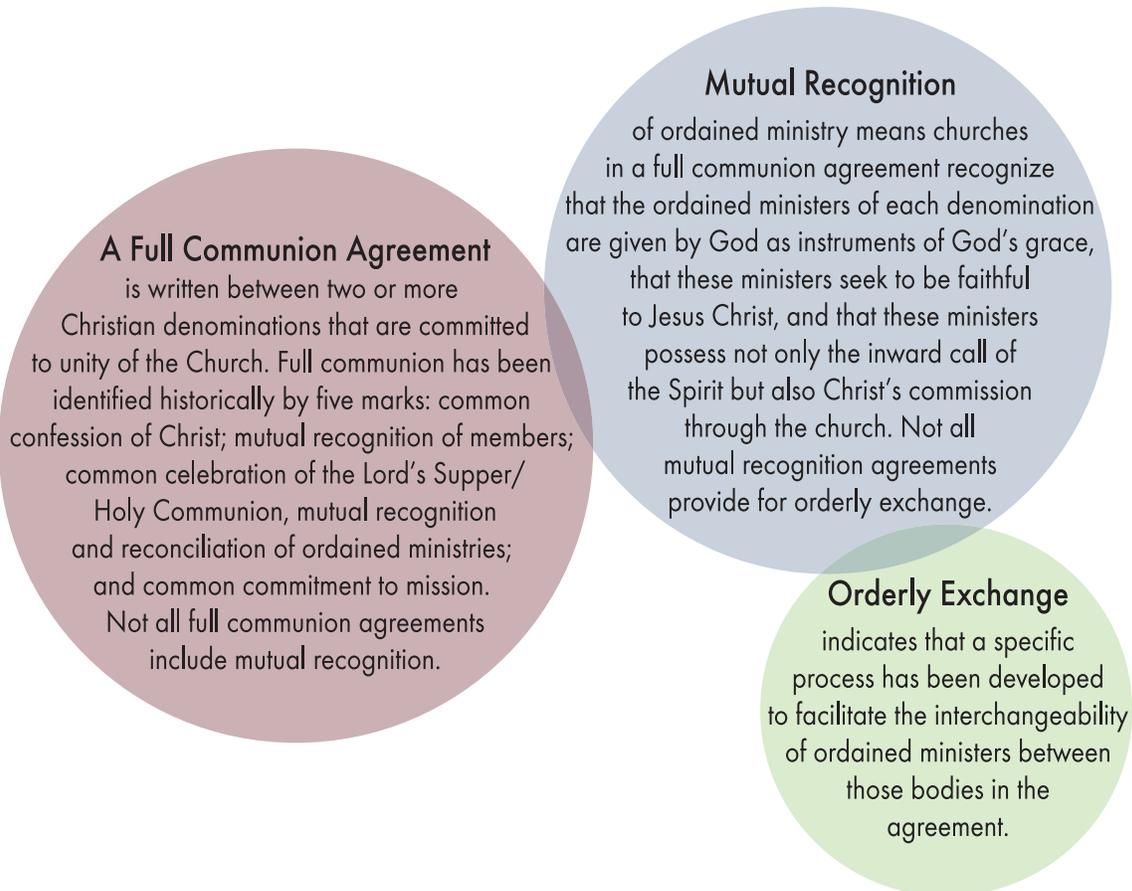
Born of the spirit of ecumenism, the United Church of Christ celebrates the diversity of the Body of Christ and appreciates the many gifts of ordained ministers from ecumenical bodies. Through formal agreements, it is possible for ecumenically ordained ministers to bless the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal through service in a UCC ministry setting. In these instances, UCC ministerial standing may be granted to ecumenically ordained ministers by a Committee on Ministry on behalf of an Association. Extravagant welcome and Spirit-filled discernment undergird the processes of considering and forming such relationships, even as those processes may vary according to the particular ecumenical body from which a minister comes and their preparedness for ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ according to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

An ordained minister from another ecclesiastical body who expresses a sense of call to a United Church of Christ ministry setting—or into the United Church of Christ itself—will follow this basic discernment process:

- conversation with a UCC Conference staff person regarding the sense of call, professional opportunities, Local Church membership, eligibility for search and call, and appropriate steps to connect with a Committee on Ministry;
- relationship-building with a Local Church, recognizing that membership may not be possible until a call to a UCC ministry setting is received and/or until UCC ministerial standing is granted;

- UCC Ministerial Standing application form²⁵ completed and submitted to a Committee on Ministry;
- additional documents as required by the Committee on Ministry according to the type of ministerial standing requested and to demonstrate engagement with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

For ministers whose ordinations were granted by a congregation, ecumenical body, community of faith, or denomination with which the United Church of Christ does not have a full communion agreement, Committees on Ministry determine the most appropriate process—whether Member in Discernment, Dual Standing, or Privilege of Call—depending on the particular call in



²⁵ See Section 3 for the UCC Ministerial Standing application form.

a UCC ministry setting and the person's preparedness according to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

The numerous ecumenical agreements of the United Church of Christ must be considered when a person approaches a Committee on Ministry with a request for ministerial standing. Several of the United Church of Christ's ecumenical agreements include the mutual recognition of ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament, meaning that the credentials, formation, and authorization process of the originating ordination are seen as valid by the receiving denomination. In addition to mutual recognition, these agreements may also include orderly exchange, meaning that a specific process has been developed to facilitate the interchangeability of Ordained Ministers between the denominations in the agreement.

Aside from formal ecumenical agreements, there are also processes by which ordained ministers from other Christians communions can either fully join the United Church of Christ (Privilege of Call) or hold temporary ministerial standing (Dual Standing).

CHRISTIAN CHURCH (DISCIPLES OF CHRIST) AND THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

All United Church of Christ Ordained Ministers who maintain their ministerial standing are Ordained Ministerial Partners with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and The United Church of Canada. Likewise, all ordained ministers who maintain their standing requirements in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or The United Church of Canada are Ordained Ministerial Partners with the United Church of Christ. Being an Ordained Ministerial Partner is an expression of the close relationship and full communion agreements between these denominations.

Ordained ministers in good standing in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or in The United Church of Canada may apply to the United Church of Christ for Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing (OMPS).²⁶ Ordained ministers in the Disciples

²⁶ Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing is specific to ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ, The United Church of Canada, and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) who serve in ministry settings affiliated with one another's denominations.

of Christ should apply for OMPS in the Association where they are geographically located. Ordained ministers in The United Church of Canada should apply for OMPS to a United Church of Christ Association where they anticipate seeking a call. The United Church of Christ has requirements for all ministers seeking Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, including:

- demonstrated knowledge of United Church of Christ history, theology and polity;
- a current criminal background check;
- a letter of good standing from originating denomination;
- a letter articulating why the minister is seeking OMPS in the United Church of Christ;
- three letters of reference.

During the process of meeting the requirements for Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, the minister may be granted Seeking OMPS status by the Committee on Ministry to which the person has applied. Seeking OMPS is an ecclesial status that is renewable annually and can be removed at any time by the Committee on Ministry granting this status. Seeking OMPS allows a minister to circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile within the UCC's search and call system. Additionally, on a case-by-case basis a Conference staff person may submit a Disciples of Christ or The United Church of Canada profile to a United Church of Christ ministry setting. If called, the minister is required to seek Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing.

Once all requirements are met and a call is extended, the Committee on Ministry votes on whether to grant the minister Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing. Only a United Church of Christ calling body or a UCC-affiliated ministry setting may serve as an authorizable call²⁷ for ministers seeking OMPS. Once granted Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, ministers hold standing in their denomination of origin as well as the UCC Association,

A Committee on Ministry always retains the option of denying OMPS or removing Seeking OMPS status even if employment is offered by a UCC Local Church. Local Churches are encouraged to review their constitution and bylaws as well as insurance coverage to verify whether ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ is required for their pastor and/or ministerial staff.

²⁷ See Section 2 Article 5 on authorizable calls.

including membership in a UCC Local Church. To clarify these relationships, ministers with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing should have Four- or Five-Way OMPS Covenants for their ministry positions.²⁸ Ministers with OMPS have primary oversight from the United Church of Christ, in collaboration with the judicatory where their Disciples of Christ or The United Church of Canada ministerial standing is held. All expectations for maintaining standing in the United Church of Christ and the originating denomination are to be clearly articulated in the OMPS covenant.

Certain ministry positions exist in service to more than one denomination. If a Disciples of Christ or The United Church of Canada ordained minister is serving in an authorizable call,²⁹ Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing may be granted for the duration of that call.

Ordained ministers from the Disciples of Christ or The United Church of Canada with OMPS may have full access to the UCC search and call process while serving in a United Church of Christ ministry setting. If a new call is found in another UCC ministry setting while the Ordained Minister still holds OMPS, then their Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing may transfer to the Association in which the new UCC call is located. When a minister with OMPS is no longer serving in a UCC ministry setting, then OMPS is removed; the minister may reapply for Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing at another time to seek and serve in a UCC ministry setting.

For those in the United Church of Christ seeking to serve in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or The United Church of Canada, Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing is applicable only for Ordained Ministers. Thus, positions in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or The United Church of Canada are not typically available as ordainable calls for Members in Discernment. Ordained Ministers in the United Church of Christ

²⁸ See Section 3 for sample Four- and Five-Way OMPS Covenants.

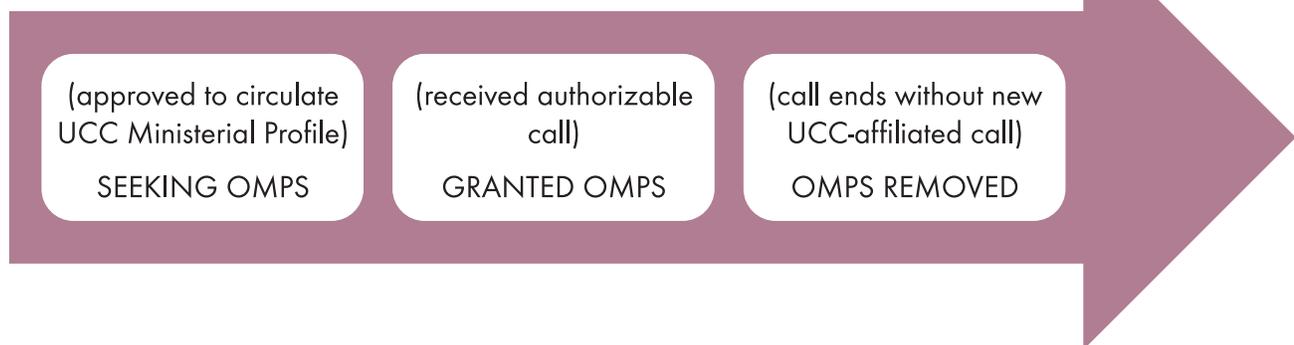
²⁹ See Section 2 Article 5 on authorizable calls.

Section 2:2 Ordained Ministers from Ecumenical Bodies

should refer to the Disciples of Christ or The United Church of Canada for procedures on how to seek calls and apply for Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing in those denominations.

UCC Ordained Ministers who hold Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing maintain membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ and ministerial standing in the corresponding Association. UCC Ordained Ministers with OMPS also hold standing in the appropriate The United Church of Canada Presbytery or Disciples of Christ Region. Oversight for UCC Ordained Ministers with OMPS is primarily exercised by the denomination of the ministry setting that the Ordained Minister serves, in collaboration with the Committee on Ministry where the Ordained Minister holds standing. UCC Ordained Ministers with OMPS should have a covenant³⁰ with their Local Church of membership, Association of standing, The United Church of Canada or Disciples of Christ ministry setting, the related judicatory, and themselves to articulate expectations for continued standing in both the denomination being served and the United Church of Christ.

UCC Data Hub designations throughout the Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing relationship:



³⁰ See Section 3 for sample Four- and Five-Way OMPS Covenants.

FORMULA OF AGREEMENT

The United Church of Christ is a partner in a multi-lateral Full Communion agreement called the Formula of Agreement³¹ with the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and the Reformed Church in America. The Formula of Agreement includes mutual recognition and a process for orderly exchange. Orderly exchange differs from the agreements with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and The United Church of Canada. Formula of Agreement ministers do not have access to the UCC Ministerial Profile system. Formula of Agreement applies only to ordained ministers of Word and Sacrament.

On a case-by-case basis, a Conference staff person of the United Church of Christ may include the profile of a PC(USA), RCA, or ELCA minister in the pool of candidates for a Local Church search process. If called, the minister must apply for Dual Standing for the duration of that call. Because the Formula of Agreement includes mutual recognition, a full examination of the minister's original ordination credentials is not necessary. It is expected that the minister can verify good standing with their originating denomination, can articulate the history, theology and polity differences between the two denominations, can demonstrate capacity to function in and appreciate the United Church of Christ, and is adequately familiar with the UCC Ministerial Code and the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. These expectations are to be demonstrated to the Committee on Ministry during the Dual Standing application process.

KIRCHENGEMEINSCHAFT

In 1981 the United Church of Christ entered into a full communion agreement with the Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany (EKU). In this relationship the term "Kirchengemeinschaft" is used rather than "full communion." This term is a German word expressing a broad range of meaning around "full church

³¹ See Section 3 for the Formula of Agreement Orderly Exchange.

community/communion.” This relationship has been expressed both through a national working group and through regional/Conference partnerships. In 2003 the General Synod reaffirmed Kirchengemeinschaft as the EKU itself became a larger body of reformed and union churches called the Union of Evangelical Churches (UEK). This agreement does not include mutual recognition or orderly exchange of ministers. A UEK pastor who wishes to gain ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ applies for either Privilege of Call or Dual Standing.

THE FELLOWSHIP OF AFFIRMING MINISTRIES

The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries (TFAM) is a trans-denominational, theologically diverse fellowship and therefore does not fall within the protocols of mutual recognition or orderly exchange related to full communion agreements. General Synod approved an affirmation of the relationship between the United Church of Christ and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries, saying:

A unique relationship exists between the United Church of Christ and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries. There are United Church of Christ congregations and clergy who are active participants in The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries. There are also congregations and clergy within The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries that have a desire to become affiliated with the UCC, and still others that value and support the relationship between the United Church of Christ and The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries but choose not to become a part of the United Church of Christ.
— General Synod 29

Ministers from The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries who approach a Committee on Ministry for ministerial standing to serve in a UCC ministry setting may have a wide variety of ecclesiastical histories and expressions.

- A TFAM minister may request Dual Standing while serving in a UCC ministry setting for a limited time. The application process for Dual Standing is followed.
- A TFAM minister may request Ordained Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ to serve and to seek calls to UCC ministry settings, and to access the UCC search and call system with a UCC Ministerial Profile. After an initial interview and assessment, the Committee determines if the appropriate avenue for the person is the Member in Discernment process or the Privilege of Call process, based on demonstration of the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. After the Committee determines the appropriate process, that process is followed with the understanding that a TFAM minister is not required to relinquish their relationship, office, or title with The Fellowship of Affirming Ministries in order to seek or maintain ministerial standing within the United Church of Christ.

MINISTERS FROM OTHER COMMUNIONS

As a United and Uniting Church³² in partnership with other communions throughout the globe, the United Church of Christ is an important partner in mission and ministry with many different denominations. There are several other ecumenical agreements between the UCC and other denominations, both domestically and internationally.³³ If an ecumenical agreement does not specifically articulate mutual recognition of ministries and orderly exchange of ministers, then persons from those communions work with Committees on Ministry for authorization

³² United and Uniting Church: Churches and denominations around the world that have historically and/or are currently working to unite with other Christian churches and denominations are called “united and uniting churches.” These churches and denominations collaborate through the World Council of Churches, and they offer a distinct witness and response to Jesus’ prayer “that they may all be one” (John 17:21).

³³ Individual Conferences may have specific ministry agreements with domestic or international ecumenical partners that do not extend beyond the boundaries of that single Conference and therefore are not included in the UCC Manual on Ministry.

through the Member in Discernment, Privilege of Call, or Dual Standing process as appropriate, using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers as the standard for assessment and appreciating diverse paths of formation and diverse ways of knowing.

LOCAL AND ONLINE ORDINATIONS

Persons who identify themselves as ordained by the authority of single congregations, online organizations, and/or independent faith communities, and who seek ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ, may be extravagantly welcomed by a Committee on Ministry for a time of mutual discernment and formation assessment. The Committee uses the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers as the standard for assessment, appreciating diverse paths of formation and diverse ways of knowing. Many persons whose ordinations are not granted by a representative Body of Christ on behalf of the Church Universal will be most appropriately considered for the Member in Discernment process.

PRIVILEGE OF CALL

At times, ordained ministers from other Christian denominations seek to affiliate their lives and ministries with the United Church of Christ. The process of Privilege of Call is designed for an ordained minister who desires to leave their denomination of original authorization and become an Ordained Minister in the United Church of Christ.

Ordained ministers seeking to relinquish standing in their denomination of origin and to maintain exclusively UCC Ordained Ministerial Standing are generally routed through the Privilege of Call discernment process when they belong to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), The United Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Reformed Church in America, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, or other ecclesial organizations whose ministerial formation process is similar to the United Church of Christ. There are times when it is appropriate for a Committee on Ministry

There are rare cases in which a letter of good standing from the current denomination is not available to the Committee on Ministry. In these instances, it is incumbent upon the Committee to verify that there are no prior or ongoing ecclesiastical proceedings that would deem the minister unfit for standing in the United Church of Christ. Efforts in this regard should be well-documented and maintained in the minister's file.

to grant Member in Discernment status rather than Privilege of Call status, particularly if the person's previous ordination is granted by a non-denominational entity (e.g. local congregation or online organization) and/or if the person does not adequately demonstrate the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

Ministers seeking Privilege of Call apply to a Committee on Ministry, submitting a completed UCC Ministerial Standing application form.³⁴ Additional documentation may be required by a Committee on Ministry at the outset or throughout the Privilege of Call discernment process, such as:

- statement of the person's spiritual journey;
- statement of the person's understanding of their call into the United Church of Christ;
- letter of good standing from the ordained minister's current denomination;
- successful completion of an approved UCC History, Polity and Theology course;
- resume or portfolio, written with reference to the Marks;
- documentation of educational and professional training (such as transcripts), recognizing multiple paths of ministerial formation and appreciating diverse ways of knowing;
- psychological assessment;
- criminal background check;
- three written references of support for the person's application for ministerial standing.

The Committee completes an interview and an initial assessment based on the Marks, criminal background check, and psychological assessment. The Committee then determines if the minister should (1) move forward with the Privilege of Call process, (2) become a Member in Discernment, or (3) be declined

Committees on Ministry that receive requests for Privilege of Call from ordained ministers from other Christian denominations who hold governmental or professional endorsements should first contact the Endorsement Office of the UCC National Setting.

³⁴ See Section 3 for the UCC Ministerial Standing application form.

The use of Ecclesiastical Councils varies by Association. Although discernment processes are delegated by an Association to a Committee on Ministry, the purpose of an Ecclesiastical Council is for an Association to exercise its authority to approve (or not) a person for ordination and ministerial standing in the UCC.

from further exploration of Ordained Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ.

If the Committee affirms the continued discernment for potential Privilege of Call, the ordained minister is granted the ecclesial status of Seeking Privilege of Call, and the minister's status as "Seeking Privilege of Call" is recorded in the UCC Data Hub. The Committee outlines further steps for discernment, including required documentation, additional preparation specific to ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ, and ongoing reflection with the Marks. Once the Committee on Ministry is satisfied by its discernment and the completion of its requirements, the Committee recommends an Ecclesiastical Council for the final decision regarding ministerial standing.

The Ecclesiastical Council is a gathering of delegates on behalf of an Association to decide, on behalf of the United Church of Christ, for or against granting Ordained Ministerial Standing to an ecumenically ordained minister (pending the receipt of an authorizable call³⁵) following the affirmative recommendation of a Committee on Ministry. Those seeking Privilege of Call who receive negative recommendations (a *No* decision) from Committees on Ministry are not considered by Ecclesiastical Councils. An affirmative vote by an Ecclesiastical Council grants Privilege of Call status to the ordained minister.

Once Privilege of Call status is granted, membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ is recommended, recognizing that some ecumenically ordained ministers will not be able to join a Local Church until Ordained Ministerial Standing is granted. Privilege of Call allows an ecumenically ordained minister to complete and circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile; the status is renewed annually by the Committee on Ministry for a recommended maximum of four years, is not transferable, and can be removed at any time by the Committee based on (1) lack of ecclesial call and/or (2) unsatisfactory demonstration of the

³⁵ See Section 2 Article 5 for additional reflection on authorizable calls.

Marks or of the Ministerial Code while holding Privilege of Call status.

Once a minister with Privilege of Call receives an authorizable call³⁶ within a UCC ministry setting, as determined by the Committee on Ministry, then the Committee votes to grant Ordained Ministerial Standing. With standing granted, the status of Privilege of Call ends and the person relinquishes their standing in any other denomination. Ordained Ministerial Standing is then held exclusively in the United Church of Christ. If the calling body/ Local Church is located outside of the Association that oversaw the Privilege of Call process and granted Ordained Ministerial Standing, the minister must then apply for a transfer of Ordained Ministerial Standing to the Association where the calling body/ Local Church is located.

UCC Data Hub designations during the Privilege of Call process:



DUAL STANDING

There are occasions when an ordained minister of another denomination is called to serve for a season in a ministry setting of the United Church of Christ. Ordained ministers of another denomination who receive a call to serve in a UCC ministry setting can apply for Dual Standing to the Committee on Ministry where the ministry setting is located. Dual Standing is

³⁶ See Section 2 Article 5 for guidance on an authorizable call.

Section 2:2 Ordained Ministers from Ecumenical Bodies

In the past Committees on Ministry have granted licenses to ministers whose ordinations and/or processes of formation are not recognized by the United Church of Christ while those ministers are serving in UCC settings. It is now recommended that Committees on Ministry grant Dual Standing to ecumenically ordained ministers whose ordination processes are not formally recognized by the United Church of Christ while those ministers serve in UCC settings, if those ministers are not seeking Ordained Ministerial Standing.

A Committee on Ministry always retains the option of denying or removing Dual Standing even if employment is offered by a UCC Local Church. Local Churches are encouraged to review their constitution and bylaws as well as insurance coverage to verify whether ministerial standing is required for their pastor and/or ministerial staff.

a temporary standing in the United Church of Christ, valid only for the duration of the call. The application to the Committee on Ministry should include:

- a current criminal background check;
- a letter of good standing from the original denomination;
- a demonstrated knowledge of United Church of Christ history, polity, and theology;
- a demonstrated capacity to function in and appreciate the polity of the United Church of Christ.

Committees on Ministry meet with applicants for Dual Standing and complete an initial interview. This interview, in dialogue with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers, will determine the Committee's decision to say *Yes* to Dual Standing, *Yes, but* with additional requirements before granting Dual Standing, *No, but* with a decline but also an invitation to return after completing certain requirements, or *No* to Dual Standing. Once satisfied, the Committee on Ministry may grant Dual Standing for the duration of the call within the UCC ministry setting.

Oversight for ministers with Dual Standing is held primarily in the denomination of origin. A minister with Dual Standing is responsible for any requirements of maintaining standing in the United Church of Christ as established by the Committee on Ministry for its ministers (such as boundary awareness training, anti-racism training, and attendance at Association and Conference annual meetings). Not maintaining the requirements for standing may result in the removal of Dual Standing.

If a fitness concern is raised regarding an ordained minister with Dual Standing, the originating denomination must be made aware at the onset. Concurrent accountability processes by both denominations are not recommended, and all efforts for cooperation in such processes are encouraged. The choice of which denomination conducts such a review may be determined by such

factors including (but not limited to) the primary location of impact of the minister's actions, the capacity of either denomination to adjudicate the process, and the denominations' like-mindedness (or not) on whether the actions in question demonstrate a concern of ministerial fitness. A Committee on Ministry may receive the findings of an accountability process led by the denomination of primary standing, or it may undertake its own Fitness Review. Outcomes of a Fitness Review process by a Committee on Ministry can only affect ministerial standing within the United Church of Christ; a Committee may make recommendations but cannot mandate changes in standing for another denomination. If a fitness concern is raised and Dual Standing is removed without a UCC Fitness Review process, the UCC Data Hub record of the minister should be marked "standing removed with bias" and accurate records maintained within the minister's file.

Dual Standing can be removed by the Committee on Ministry at any time and is not transferable. Dual Standing does not grant an ecumenically ordained minister access to the UCC Ministerial Profile or to the UCC search and call system.

2 Ministerial Authorization

ARTICLE 3: ORDAINED MINISTERIAL STANDING

ORDAINED MINISTERIAL STANDING

In the history of the Church and in the confidence of God's call upon the lives of some persons to be set apart by the laying on of hands "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12), the commitment of an Ordained Minister to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church is prescribed and held accountable by the relationship of Ordained Ministerial Standing.

Ordained Ministerial Standing is the formal ecclesial relationship by which an Ordained Minister may represent the United Church of Christ to the Body of Christ and to the wider world. Through Ordained Ministerial Standing, the Ordained Minister demonstrates commitment to view their ministry as part of the whole ministry of the United Church of Christ and, in turn, the United Church of Christ (through the Association) commits to an Ordained Minister and claims their ministry as its own. An Association through its Committee on Ministry grants and holds ministerial standing; an Ordained Minister maintains standing in the Association where the Ordained Minister keeps their Local Church membership. Ministerial standing may be held in only one Association at a time. For Ordained Ministers serving as settled or designated Local Church pastors, membership belongs in the congregation they are pastoring and standing belongs in the Association of that Local Church. For Ordained Ministers serving in specialized settings, interim ministries, or ministries that are not geographically bound, ministerial standing is held by the Association where they have a Local Church membership.

Each Association sets its own requirements for continuing education. Qualifying continuing education might include:

- *seminary course work;*
- *training requirements of professional agencies;*
- *assigned readings;*
- *participation in clergy convocations/gatherings;*
- *practical ministry trainings.*

Section 2:3 Ordained Ministerial Standing

Specialized opportunities to maintain standing should be made available as appropriate for such persons as ministers in specialized settings, military chaplains, Ordained Ministers who are professionally retired, and others.

Ordained Ministerial Standing is a mutual relationship with defined systems of support and accountability that the Ordained Minister and Association engage together.³⁷ This relationship promotes an Ordained Minister's ongoing development in the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers and their faithful adherence to the UCC Ministerial Code. Associations have the responsibility of providing ample and diverse opportunities for their Ordained Ministers to meet the obligations of Ordained Ministerial Standing, which include but are not limited to:

- continuing education;
- diversity and anti-racism training;
- boundary awareness training;
- participation in processes of oversight;
- regular participation in the life of the Association and Conference.

Ordained Ministers, unless they have been granted Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing, must meet their Associations' requirements for ministerial standing. Ordained Ministerial Standing includes voting privileges in the Association and Conference where the Ordained Minister holds standing.

The expectations for ministerial standing are provided by a Committee on Ministry when it grants ministerial standing in its Association. Often those expectations are included in Three- and Four-Way Covenants³⁸ that also outline the obligations of covenantal relationship among a minister, their Local Church of membership, their ministry setting, and the Association. A Three-Way Covenant outlines expectations for the Local Church, the Ordained Minister, and the Association in relationship to each other. The Four-Way Covenant outlines expectations for the Local Church of membership, the Ordained Minister, the

A Committee on Ministry is not obligated to consider or grant Ordained Ministerial Standing whenever a ministry setting employs a minister. An employment agreement is negotiated separately between the ministry setting and the minister.

³⁷ See Section 2 Article 6 for recommendations of best practices for support and accountability.

³⁸ See Section 2 Article 5 for reflection on Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

Association, and the ministry setting (when not the Local Church) in relationship to each other.

Anyone with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ is obligated to meet the requirements of standing and to engage the processes of support and accountability even when a Three- or Four-Way Covenant is not engaged, regardless of whether they are employed, professionally retired, or between calls.

Ordained Ministerial Standing must transfer between Associations when an Ordained Minister moves their Local Church membership across Association boundaries, regardless of whether the minister has a new call with accompanying Three- or Four-Way Covenant, is on Leave of Absence, or is actively seeking a call. An Ordained Minister who is undergoing a Fitness Review may not transfer their standing; an Ordained Minister who is censured with a program of growth, suspended, or terminated may not transfer ministerial standing. Exempt Standing is the only form of ministerial standing in which Local Church membership can be held outside of the Association where standing is located.

During vocational seasons when an Ordained Minister steps away intentionally from public ministry, Ordained Ministerial Standing may be categorized in one of two ways, as determined by mutual discernment between the minister and the Committee on Ministry, with different implications for oversight and transferability:

- **Leave of Absence** is a type of standing for an Ordained Minister who is neither seeking nor engaged in professional ministry for a temporary season. Reasons to request Leave of Absence are diverse, such as vocational discernment or major life event. Leave of Absence may be transferred between Associations. Responsibilities and permitted ministerial functions during Leave of Absence are established in conversation with the Committee on Ministry where standing is held but may not negate the Ordained Minister's or Association's commitments of oversight.

- **Exempt Standing.** Ordination is understood as lifelong, however there may come a time when the public ministry of an Ordained Minister comes to a close, at which point an Ordained Minister may apply to their Committee on Ministry for Exempt Standing, covenanting to no longer perform acts of public ministry.³⁹ Exempt Standing includes an ongoing commitment to the covenantal relationship between the Ordained Minister and the Committee on Ministry, with relief granted to the minister from certain obligations of standing. This commitment is articulated through an Exempt Standing covenant.⁴⁰ In general, Exempt Standing releases Ordained Ministers from requirements such as boundary training and continuing education; ministers who hold Exempt Standing continue to be responsible for faithfully embodying the UCC Ministerial Code and are obligated to processes of oversight.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Leave of Absence is a ministerial standing for Ordained Ministers experiencing a prolonged life season when they are neither seeking nor engaged in professional ministry. Such a season might include family leave to care for a new child or an aging parent, study leave to begin an academic program, vocational discernment when a person reassesses their professional path, sick leave following a serious accident or health crisis, or other reasons. During such a season, Leave of Absence modifies the expectations for the ecclesial relationship between the Ordained Minister and their Association, in order to make room for life changes and/or vocational discernment.⁴¹

An Ordained Minister requests Leave of Absence in writing to the Committee on Ministry where they hold ministerial standing. In

³⁹ An Ordained Minister with Exempt Standing who has been celebrated by a Local Church with the title Pastor Emeritus may continue as Pastor Emeritus in title only, honoring their Exempt Standing by taking no active ministerial leadership role in that Local Church.

⁴⁰ See Section 3 for a sample Exempt Standing covenant.

⁴¹ Leave of Absence is not appropriate to Fitness Reviews or other Committee on Ministry accountability processes.

conversation with the Committee, expectations for the duration of Leave of Absence are outlined, including:

- the Ordained Minister’s continued responsibility for or temporary reprieve from standing requirements such as boundary training and continuing education;
- the Ordained Minister’s ongoing relationship with their Local Church of membership;
- the Ordained Minister’s authorization (or not) to provide pulpit supply, celebrate sacraments, officiate weddings and funerals, etc. during Leave of Absence;
- the agreed-upon method for renewing Leave of Absence annually (up to five years) and the next steps for both the Ordained Minister and the Committee on Ministry when Leave of Absence expires.

An Ordained Minister on Leave of Absence meets annually with the Committee on Ministry, and the Ordained Minister’s and Association’s mutual commitment to processes of oversight continue during the Leave of Absence. At the conclusion of a Leave of Absence, the Ordained Minister may request in writing to the Committee that they return to active Ordained Ministerial Standing or that they resign their standing. Prior to returning the minister to Ordained Ministerial Standing, the Committee ensures that the minister is current with (or has plans to become current within one year with) all standing requirements of the Association.

If a Committee on Ministry learns of circumstances in an Ordained Minister’s life or career for which Leave of Absence might be appropriate to provide a season of respite or reflection, the Committee may invite the minister into dialogue about the option of Leave of Absence. It is inappropriate for a Committee on Ministry to use or impose Leave of Absence as a penalty; Leave of Absence cannot serve the same purposes as program of growth related to a Fitness Review.

Leave of Absence is a ministerial standing, not to be confused with leave from employment or suspension of standing. Leave of Absence is a particular ecclesial relationship, granted by a Committee on Ministry during an Ordained Minister’s prolonged absence from active ministry, so the minister can make room for life changes and/or vocational discernment. Leave from employment is determined by an employer for reasons that may include but are not limited to administrative, short- or long-term disability, family needs, etc.

“Retired” is a word with financial and employment connotations; it is not an ecclesial word and it is not a form of ecclesiastical standing in the United Church of Christ. A minister who identifies as “retired” might be employed or not, might be drawing an annuity or not; however, a retired minister must still adhere to the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing as set forth by their Association’s Committee on Ministry, unless they have requested and been granted Exempt Standing. Similarly, an Ordained Minister does not have to be a person of retirement age to discern an end of their public ministry and to request Exempt Standing.

EXEMPT STANDING

Exempt Standing is a ministerial standing for Ordained Ministers who continue to affirm their ordination and commitment to the United Church of Christ, but who choose to no longer (or are no longer able to) engage in public ministry and do not plan to reengage public ministry in the future. This choice may be the result of vocational discernment as an Ordained Minister ends their ministry career and wider church engagement, the result of a significant change in health that ends their capacity for representative servant leadership on behalf of the United Church of Christ, or the result of other reasons. Exempt Standing is the only ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ in which an Ordained Minister may hold membership in a Local Church that is not located in the same Association where standing is kept.

Having discerned the need or readiness to set aside the public mantle of ministry, an Ordained Minister requests Exempt Standing and the release from the ongoing requirements of standing. The request for Exempt Standing should be considered with prayerful discernment by the Committee on Ministry alongside the Ordained Minister, as the granting of Exempt Standing is considered to be enduring—not a temporary season in one’s career.

If the Ordained Minister and Committee on Ministry discern together that Exempt Standing is appropriate, then in continued conversation the expectations for Exempt Standing are outlined,⁴² including:

- the Ordained Minister’s release from the requirements to maintain ministerial standing, such as boundary awareness training and continuing education;
- the Ordained Minister’s continued responsibility to the UCC Ministerial Code and processes of oversight, including annual updates of contact information (Information Review) and disciplinary processes as needed (Fitness Review);

⁴² See Section 3 for a sample Exempt Standing covenant.

- the Committee on Ministry's commitment to maintain annual contact (to provide the Information Review);
- the Ordained Minister's ongoing relationship with their Local Church of membership, which may be located in an Association other than their Association of standing;
- the Ordained Minister's covenant to refrain from public roles of ministry, including (but not limited to) providing pulpit supply, circulating a UCC Ministerial Profile, officiating at weddings and funerals, serving on Association or Conference committees, etc.

Although rare, reinstatement to Ordained Ministerial Standing may be requested by an Ordained Minister who has been granted Exempt Standing. Before reinstating Ordained Ministerial Standing, the Committee on Ministry seeks evidence of the Ordained Minister's current adherence to the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing (such as up-to-date boundary awareness training, continuing education, and anti-racism training), and engages the Ordained Minister in discernment conversations regarding the minister's desire to return to public ministry. The Committee on Ministry may grant or deny the request for reinstatement.

If a Committee on Ministry learns of circumstances in an Ordained Minister's life or career for which Exempt Standing might be appropriate, the Committee may invite the minister into dialogue about the option of Exempt Standing. It is inappropriate for an Ordained Minister to use Exempt Standing in order to avoid the requirements for maintaining ministerial standing if that minister intends to continue their role as a public minister. Likewise, it is inappropriate for a Committee on Ministry to use Exempt Standing in order to avoid engaging in a Fitness Review process for an Ordained Minister who may be preparing to depart (or has already departed) from public ministry.

TRANSFER OF MINISTERIAL STANDING

Ministerial standing is allowed and expected to move between Associations throughout the career and lifetime of an Ordained Minister. When an Ordained Minister moves their Local Church membership and/or enters into a call agreement which includes taking Local Church membership in an Association that is not their current Association of standing, ministerial standing must transfer between Associations so that support and accountability can continue.

Transfer of standing from one Association to another is initiated by the Ordained Minister, the originating Committee on Ministry, or the receiving Committee on Ministry.⁴³ The minister meets with the Committee on Ministry of the Association into which the person is moving. The Committee on Ministry that will receive the minister's standing requests the ministerial file from the originating Association. Upon receipt and review of the file, the receiving Committee votes whether to receive the minister's standing. This decision is communicated to the minister, to the originating Association, and to the appropriate Association or Conference administrator to transfer the record in the UCC Data Hub.

A Committee on Ministry may not complete a transfer of standing while an Ordained Minister is:

- under a Fitness Review;
- serving a program of growth as a condition of a Fitness Review that resulted in censure;
- serving a suspension of standing.

An Ordained Minister who has resigned their standing or whose standing has been terminated may not request a transfer of standing. Ecclesial statuses (such as Member in Discernment and Privilege of Call) do not transfer between Associations.⁴⁴

⁴³ See Section 3 for sample Transfer of Standing chart.

⁴⁴ See Section 2 Article 2 for eligibility of transferring standing of ecumenically ordained ministers.

TRANSFER OF MINISTERIAL FILES

In order to track and validate an Ordained Minister's standing, Committees on Ministry maintain ministerial files⁴⁵ for each person holding standing within their Associations. These files are critical in the work of support and accountability as documentation of the covenantal relationships among an Ordained Minister, their ministry settings, and the wider United Church of Christ. A ministerial file includes:

- record of Local Church membership;
- record of ordination;
- documentation of regular oversight proceedings;
- documentation of disciplinary proceedings (concluded Fitness Review materials are included as a packet in the file, to be accessed only as needed);
- dates of boundary awareness training and continuing education;
- most recent UCC Ministerial Profile;
- current Three- or Four-Way Covenant;
- Leave of Absence agreements (if any);
- Exempt Standing covenant (if applicable);
- copy of Ecclesiastical Endorsement (if applicable);
- credentials or ministerial standing related to ecumenical bodies (if applicable).

Ministerial files do not include materials collected during a Committee on Ministry's processes of discernment with a person holding an ecclesial status (e.g. Member in Discernment, Privilege of Call); these materials are maintained by the Committee on Ministry that conducted the discernment process and archived in perpetuity by the Committee or its Association. When the person is ordained and/or granted Ordained Ministerial Standing in the

⁴⁵ See Section 3 for Committee on Ministry best practices regarding ministerial files.

United Church of Christ, the documentation of ordination and ministerial standing comprise the start of the person’s ministerial file. If the person is declined ordination or ministerial standing, the documentation of the discernment process and of the Committee on Ministry’s decision is archived; the documentation is made available if, at a future time, the person requests to begin the discernment process anew, whether in the same or a different Association.

Ministerial files, including records of discernment and oversight processes, are the property of the United Church of Christ and may be shared as appropriate across settings and partnerships.⁴⁶ While persons may request and be granted access to their ministerial files for review under supervision, they may not retain the original or any copies of their ministerial files.

Transferable

- Ordained Ministerial Standing as part of:
new call, change in Local Church membership, Leave of Absence, Exempt Standing

Non-Transferable

- Privilege of Call
- Member in Discernment
- Seeking Privilege of Call
- Ordained Ministerial Standing during Fitness Review, censure, suspension, or termination
 - Resigned ministerial standing

LOSS OF STANDING

The loss of Ordained Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ may be the result of an oversight process by a Committee on Ministry or the choice by a minister to resign standing. Any request to return to ministerial standing must always be made to the

⁴⁶ Settings and partners include but are not limited to: the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team, the Office of General Counsel, Conferences, Associations, and ecumenical partners.

Association where standing was last held. Standing may be lost by the following actions:

- *Removal* indicates that ministerial standing is removed without bias for administrative reasons, such as the conclusion of a call for an ecumenically ordained minister serving in a UCC setting through Dual Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing;
- *Resigned* indicates the choice of an Ordained Minister to resign their standing, and the resignation is recorded in the UCC Data Hub as “with bias” or “without bias”;
- *Suspended* indicates that an Ordained Minister has temporarily lost standing as well as the authorization to minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ as part of an accountability process (Information Review or Fitness Review); the reinstatement of Ordained Ministerial Standing is dependent upon conditions outlined by the overseeing Committee on Ministry;
- *Terminated* indicates the permanent loss of ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ.

The phrase “without bias” may be selected in the Standing field of the UCC Data Hub upon a minister’s resignation of standing to indicate that the Committee has no concerns about the person’s fitness for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ. The phrase “with bias” may be selected to accompany a resignation that seeks to avoid or prematurely end an accountability process, and/or to indicate that the Committee has concerns about the person’s fitness or capacity for ordained ministry.

A person may not represent themselves to the Body of Christ or the world as a minister in the United Church of Christ without having standing in an Association. A person whose standing has been lost may not transfer between Associations. The loss of standing is recorded in the UCC Data Hub by designating the appropriate standing category. Records for persons who are removed, resigned (with or without bias), or terminated should be marked “inactive” in the UCC Data Hub.

REINSTATEMENT OF MINISTERIAL STANDING

An Ordained Minister may seek reinstatement of ministerial standing following the resignation or termination of standing only through the Association where standing ended. Upon receiving a request for reinstatement, a Committee on Ministry considers the circumstances surrounding the resignation or termination and reviews

the person's capacity for service on behalf of the United Church of Christ in light of the UCC Ministerial Code and the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. In situations involving prior disciplinary processes, the Committee's consideration includes the following, among other factors:

- the circumstances that gave rise to that concern and/or Fitness Review process;
- the degree to which responsibility for actions was/is taken;
- the perspective of those who have been harmed by the person's behavior.

If a minister resigned their standing in the midst of a Fitness Review or prior to the completion of a program of growth and returns to a Committee on Ministry to request reinstatement, the unfinished oversight process must be completed first before the Committee determines whether to grant reinstatement of standing.

UCC MINISTERIAL CODE

All persons with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ are expected to abide by the UCC Ministerial Code:

I acknowledge as the Church's sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior, and as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. I will look to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world.⁴⁷

Affirming that I have been called by God to be a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ and granted ministerial standing by the United Church of Christ, I agree to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church with integrity, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership in covenant with others.

Relying on the grace of God, I:

⁴⁷ Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

Covenant with God to:

- Lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.
- Demonstrate a sincere yearning for connection with the Triune God, expressed in prayer, worship, Bible study, retreat, and other spiritual practices.
- Affirm the importance of discernment in relationship to my call and, using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers, will continue to discern the nature of my call in community.
- Grow in faith, knowledge, and the practice of ministry through intentional continuing education, study, and devotional life.
- Cultivate a culture of call by nurturing the gifts of others in the Church and joining their gifts with mine in seasons of change and continuity for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ and the health of the Church.
- Honor the diversity of God's creation and work for the unity of the Body of Christ (John 17:21).
- Recognize the communal nature of God, ensuring that ministry does not happen in isolation.

Covenant with self and family to:

- Attend to my physical well-being by adopting a healthy lifestyle including diet, exercise, and rest, setting aside time for Sabbath and vacation.
- Steward my time, talents, and personal financial resources responsibly.
- Accept responsibility for all debts that I incur.

- Refrain from abusive behavior including abusive behavior toward others, the abuse of alcohol, drugs, or any other substance; to seek appropriate care for physical and mental health concerns; and to avoid addictive behaviors.
- Engage in sexually healthy and responsible behavior.
- Honor my family commitments, including my family's need for privacy and time together.
- Develop and maintain meaningful personal relationships outside of my ministry setting.

Covenant with the United Church of Christ to:

- Actively participate in the covenantal life and work of all settings of the United Church of Christ.
- Adhere to all requirements for maintaining ministerial standing as set forth by my Association, and abide by the terms of my call agreements and covenants with energy and vitality.
- Seek the counsel of others, including Conference staff and/or the Association Committee on Ministry, should divisive tensions threaten my relationship with those with whom I minister.
- Serve as an ambassador for the United Church of Christ, and participate in activities that strengthen its mission, vision, and purpose.
- Advocate for fair standards of compensation for all ordained and lay employees of the Church, and honor the search and call process of the United Church of Christ.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Within the United Church of Christ, search and call depends on a process within, across, among, and between Associations to make available UCC Ministerial Profiles when Local Churches seek new pastoral leadership. The UCC Constitution and Bylaws provide for an "open search," meaning that anyone who has been rightly granted access to the search and call system—especially but not only through the UCC Ministerial Profiles Portal—may request that a Conference submit their name to any search committee. The UCC Ministerial Profile is a denominational tool that verifies a person's eligibility to seek a call, as determined by the discernment and decisions of a Committee on Ministry.

- Seek to know, understand, and respect the diversity of opinions and people within the United Church of Christ, affirming that settings of the United Church of Christ speak to the church and not for it.
- Encourage and participate in the evaluation of my ministry, understanding and demonstrating that ministry is of and for the Church as it seeks to advance God's mission in the world.

Covenant with my ministry setting to:

- Preach and teach the gospel without fear or favor, regarding all persons with equal respect and concern, and undertaking to minister impartially.
- Honor all confidences shared with me, telling only those who need to know, what they need to know, when they need to know it.
- Steward church funds and property faithfully, while overseeing the administrative tasks of ministry with integrity.
- Speak the truth, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit any person nor using my position for unwarranted personal financial gain.
- Assess with care the implications of accepting gifts from congregation members.
- Not perform pastoral services within a congregation, or for a member of a congregation, without the invitation of the current pastor of that congregation.
- Neither interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor, upon my departure from a ministry setting; and to deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.

Covenant with all lay and ordained ministers to:

- Work cooperatively and collegially, with intercultural awareness.
- Stand in mutual relationships with colleagues in ministry, offering and receiving counsel and support with intentionality.
- Use technology and social media responsibly.
- Act to prevent and to report known or suspected cases of physical or sexual abuse or neglect.
- Attribute the sources of words and ideas that are not my own.
- Accurately represent my professional qualifications, education, experience and affiliations, acknowledging the limitations of my office, abilities, skills and competencies, and making referrals when necessary and/or appropriate.
- Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.

The commitment to the UCC Ministerial Code and to the covenantal relationships of ministerial standing safeguards and encourages continued excellence in ministry. Through mutual accountability, demonstrated through the faithful maintenance of Ordained Ministerial Standing, the witness of the United Church of Christ is strengthened, the Body of Christ is built up, and the good news of God's love is proclaimed to the world.

2 Ministerial Authorization

ARTICLE 4: MINISTERIAL STANDING FOR LAY PERSONS

MINISTERIAL STANDING FOR LAY PERSONS

For a variety of reasons, there are instances when an Ordained Minister is not available to represent and serve the Church. In such circumstances and in the confidence of the priesthood of all believers, lay persons may be called to bring their gifts and graces to particular roles in which they represent the United Church of Christ and for which the United Church of Christ, through an Association, provides support and accountability in a formal ecclesial relationship of ministerial standing. Through Lay Ministerial Standing, a lay person demonstrates commitment to view their season in ministry as part of the ministry of their Association on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and, in turn, the United Church of Christ through the Association lays claim to the particular ministry in which the lay person is charged to serve for a season and commits to that ministry's vitality.

Lay Ministerial Standing is a temporary, accountable covenantal relationship among the Association, the lay member, and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ. The expectations of ministerial standing are outlined in covenants.⁴⁹ When a lay person serves in a ministerial role for a Local Church as a representative servant of the United Church of Christ, membership is located in the Local Church being served,⁵⁰ and a Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant outlines the ecclesial expectations for the Local Church, the person with standing, and the Association in relationship to each other. For a lay person serving in a ministerial role beyond

⁴⁹ Sample Lay Ministerial Standing Covenants are available in Section 3.

⁵⁰ See the "Lay Ministerial Standing and Discernment" subheading in this article for an exception.

the Local Church as a representative servant of the United Church of Christ, ministerial standing is held by the Association where they have membership in a Local Church, and the Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant outlines the ecclesial expectations for the Local Church of membership, the person with standing, the Association, and the ministry setting in relationship to each other.

LAY MINISTERIAL STANDING

Most often, the circumstances in which an Ordained Minister is not available to serve in a priestly, pastoral, and representative role on behalf of the United Church of Christ—and to which a lay person might be called—arise in the life of the Local Church. In some congregations, the need is met by a Local Church’s discernment that one of its own lay members has the gifts and graces to respond to the specific need for a limited season. In other congregations, the Association is invited to help a Local Church identify a lay person within the Association who has the capacity and talent to meet the specific need for a limited season.

However and whenever such a lay person is identified, the congregation may approach its local Committee on Ministry to request Lay Ministerial Standing for the member it has identified to serve as a Lay Minister. This request is accompanied by the Local Church’s outline of the particular roles and tasks with which the Lay Minister is charged, the boundaries and duration of the season for ministry, the specific need for representative servant leadership on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and the desire (if applicable) for Lay Ministerial Standing to include authority for the Lay Minister to celebrate the sacraments in specified circumstances.

Overview:

Lay Ministerial Standing is limited to a single setting and for a recommended maximum of seven years, during which time the Association is responsible to engage in discernment with

Priestly: Providing sacramental leadership.
Pastoral: Holding responsibility for others’ spiritual care.
Representative: Demonstrating the public presence of the United Church of Christ.

the lay person and with the ministry setting or congregation. Lay persons who hold Lay Ministerial Standing participate in ecclesial systems of oversight and adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code; a Committee on Ministry may find it appropriate to offer specialized formation opportunities for Lay Ministers as part of the continuing education requirement of ministerial standing.

Lay Ministers are assigned an LMS Supervisor⁵¹ by their Committee on Ministry; the role of the LMS Supervisor is to provide quarterly support and guidance between the annual meetings of the Lay Minister with the Committee on Ministry.

Lay Ministerial Standing does not inherently include privileges of voice and vote in Association, Conference, or General Synod business any more than the voice and vote granted to all laypersons who are members of the United Church of Christ. Lay persons who hold Lay Ministerial Standing are not eligible for Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing and may not transfer standing across Associations.

Process:

When a lay member has been identified to meet the representative need of the United Church of Christ in a specific time and place of ministerial service, both the need and the person are introduced to the Committee on Ministry for its discernment of the appropriateness of Lay Ministerial Standing. The Committee on Ministry meets with the person, a representative of the congregation, and an Association or Conference staff person to determine if the identified need warrants Lay Ministerial Standing for a lay person to represent and serve on behalf of the United Church of Christ in a specific role and ministry setting, and to make provisions for four steps of ecclesial due diligence:

- a criminal background check;
- a self-disclosure form;

The Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant outlines the relationships among a lay person, a Local Church, and an Association for the season of a lay person's service.

⁵¹ Best practices for LMS Supervisors can be found in Section 3.

Section 2:4 Ministerial Standing for Lay Persons

- a psychological assessment;
- an interview with the Committee on Ministry to review the responsibilities of the call and the gifts and graces of the lay person to satisfy those responsibilities, as well as the expectations of the UCC Ministerial Code and the lay person's capacity to adhere to the Code.

Lay Ministerial Standing should not be granted before the lay person has signed a self-disclosure form, the Committee has reviewed the criminal background check and psychological assessment report, and an interview has been held.

A Committee on Ministry is not obligated to consider or grant Lay Ministerial Standing whenever a ministry setting employs a lay person. The capacity of the lay person to represent the United Church of Christ through a season of Lay Ministerial Standing informs the Committee on Ministry's decision. The scope and responsibilities of the ministry, as well as the representative need of the United Church of Christ in that role and place, determine if Lay Ministerial Standing is appropriate or if the role can be fulfilled by a lay person without the obligations of ministerial standing. The three qualities of an authorizable call⁵² shape the Committee on Ministry's assessment of the position: the call is covenantal, the call responds to the needs of the Church, and the call involves shared mutuality in ministry between the minister and the community.

If Lay Ministerial Standing is granted, a Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant⁵³ is written among the lay member, the Association, the Local Church, and the ministry setting if different than the Local Church, to outline the ecclesial commitments of all covenantal parties, the duration of the Lay Minister role, the requirements of ministerial standing, and the expectations of ongoing mutual discernment among the Association, the Local Church, and the lay member. Because the granting of Lay Ministerial Standing is understood to be a one-time occasion for a specific setting

⁵² See Section 2 Article 5.

⁵³ See Section 3 for sample Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant.

and season, the covenantal expectation of mutual discernment is necessary to assess:

- whether the lay person’s call by God and the Church might extend beyond the particular role and season to which they are granted Lay Ministerial Standing and thus warrant a Member in Discernment process, which may be undertaken concurrently while holding Lay Ministerial Standing; a continuing call beyond seven years and/or to new settings may indicate a call to ordained ministry, for example;
- whether the Local Church’s identified need for a Lay Minister might be served and resolved in the long term by the ministry setting’s engagement in revitalization tools, grants, shared ministry opportunities, closure or merger considerations, reorganization, and more; the health of a ministry setting or congregation that struggles to find or retain ordained clergy should be faithfully considered, for example;
- whether the search and call process might equip the Local Church to envision its pastoral leadership needs in new ways.

An employment agreement is negotiated separately between the ministry setting and the Lay Minister; the Committee on Ministry and Association staff may request to review the employment agreement in order to understand its alignment with the role and expectations drafted in the LMS Covenant. Any person who is granted Lay Ministerial Standing joins as a member of the Local Church to which they have been called. (See the “Lay Ministerial Standing and Discernment” subheading in this article for an exception.) In this way, the Local Church and the Lay Minister join together in discernment and in equipping one another for ministry.

For the duration of Lay Ministerial Standing, a Committee on Ministry is responsible for the ongoing support and oversight of

the Lay Minister, including the assignment of an LMS Supervisor who provides support and guidance on behalf of the Committee on Ministry. The processes of accountability that are outlined elsewhere in this Manual on Ministry apply for Lay Ministerial Standing.

- Information Reviews are recommended to be submitted at annual in-person meetings between the Committee on Ministry and the Lay Minister as an opportunity for ongoing assessment, ministry review, and standing renewal; the LMS Supervisor should also meet with the Committee on Ministry at the time of the Information Review.
- The ongoing requirements of ministerial standing—such as continuing education, boundary awareness, and anti-bias training—should be outlined clearly and could be tailored by the Committee on Ministry to suit the Lay Minister’s needs for practical training, theological and educational development, skill building, etc., depending on the Committee on Ministry’s and Lay Minister’s review of the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers; regional theological education programs and seminaries may be useful in providing these education and training opportunities.
- Periodic Vocational Support provides the opportunity for a Committee on Ministry and a Lay Minister to continue their ongoing discernment regarding the call of God and of the Church upon the gifts, skills, and person of the Lay Minister across time; peer support—whether in person or by online connection—is encouraged as another avenue of ongoing discernment and for collegiality during their season of ministerial service.
- Situational Support Consultations should be a ready tool that all parties of a Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant understand can be called upon to navigate conflicts or

missteps that arise during the season of Lay Ministerial Standing.

- Fitness Reviews are necessary when questions of fitness are raised about Lay Ministers; the Fitness Review process⁵⁴ should be followed faithfully by the Committee on Ministry and appropriately recorded in the Lay Minister's ministerial file.

The Lay Minister is likewise obligated to engage the processes of support and accountability for the duration of their Lay Ministerial Standing.

When a Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant ends, Lay Ministerial Standing also ends. Lay Ministerial Standing is not transferable.

LAY MINISTERIAL STANDING AND DISCERNMENT

There are two circumstances in which a Member in Discernment might simultaneously hold Lay Ministerial Standing as the result of being called upon to serve in a priestly, pastoral, and representative role where an Ordained Minister is not available to serve in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ:

1. when a Local Church has identified one of its members to serve as its Lay Minister, and while holding Lay Ministerial Standing the person discerns a possible call to ordination and enters a Member in Discernment process with the Committee on Ministry; if the Member in Discernment continues to serve as Lay Minister in that same setting, then the Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant is amended to acknowledge the Member in Discernment process;
2. when a Member in Discernment is identified as holding the gifts and graces to serve for a season in a ministry setting that otherwise cannot identify an Ordained Minister to serve on behalf of the United Church of Christ, with Lay Ministerial Standing granted by the Committee where MID status is located, only after the Committee

For a Member in Discernment asked to serve as a Lay Minister, the Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant assumes that a Committee on Ministry has not yet completed its discernment process with a Member in Discernment and thus includes continued goals for development. If the Member in Discernment has been approved for ordination pending call, the offer of employment can be considered as a possible ordainable call.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ See Section 2, Article 6.

on Ministry's review of the Member in Discernment's criminal background check, psychological assessment report, and self-disclosure statement; if the calling body is not also the Member in Discernment's Local Church of membership, the Member in Discernment's Local Church membership does not move but the Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant is written with transparency and collaboration of oversight responsibilities between the Member in Discernment's Committee on Ministry and the ministry setting's Committee on Ministry if located in a different Association.

Lay Ministerial Standing is not necessary for Members in Discernment who accept training positions (such as internships or clinical programs).

A Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant for a lay person who is also a Member in Discernment includes:

- the Member in Discernment's ongoing responsibilities to the discernment process with the Committee on Ministry,
- the continued relationship of discernment with their Local Church of membership,
- the requirements for maintaining Lay Ministerial Standing (such as continuing education, boundary awareness training, anti-racism training, and peer support groups),
- the expectations for regular meetings with a MID Advisor as well as an LMS Supervisor,
- the responsibility of oversight by the Committee on Ministry that holds the Member in Discernment's status.⁵⁵

When the Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant expires, Lay Ministerial Standing ends. The Member in Discernment process, which has been ongoing during the season of Lay Ministerial Standing, continues unless oversight processes have led a Committee on Ministry to decide otherwise.

⁵⁵ For ordainable calls, see Section 2 Article 5.

The oversight of a Member in Discernment who holds Lay Ministerial Standing is the task of the Association where the Member in Discernment process is being conducted. If a Fitness Review is called for a person holding Lay Ministerial Standing who is also a Member in Discernment, and the Fitness Review results in suspension or termination, both the Lay Ministerial Standing and the Member in Discernment status are terminated. If a lay member who has lost their Member in Discernment status and Lay Ministerial Standing in one Association requests to start the discernment process anew in another Association, the Association where Member in Discernment status was lost shares its files with the new Association.

MINISTERIAL FILES

When a lay person is granted Lay Ministerial Standing, a ministerial file⁵⁶ is created and maintained for the duration of the person's standing within their Association. These files are critical in the work of support and accountability as documentation of the covenantal relationships among Lay Ministers, their ministry settings, and the wider United Church of Christ. A ministerial file includes:

- record of Local Church membership;
- record of Committee on Ministry meeting that grants Lay Ministerial Standing;
- documentation of regular oversight processes;
- documentation of disciplinary proceedings (concluded Fitness Review materials are attached as a packet in the file, to be accessed only as needed);
- dates of boundary awareness training and continuing education;
- Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant;
- credentials or ministerial standing related to ecumenical bodies (if applicable).

⁵⁶ See Section 3 for best practices regarding ministerial files.

In addition to the ministerial file, a UCC Data Hub record must be created for a person granted Lay Ministerial Standing.

Lay Ministerial Standing does not transfer. If a lay person transfers Local Church membership into a new Association, and if the person requests to enter a Member in Discernment process or is invited to serve with Lay Ministerial Standing in the new Association, the ministerial file from the previous Association must be shared by the Association that previously granted Lay Ministerial Standing before a new status or standing is granted.

Ministerial files are the property of the United Church of Christ and may be shared as appropriate across settings and partnerships.⁵⁷ While Lay Ministers may request and be granted access to their ministerial files for review under supervision, they may not retain the original or any copies of their ministerial files. These materials are maintained by the Committee on Ministry and archived in perpetuity by the Committee or its Association.

LICENSED MINISTRY

Licensed ministry is an authorization⁵⁸ and standing for a lay person with specific pastoral duties in a Local Church for a designated time, under supervision, renewable annually at the discretion of a Committee on Ministry. Licensed ministry is a form of ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ that was created by the adoption of 1983-1984 amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws, and written into the 1986 edition of the Manual on Ministry. By definition, a Licensed Minister performs specified duties in a designated Local Church or within an Association, mainly preaching and conducting services of worship.⁵⁹

New licenses are not anticipated after 2018, and Committees on Ministry that review and renew existing licenses are

⁵⁷ Settings and partners include but are not limited to: the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team, the Office of General Counsel, Conferences, Associations, and ecumenical partners.

⁵⁸ The phrase “authorized minister” has been used to indicate an Ordained, Licensed, or Commissioned Minister.

⁵⁹ From the 1986/2002 Manual on Ministry.

encouraged to discern the appropriateness of ordination for those Licensed Ministers called to ongoing service in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers to assess a Licensed Minister's preparedness for ordination. General Synod's 2005 affirmation of multiple paths for preparation and formation toward ministerial authorization means that Licensed Ministers should not be unduly hindered from pursuing ordination if they demonstrate competency with the Marks. Committees on Ministry with currently Licensed Ministers can reflect upon the questions and definitions of "ordainable call" in Section 2 Article 5.

Processes of support and oversight that are outlined in the 2018 edition of the Manual on Ministry should be followed for all Licensed Ministers. Associations may grant voice and vote to Licensed Ministers; Associations may also, at their discretion, continue to recognize the voice and vote of Licensed Ministers following the retirement of those persons from their ministries. Licensed Ministers are not eligible for Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing and may not transfer standing across Associations.

Currently Licensed Ministers are obligated to the requirements of ministerial standing as set by their Associations and to participate in processes of support and oversight as outlined in this Manual on Ministry, adhering to the UCC Ministerial Code. Licensure is reviewed and may be renewed annually by a Committee on Ministry to continue a Licensed Minister's service in a particular ministry setting; a license expires if action to renew is not taken by the Committee on Ministry; a license ends when the person is no longer in the setting for which they were licensed; a license can be resigned or terminated as a result of Fitness Review concerns and proceedings.

COMMISSIONED MINISTRY

Commissioned ministry is an authorization⁶⁰ and standing for a lay person with specialized training and talent for a specific church-related non-sacramental ministry that is recognized by an Association as requiring a representative servant leader on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Commissioned ministry is a form of ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ that was created by the adoption of 1983-1984 amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws, and written into the 1986 edition of the Manual on Ministry.⁶¹ By definition, a Commissioned Minister is called and commissioned to a specific church-related non-sacramental ministry for which they are trained and in which the Church through the Association has a dedicated investment. Commissioned Ministers understand their particular skill sets and ministries as part of the whole ministry of the United Church of Christ, and, in turn, the United Church of Christ through the Association demonstrates investment in the particular ministry fields to which Commissioned Ministers are called. Currently Commissioned Ministers may transfer their standing across Associations for a new call that is within the same specialized field to which they were commissioned. Unless standing transfers to a new call, a commission ends when the current call to which a person was commissioned ends.

New commissions are not anticipated after 2018, and Committees on Ministry that review existing commissions are encouraged to discern the appropriateness of ordination for those Commissioned Ministers called to ongoing service in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. General Synod's 2005 affirmation of multiple paths for preparation and formation toward ministerial authorization, and the broadened understanding of "ordainable call," mean that Commissioned Ministers should not be

⁶⁰ The phrase "Authorized Minister" has been used to indicate an Ordained, Licensed, or Commissioned Minister.

⁶¹ From the 1986/2002 Manual on Ministry.

unduly hindered from pursuing ordination if they demonstrate competency with the Marks and serve in an ordainable call.

Currently Commissioned Ministers are obligated to the requirements of ministerial standing as set by their Associations and to participate in processes of support and oversight as outlined in this Manual on Ministry, adhering to the UCC Ministerial Code. A Committee on Ministry may find it appropriate to recognize specialized education opportunities and/or specialized professional membership groups as appropriate to meet the continuing education requirement of ministerial standing. A commission may be transferred to a new Association if the Commissioned Minister is called to a new position in the same field of ministry; a commission is resigned or Leave of Absence is applied for if a Commissioned Minister is not serving in their particular field of ministry; a commission can be resigned or terminated as a result of Fitness Review concerns and proceedings. Currently Commissioned Ministers who retire directly from commissioned ministry may be granted voice and vote at the discretion of their Associations.

Local Churches and Associations, as they have done through history, may locally commission a person or persons on their behalf for a designated role or task. A youth group, for example, may be commissioned by its congregation to a service project. A Local Church might commission its members who serve as General Synod delegates. An Association might annually commission the staff of its outdoor ministry program, or it might commission lay members who are serving as missionary educators in another country. Certain UCC-affiliated organizations similarly grant commissions. Such local commissions represent the ways in which the Body of Christ extends itself through the gifts and graces of its members, blessing them to particular work in the world. Local commissions are valued in the life of the United Church of Christ and in the celebration of the priesthood of all believers; however, they are not accompanied by ministerial standing and ecclesial responsibilities.

2 Ministerial Authorization

ARTICLE 5: CALLS, COVENANTS, AND ENDORSEMENTS

COVENANT

Covenant—the commitment of God to God’s people, of the people to God, and of the people to one another as the Body of Christ—is foundational to United Church of Christ identity and is at the heart of our governance. God’s covenant with creation and humankind inspires deep and binding commitment in relationships within and beyond the Church, “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). The covenantal relationships between parts of the Body of Christ are characterized by mutuality, transparency, accountability, and a desire to represent Christ together for the glory of God.

When a member of the United Church of Christ, in response to God’s call and with the affirmation of the wider Church’s discernment through a Committee on Ministry acting on behalf of an Association, is ordained and/or granted ministerial standing, the commitments of covenant are formalized among participating covenantal partners:

- the person who holds ministerial standing;
- the Local Church of which they are a member;
- the ministry setting to which the person is called;
- the Association through its Committee on Ministry.

These commitments are typically outlined as Three-Way Covenants and Four-Way Covenants (depending on a person’s employment and ministry setting); however, all persons who hold ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ—regardless of employment—bear responsibility to participate with mutuality,

Three- and Four-Way Covenants are named according to the number of covenantal partners.

While “call” has many meanings in the processes of discernment and ministerial authorization, here the word “call” refers to a ministry setting and role for which a person is gifted and qualified and in which they are asked to serve on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The “call” includes a call agreement (or employment contract) that outlines scope of work and compensation, among other details. A Three- or Four-Way Covenant is written separately from the call agreement.

transparency, and accountability in relationship to the above-mentioned covenantal partners.

The conditions and obligations of employment with a ministry setting are set by the employer, sometimes in the form of a call agreement.⁶² A call is not required to maintain ministerial standing; however, a call is required for a person to initially receive ministerial standing after the appropriate process of discernment with a Committee on Ministry. In order to be ordained, for example, a Member in Discernment who is “approved for ordination pending call” must first receive a call to an approved ministry setting; this is referred to as an ordainable call. Similarly, in order to receive ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ through Dual Standing or following the discernment process for Privilege of Call, an ordained minister from another ecclesiastical body must first receive a call to a UCC ministry setting that is considered by a Committee on Ministry to warrant ministerial standing; this is referred to as an authorizable call.

At the heart of any ordainable or authorizable call is covenant: the sacred commitment among the person with ministerial standing, the ministry setting, the Local Church, and the Association, to one another and to Christ, in order to faithfully and effectively minister together for the glory of God.

ORDAINABLE CALL

In ordination, the person makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic ministry, they continue the witness of Christ’s followers from New Testament times with responsibilities for the proclamation and continuation of the Christian faith and of the Church itself.

A Member in Discernment who is “approved for ordination pending call” must receive a call for representative, ministerial service before they are ordained to serve and to lead on behalf

⁶² Local Churches, Conferences, and ministers may obtain a sample call agreement through ucc.org/ministers. The Call Agreement Workbook, a resource for ministers and their ministry settings, can be purchased through uccresources.com.

of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal. The decision of whether a call is an ordainable call is empowered to Committees on Ministry on behalf of their Associations. When a Member in Discernment who is approved for ordination pending call has been invited to accept a position, the Committee on Ministry is charged with reviewing the position—including the setting and scope of work—to discern if the position serves God, Jesus Christ, the Church Universal, and the United Church of Christ in such a way that ordination is necessary. Not every call is an ordainable call, and not every employment setting necessitates the covenantal relationship and oversight of ministerial standing.

As ministry changes in the 21st century, the United Church of Christ and its Associations are coming to understand that the setting for an ordainable call may or may not be in the Local Church and may or may not include full-time compensation. Instead an ordainable call must demonstrate three essential qualities to the Committee on Ministry's satisfaction:

- **The call is covenantal.** In the United Church of Christ, no one does ministry alone. An ordainable call demonstrates clear connectedness with a Local Church (or in the case of a call beyond the Local Church, connectedness between the Local Church and the calling body), as the person being called to serve represents the commitments of the Local Church and the Association to a shared mission on behalf of the United Church of Christ. This commitment is illustrated in the creation of a Three- or Four-Way Covenant that documents the covenantal expectations of the person who will be ordained, the Local Church of membership, the ministry setting (if different from the Local Church of membership), and the Association.

Questions to ask while discerning the covenantal aspects of an ordainable call may include:

- ▼ Has the United Church of Christ through an Association demonstrated an ongoing commitment to this position

To be recognized as a calling body, an organization/ ministry setting/faith community typically must have: an identifiable structure of leadership and governance; a willingness to recognize and provide appropriate oversight for a person's ministry; and a commitment to participate fully in a Three- or Four-Way Covenant with the person, the Local Church, and the United Church of Christ through an Association.

and/or this ministry setting? If the commitment to this particular ministry is new, how have the Association and other potential covenantal partners demonstrated a plan to invest in the ministry over time? How does the Local Church show engagement with and support for the ministry and the position?

- ▼ How will the Ordained Minister show engagement with and support of the Local Church and the wider United Church of Christ?
- ▼ Does the United Church of Christ have a particular need for a representative on its behalf to this ministry setting? Is that need ongoing or temporary?
- **The call responds to the needs of the church.**⁶³ An ordainable call meets the needs of the Body of Christ for a representative of the United Church of Christ and of the Church Universal through priestly and pastoral servant leadership. The particular need that leads to an ordainable call relates to the whole and holy life of the Church, with responsibility for representing Christ and the Church and for equipping the Church's response to God's work in the world.

Some calls, including active duty military chaplaincy, have additional requirements in order for a person to meet the needs of the Church in that particular setting, such as several years of post-ordination experience, and therefore cannot be considered an ordainable call.

The call, whether to a Local Church or a setting beyond the Local Church, must be carefully reviewed for its intent, authenticity, and validity to serve the ongoing and expanding needs of the Church. A Committee on Ministry may be asked to consider calls to interim ministry, community organizing, or a wide variety of entrepreneurial ministry settings for ordination. The ministry setting, the Member in Discernment who is approved for ordination pending call, and the Association should articulate a sense of commitment to meet the identified need of the Church faithfully and effectively through this call.

⁶³ See Section 1 for "Needs of the Church."

Questions to ask while discerning the needs of the Church for an ordainable call may include:

- ▼ Do this position and ministry setting require a person who is ordained by the Body of Christ to serve in Jesus' name on behalf of the United Church of Christ? Do the position and ministry setting require the person to embody and proclaim the good news for all of God's children through preaching, teaching, and acts of loving-kindness?
 - ▼ Does this ministry setting ask the one who serves to nurture and empower a community through worship and sacraments, fellowship and mutual care, lifelong education and spiritual formation, pastoral presence and spiritual guidance? Does the position bear particular responsibilities to nurture and inform the Church itself?
 - ▼ Will the need of the Church for faithful and effective authorized ministers be met if this particular person accepts this particular call? Is the potential call considered to be within the Member in Discernment's capacities and capabilities?
- **The call involves mutuality in ministry between the minister and the community.** An ordainable call demonstrates tangible commitments to shared concerns and mutual accountability for the sake of sustained ministry. Whether a minister is serving in a Local Church or in a specialized setting, it is expected that there are ongoing structures of both support and accountability in place to encourage the long-term well-being of the minister and the ongoing viability of the ministry being undertaken.

Questions to ask while discerning the quality of mutuality of an ordainable call may include:

Section 2:5 Calls, Covenants, and Endorsements

Not every call is an ordainable call and not every employment setting needs the covenantal relationship and oversight of ministerial standing. There may be times when a position is employment but not a call. University instruction, for example, may be employment for which a Member in Discernment is qualified but for which ordination is not a professional requirement, and therefore it might not be an ordainable call. Seminary instruction, however, might be considered an ordainable call. Similarly, a position of Minister for Christian Education may be an ordainable call while the role of Sunday school teacher might not.

- ▼ Does the United Church of Christ have a particular need for oversight of the person called to this position? Do all of the potential covenantal partners have a shared understanding about the processes for accountability in this potential call, and are those processes outlined in a call agreement and Three- or Four-Way Covenant?⁶⁴
- ▼ Are the ministry setting and position structured to grow together mutually, informing, encouraging and challenging one another to the glory of God? (Internships, Clinical Pastoral Education residencies, and training positions, for example, are not considered ordainable calls due to the imbalances in mutuality; such ministry settings are intended to shape the person but are not structured to be shaped in return).
- ▼ How does the ministry setting attend to its own vitality over time and to the ongoing well-being of the person who is called to it? Regardless of whether the call is full-time or part-time, does the scope of work represent fair expectations of labor and clear commitments to time and compensation (for example, is a quarter-time pastor expected to be “on call” 24/7 for a congregation)?

Additional tools that can help a Committee on Ministry discern whether a call to ministry is authorizable include:

- prayer and discernment;⁶⁵
- the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers;
- position description and scope of work;
- call agreement/employment contract;
- Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

⁶⁴ See Section 3 for sample Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

⁶⁵ See Section 3 for the Discernment Travelogue.

AUTHORIZABLE CALL

An authorizable call is that call by which, following appropriate discernment processes, an ecumenically ordained minister is granted ministerial standing: Dual Standing, Ordained Ministerial Standing through Privilege of Call, or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing. An authorizable call refers to a call for which a person is tasked with representative, ministerial service on behalf of the United Church of Christ and through which a covenantal relationship of UCC ministerial standing is established.

The discernment of an authorizable call is a decision empowered to Committees on Ministry by their Associations. Such a decision considers both the local ministry context and the wider context of the United Church of Christ. Like ordainable calls, authorizable calls must demonstrate three essential qualities to the Committee on Ministry's satisfaction:

- **The call is covenantal.** An authorizable call demonstrates clear connectedness with the United Church of Christ (whether through a Local Church or a UCC-affiliated ministry setting), demonstrated in the creation of a Three- or Four-Way Covenant that outlines the covenantal expectations of the person who will hold ministerial standing, a Local Church, the ministry setting (if different from the Local Church), and the Association.
- **The call responds to the needs of the church.** An authorizable call meets the needs of the Church—the Body of Christ—for a priestly and pastoral servant to represent the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal, and to equip the Church's response to God's work in the world. Both the ministry setting and the ecumenically ordained minister seeking ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ articulate a sense of commitment to meet that Church's needs faithfully and effectively on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

When a Committee on Ministry is considering the appropriateness of an employment or ministry setting to provide an ordainable or authorizable call, it may be helpful for the potential ministry partners to draft a Three- or Four-Way Covenant as an exercise to review the scope of proposed ministry, mutual accountability and oversight, as well as the ways in which the call would require of the person an embodiment of Word and Spirit through preaching and teaching, rites and sacraments, justice and pastoral care.

- **The call involves mutuality in ministry between the minister and the community.** Outlined in a Three- or Four-Way Covenant, an authorizable call demonstrates shared expectations of ecclesial accountability and relationship among the minister, the ministry setting, and the United Church of Christ through its Association and/or Local Church, for the sake of sustained ministry. A call agreement or job description may be used to demonstrate mechanisms of oversight in the employment setting.

Tools that can help a Committee on Ministry discern whether a call to ministry is authorizable include:

- prayer and discernment;⁶⁶
- the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers;
- position description and scope of work.

Discernment of an authorizable call is also beneficial for a Committee on Ministry in conversation with an Ordained Minister who is considering Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing, in order to assess whether employment and/or entrepreneurial work indicate a ministry for which oversight is needed and in which the United Church of Christ understands itself to be represented.

THREE- AND FOUR-WAY COVENANTS

The sacred nature of shared ministry and relationship between a Local Church, an Association, the person who holds a form of UCC ministerial standing, and the ministry setting beyond the Local Church (if applicable) for the purpose of God’s mission is made explicit with a Three- or Four-Way Covenant.⁶⁷ Covenant—not only in writing but in all its forms—is meant to secure the well-being of God’s community and the Body of Christ. In the United Church of Christ, Three- and Four-Way Covenants are written to further the mutual ministry of all covenantal partners for the sake of God’s glory and on behalf of the United Church

⁶⁶ See Section 3 for discernment tools such as the Discernment Travelogue.

⁶⁷ See Section 3 for sample Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

of Christ. Accountability for healthy ecclesial relationships, good communication, and mutual concern for all participants is built into the fabric of the Three- or Four-Way Covenant in order to strengthen and encourage the ministry of each covenantal partner on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The authority and power of the Three- or Four-Way Covenant rests in the understanding of commitment and accountability on the part of each participant, believing that “as God gives God’s self to humanity for the sake of all, so Christians are called into covenant for the sake of one another rather than for one’s self.”⁶⁸

Three-Way Covenants outline ecclesial expectations, individually and in relationship to one another, of (1) the person with ministerial standing, (2) the Local Church of membership as the calling body, and (3) the Association.

Four-Way Covenants outline ecclesial expectations, individually and in relationship to one another, of (1) the person with ministerial standing, (2) the Local Church of membership, (3) the Association, and (4) the ministry setting as the calling body.

Three- and Four-Way Covenants are distinct from call agreements/employment contracts.

While the specific responsibilities in Three- and Four-Way Covenants can vary according to Association and ministry setting, some basic expectations are important to foster healthy relationships and communication among the covenantal partners and with God:

- Local Church responsibilities include participation in the Association and Conference (e.g. sending delegates to annual meetings and nurturing its own “culture of call” to identify members whose leadership gifts would bless the wider church); support of its members who are Ordained Ministers (pastors, ministers in specialized settings, and retired clergy alike) through pastoral relations and/or discernment committees; and appreciation for other

Three-Way Covenants are also valuable in non-employment seasons of an Ordained Minister’s career, for example while searching for a call or following retirement, especially if the minister is active in short-term opportunities such as pulpit supply or in volunteer capacities with the wider church. Adaptations of the Three-Way Covenant in such seasons outline the ecclesial relationship and expectations among an Ordained Minister, the Local Church of membership, and the Association.

⁶⁸ See Section 1.

In a church landscape where specialized and entrepreneurial ministries are multiplying, Four-Way Covenants are valuable to clarify and document the ecclesial relationships that support ministry beyond the Local Church. Those specialized ministers who should hold Four-Way Covenants include (but are not limited to) ordained ministers serving as judicatory staff, military chaplains, hospital and hospice chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty, etc.

settings beyond its own walls and programs as essential locations of ministry.

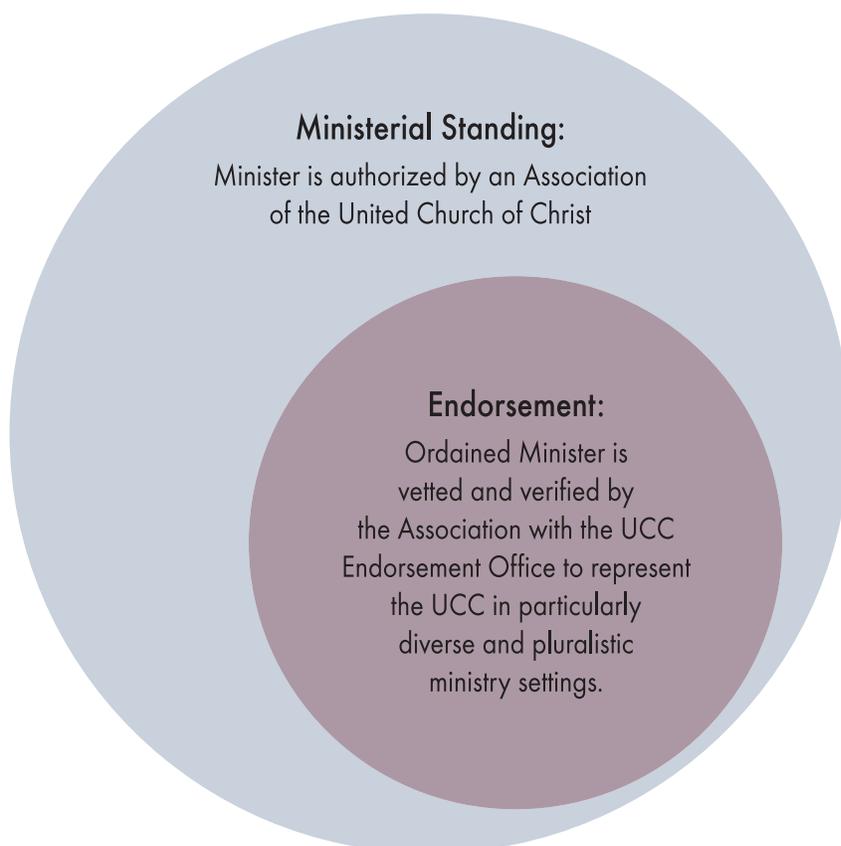
- Ordained Minister responsibilities include maintenance of ministerial standing, participation in the life of a Local Church and of the wider United Church of Christ, including financial support; and faithfulness to the UCC Ministerial Code and to the terms of a call agreement. Those ministers called to specialized settings are encouraged to engage and support their Local Church of membership through newsletter articles, annual reports, stewardship of their resources, and pastoral assistance if and when there is an appropriate opportunity.
- Association responsibilities include communication of expectations for ministerial standing; faithful exercise of oversight responsibilities, such as annual Information Reviews and opportunities for clergy renewal; the hosting of installation services; and participation in the wider United Church of Christ, including timely communication with other Associations' Committees on Ministry in matters of ministerial standing.
- Ministry setting responsibilities include fair terms of call/employment, written in proportion to the position's scope of work; affirmation of the Local Church as the locus of ministry and mission in the United Church of Christ; and communication with the Association as needed for support and oversight.

Occasionally, some ministry settings are unable to sign a Four-Way Covenant. In those situations, a Four-Way Covenant can be created using the minister's job description as a reference to outline support and accountability for all covenantal partners.

ECCLESIASTICAL ENDORSEMENT

While ordination and the granting of ministerial standing are the responsibility of Associations, the ecclesiastical endorsement of an Ordained Minister is the work of Associations through their Committees on Ministry in collaboration with the UCC Endorsement Office. Ecclesiastical endorsement is the assessment and verification of an Ordained Minister's standing, qualifying experience, and capacity to represent the United Church of Christ faithfully and sensitively in diverse and pluralistic settings. A person cannot be endorsed without ordination and Ordained Ministerial Standing. Ecclesiastical endorsement is sought by an Ordained Minister when required by an agency for ministry in that setting.

Many federal and professional agencies require a Master of Divinity degree in order to be considered for endorsement. If a Member in Discernment is considering ministry in a setting that requires endorsement, attention should be paid to endorsement requirements when establishing the preparation and formation plan.



Professional and governmental agencies that require endorsement set unique standards that are maintained and updated by those agencies. The ecclesiastical endorsement process of the United Church of Christ is wholly separate from the agencies' processes. At stake for the United Church of Christ in ecclesiastical endorsement is the faithful representation of the United Church of Christ in ministry settings where the community is diverse and pluralistic. It is therefore critical for the Ordained Ministers seeking endorsement to work closely with the Committee on Ministry, the Endorsement Office, and the Ecclesiastical Endorser of the United Church of Christ, from the beginning of their discernment.

There are two types of organizations that may require ecclesiastical endorsement of an Ordained Minister. The requirements for and processes of ecclesiastical endorsement to these organizations can be broadly outlined as follows:⁶⁹

Governmental endorsement regulations stipulate specifically which types of post-ordination experiences are required and the duration of those experiences. Because post-ordination experience is required by the government prior to endorsement, chaplaincy positions with the military, Veterans Affairs, or Federal Bureau of Prisons cannot qualify as ordainable calls. They may, however, be considered as authorizable calls to ecumenically-ordained ministers who seek ministerial standing through the process of Privilege of Call.

- **Governmental:** For military chaplaincy, chaplaincy in the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or chaplaincy in the Veterans Affairs health care system, Ordained Ministers work with their Committees on Ministry and the Ecclesiastical Endorser to complete the required documentation. Once the application materials are approved to be complete, the Committee on Ministry interviews the Ordained Minister and decides whether to recommend endorsement to the Ecclesiastical Endorser for the United Church of Christ. The final determination of endorsement is made by the Ecclesiastical Endorser, confirming that the person is specifically qualified to serve in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ in a governmental agency. Ecclesiastical endorsement may be removed at the discretion of the Endorser.
- **Professional:** In cases where persons are seeking ecclesiastical endorsement to pursue certification as a

⁶⁹ See Section 3 for specific endorsement requirements and procedures for various professional and governmental agencies.

chaplain or educator⁷⁰ through a professional agency, the person and their Committee on Ministry work with the UCC Endorsement Office to ensure that their documentation satisfies the endorsement requirements of the United Church of Christ. The Committee on Ministry grants the endorsement and sends the Letter of Endorsement to the UCC Endorsement Office. The Endorsement Office reviews and approves the application materials for completeness, stamps the seal of the United Church of Christ on the Letter of Endorsement, and sends it to the appropriate agency. Endorsement to a professional organization may be removed by the UCC Endorsement Office following the resignation of membership in the organization by the Ordained Minister, the termination of the minister's membership by the organization, the loss of ministerial standing as the result of an oversight proceeding, or the resignation of standing by the Ordained Minister.

Endorsement verifies that an Ordained Minister maintains their Ordained Ministerial Standing and has accrued the needed credentials and experience to minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ in diverse professional settings.

GOVERNMENTAL ENDORSEMENT

Overview:

Ecclesiastical endorsement for governmental agencies is primarily for those chaplains who serve in the military, the Federal Bureau of Prisons, or Veterans Affairs health centers, or for seminarians applying to a Chaplain Candidacy Program. For ecclesiastical endorsement to a governmental agency, the Committee on Ministry on behalf of its Association serves to recommend endorsement to the Ecclesiastical Endorser. The Endorser has

⁷⁰ Board Certified Chaplains are assessed and determined by the Association of Professional Chaplains. Certified Educators are assessed and determined by the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education.

the final and sole authority to grant (or remove) government endorsements on behalf of the United Church of Christ. An Ordained Minister seeking endorsement for a government agency, or a seminarian considering chaplain candidacy, should initially contact the Ecclesiastical Endorser to confirm if ecclesiastical endorsement is needed for a particular governmental position and to review qualifications. The application process for ecclesiastical endorsement begins with an Ordained Minister and their Local Church of membership. The Ordained Minister requests the support and consideration of their Local Church regarding their gifts and graces for a specialized ministry with a governmental agency. The Local Church governing body recommends the Ordained Minister to the Committee on Ministry for the ecclesiastical endorsement application process. With the Local Church's recommendation, the Committee on Ministry notifies the Ecclesiastical Endorser of the application it has received; the Ordained Minister, Committee on Ministry, and Ecclesiastical Endorser work closely together to achieve the timely and satisfactory submission of all application materials.

When the application materials are completed, they are submitted to the Committee on Ministry, which then votes to recommend (or not) the Ordained Minister to the Ecclesiastical Endorser for the final consideration of endorsement on behalf of the United Church of Christ. With its recommendation, the Committee on Ministry vouches that the Ordained Minister can minister faithfully and effectively in culturally diverse, theologically pluralistic, challenging ministry settings while representing the United Church of Christ to the wider Body of Christ and the world.

Ecclesiastical endorsement is a prerequisite for application to the government agencies noted above, and it is a necessary authorization for continuing to serve as a chaplain in these settings. Once endorsed, an Ordained Minister continues to be subject to all of the requirements of ministerial standing (such as boundary awareness training and continuing education) and oversight

processes with the Committee on Ministry in the Association where their standing is held.

1. Initiating the Endorsement Process:

After initially contacting the UCC Ecclesiastical Endorser, the Ordained Minister requests the support and consideration of their Local Church of membership regarding their gifts and graces for a specialized ministry with a governmental agency. After prayerful reflection, the Local Church governing body writes a recommendation to the Committee on Ministry in support of its member's request to apply for ecclesiastical endorsement. The Committee on Ministry, with the Local Church recommendation, notifies the Ecclesiastical Endorser of the applicant. The Ordained Minister, the Committee on Ministry, and the Ecclesiastical Endorser work closely together to achieve the timely and satisfactory submission of all application materials.

2. Application Documentation:

The Ordained Minister prepares the following materials for the Committee on Ministry and the Ecclesiastical Endorser in order to be considered for ecclesiastical endorsement:

- ecclesiastical endorsement application form,⁷¹ including the signed self-disclosure statement;
- letter from the governing board of the Local Church of membership, verifying participation in a Local Church life; this letter is to be no more than one year old;
- verification from the Committee on Ministry of the applicant's Ordained Ministerial Standing, with the date when ministerial standing was granted (shown by a copy of the ordination certificate and of the most recent Ordained Ministerial Standing certificate); for governmental chaplaincy positions, the applicant cannot be a Member in Discernment; in cases of an applicant who wishes to transfer endorsement from another denomination, the

When an ecumenically-ordained minister approaches a Committee on Ministry for Privilege of Call, including the transfer of their ecclesiastical endorsement from another denomination; the Endorsement Office should be notified immediately.

⁷¹ See Section 3 for ecclesiastical endorsement application form.

Ordained Minister must have completed the Privilege of Call process and be granted Ordained Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ; current ministerial standing must be accurately recorded in the UCC Data Hub;

- Summary of Interest paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, detailing the Ordained Minister’s motivation and call to the specific governmental chaplaincy setting, including:
 1. identification of the specific chaplaincy in which the minister hopes to serve;
 2. applicant’s interest and understanding of the ministry of the specific chaplaincy;
 3. applicant’s understanding of being representative of the ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ in their ministry setting;
- Faith Journey paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, reflecting on the Ordained Minister’s Christian commitment and conviction for ministry; the Faith Journey paper may excerpt the ordination paper at the discretion of the Ecclesiastical Endorser;
- three – four letters of reference, including one from a clinical ministry setting (such as a CPE educator), one from the applicant’s current ministry setting, and one or two from persons who have observed the Ordained Minister and are qualified to assess the applicant’s capacity for ministry in a government setting; letters should not be more than one year old;⁷²
- a current photograph of the applicant;
- copy of Three- or Four-Way Covenant from current ministry setting (if applicable);
- verification of Bachelor’s degree;

⁷² Signatures on all letters submitted with the application must be written in blue ink, so that original signatures are easily verified.

- verification of Master of Divinity degree;
- verification of at least one Clinical Pastoral Education unit;
- verification of ordained ministry experience, demonstrated through a resume; note that applicants must meet the post-ordination ministry experience requirements of both the United Church of Christ and the governmental agency to which they are applying:
 1. for the U.S. Armed Forces Active Duty, applicants for endorsement must have three years of post-ordination ministry experience;
 2. for Veterans Affairs and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, applicants must have two years of post-ordination ministry experience;
 3. for National Guard and Reserves, applicants must be ordained before they are endorsed;
- UCC Ministerial Profile, at the discretion of the Ecclesiastical Endorser.

3. Interview and Decision:

The Committee on Ministry receives and studies the materials provided by the Ordained Minister before setting an interview date. For the interview, the Committee may want to invite a chaplain from the respective government agency to be present, both to sharpen the questions being explored and to provide relevant information to the Committee and Ordained Minister. The purpose of the interview is to help the Committee consider and examine the following:

- Does the person faithfully meet the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing as established by the Association? How does the person demonstrate continuing growth related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers and specific growth in their field of ministry?

- Does the person meet the requirements set forth by the agency in which they wish to seek a call?
- Does the person have a realistic understanding of the specialized ministry field they seek to enter?
- Is the person adequately grounded in their spiritual habits, theological formation, and commitment to the values of the United Church of Christ?
- Can the person function in a ministry setting that is theologically and denominationally diverse? Has the person demonstrated capacity to work collegially in a team ministry?
- Will the person be an effective, faithful, and respected representative of the United Church of Christ as they serve in a government chaplaincy?
- Has the person explored with their family the implications of this ministry and its impact on family life, such as mobility and long periods of separation?

Additional questions that the Committee may explore with the Ordained Minister include:

- What is your understanding of the particular goals of this ministry, and why are those goals important to you?
- How do you understand this type of ministry in terms of your career in ministry?
- How will you continue to be a part of the United Church of Christ and participate in its ongoing life? How do you understand yourself as a representative of the United Church of Christ in this ministry setting?
- What is the distinctiveness of your ministry in this field?

Following the interview, the Committee on Ministry prayerfully makes its decision whether to recommend the ecclesiastical endorsement of the Ordained Minister. The Committee communicates its decision to the applicant and to the Endorser. If the

decision is affirmative, the Committee sends its recommendation letter along with all original application documentation to the Ecclesiastical Endorser, who holds the authority and responsibility to grant ecclesiastical endorsement to government chaplaincy.

4. Endorsement:

The Ecclesiastical Endorser reviews the recommendation letter and all application materials before determining whether to endorse the Ordained Minister on behalf of the United Church of Christ to chaplaincy with a government agency. The Endorser relays their decision to the Committee on Ministry and the candidate. If the decision is affirmative, the Endorser reports the endorsement to the UCC Endorsement Office and to the governmental agency; the Committee on Ministry or Association administrator updates the UCC Data Hub. In addition to the Committee on Ministry, the Endorser maintains records of all endorsed chaplains.

An endorsed Ordained Minister is responsible for completing any requirements as set forth by the governmental agency. Likewise an endorsed minister continues to be subject to all of the requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing (such as boundary awareness training and continuing education) and oversight processes with the Committee on Ministry in the Association where their standing is held.

Endorsements for branches of the military and other governmental agencies are not transferable between agencies. Ordained Ministerial Standing may transfer across Associations as appropriate. An Ordained Minister must initiate the endorsement process for each new endorsement they want to secure.

5. Continuation of Endorsement:

Those Ordained Ministers who have been granted ecclesiastical endorsement to and are continuously employed by governmental agencies are required to renew their endorsement only if requested by their supervisor or Commanding Officer in order to update or validate their existing file.

Those Ordained Ministers who have been granted endorsement to governmental agencies and are currently seeking employment must communicate with the Ecclesiastical Endorser annually for an interview, so that the endorsement might be renewed.

Once endorsed, an Ordained Minister and their Committee on Ministry maintain the appropriate ecclesial relationship of oversight and support, which can be clarified using a Four-Way Covenant. Likewise the Ordained Minister and the Local Church of their membership remain intentional in their relationship, especially when the Ordained Minister's chaplaincy takes them beyond the geographic boundaries of the Association. The Ordained Minister also keeps the Endorser informed of pertinent information about their duty assignments, including such information as change of mailing address.

If at any time an endorsed chaplain is subject to a Fitness Review, the Endorser is notified immediately; if an endorsed chaplain's ministerial standing is terminated or resigned, their ecclesiastical endorsement is terminated concurrently. Upon termination of military service, an Ordained Minister's ecclesiastical endorsement is withdrawn.

Request for Active Duty Endorsement:

An Ordained Minister who is endorsed for the Reserves or National Guard may request to have a new endorsement granted for Active Duty once they have accrued three years of post-ordination experience. The process to apply for Active Duty endorsement is identical to the governmental endorsement process. The Ecclesiastical Endorser determines whether to grant Active Duty endorsement based on the submitted application, new letters of reference (no more than one year old), and officer evaluation reports from the chaplain's commander.

Chaplain Candidate Program:

Chaplain Candidate Programs—specific programs for seminary students and sponsored by the Army, Navy, or Air Force—require

that a student be ecclesiastically endorsed for the Chaplain Candidate Program, even before their ordination. To become a Chaplain Candidate, a seminary student must be a Member in Discernment and complete the entire endorsement process satisfactorily, in addition to any requirements for program completion specific to the respective military branch.

The required documentation for a Chaplain Candidate applicant is the same as other applications for ecclesiastical endorsement to governmental agencies, excluding the Master of Divinity degree, the certification of CPE units, the ordination certificate, and the certificate of Ordained Ministerial Standing. Letters of reference should address the applicant's ability to perform ministry in diverse and pluralistic settings.

The UCC Endorsement Office must be notified immediately if a Committee on Ministry discontinues the Member in Discernment status of a Chaplain Candidate. Endorsement for Chaplain Candidates can be removed at any time by the UCC Ecclesiastical Endorser.

PROFESSIONAL ENDORSEMENT

Overview:

Ecclesiastical endorsement for certification in professional agencies is primarily for professional chaplains or educators, related to such agencies as the Association of Professional Chaplains and the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education. Ordained Ministers seeking ecclesiastical endorsement in order to pursue professional certification are expected to have three years of ministry experience, at least one of which is post-ordination. Ecclesiastical endorsement is granted by a Committee on Ministry based on its assessment of the Ordained Minister's capacity and capability to minister faithfully and effectively in culturally diverse settings of pastoral care, counseling, and education.

1. Initiating the Endorsement Process:

The Ordained Minister requests to meet with their Local Church of membership to discuss their sense of call to pursue professional certification through ecclesiastical endorsement. After prayerful reflection, the Local Church governing body decides whether to recommend the Ordained Minister to the Committee on Ministry for the ecclesiastical endorsement application process.

The letter of recommendation from the Local Church governing body is shared by the Ordained Minister with their Committee on Ministry and with the Endorsement Office of the National Setting, as the applicant informs both parties simultaneously of their intent to seek a specific level of membership or certification in a professional organization. The Endorsement Office and Committee on Ministry provide the Ordained Minister with the necessary application materials, guidelines, and related documentation for the endorsement process.

2. Application Documentation:

The Ordained Minister prepares the following materials for the Committee on Ministry in order to be considered for ecclesiastical endorsement:

- ecclesiastical endorsement application form,⁷³ including the signed self-disclosure statement;
- letter from the governing board of the Local Church of membership, indicating date of membership, verifying participation in the life of a Local Church, and recommending the Ordained Minister for professional endorsement; this letter is to be no more than one year old;
- verification from Committee on Ministry of the person's Ordained Ministerial Standing, with the date when ministerial standing was granted (shown by copies of the ordination certificate or of the most recent Ordained Ministerial Standing certificate); the applicant cannot be

⁷³ See Section 3 for ecclesiastical endorsement application form.

a Member in Discernment or an ecumenically ordained minister in the Privilege of Call process; current ministerial standing must be accurately recorded in the UCC Data Hub;

- Summary of Interest paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, detailing an Ordained Minister’s motivation and call to the specific professional chaplaincy setting, including:
 1. identification of the specific chaplaincy in which the minister seeks to serve;
 2. applicant’s interest and understanding of the ministry of the specific chaplaincy;
 3. Applicant’s understanding of being a representative of the ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ in their ministry setting;
- Faith Journey paper, 3 – 5 pages in length, reflecting on the Ordained Minister’s Christian commitment and conviction for ministry; at the Committee on Ministry’s discretion, the Faith Journey paper may excerpt the ordination paper or the faith paper for their certification application to the agency;
- three – four letters of reference, including one from a clinical ministry setting (such as a CPE supervisor), one from the Ordained Minister’s current ministry setting, and one or two additional letters; letters should not be more than one year old;⁷⁴
- copy of Three- or Four-Way Covenant from current ministry setting (if applicable);
- verification of Bachelor’s degree;
- verification of Master of Divinity degree;
- verification of at least one CPE unit;

⁷⁴ Signatures on all letters submitted with the application must be written in blue ink, so that original signatures are easily verified.

- verification of three years of ministry experience, including at least one year of post-ordination ministry experience.

3. Interview and Decision:

The Committee on Ministry receives and studies the materials provided by the Ordained Minister. Materials not completed in accordance with the endorsement guidelines and to the Committee's satisfaction should be returned for further improvement. The final and satisfactory application packet must be received by the Committee before setting an interview date. The Committee interviews the Ordained Minister, using the criteria for ecclesiastical endorsement and the provided application materials as the basis for discussion. The Committee may also invite a person who already has ecclesiastical endorsement in the same field to be present for the interview, both to sharpen the questions being asked and to provide relevant information to the Committee and the Ordained Minister.

The purpose of the interview is to help the Committee consider and examine the following:

- Does the person faithfully meet all of the current requirements of Ordained Ministerial Standing as established by the Association? How does the person demonstrate continuing growth related to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers?
- Does the person have a realistic understanding of the specialized ministry field they seek to enter?
- Is the person adequately grounded in their spiritual habits, theological formation, and commitment to the values of the United Church of Christ?
- Can the person function in a ministry setting that is culturally, theologically, and denominationally diverse? Has the person demonstrated capacity to work collegially in a team ministry?

- Will the person be an effective, faithful, and respected representative of the United Church of Christ in their particular ministry field?

Additional questions that the Committee may explore with the Ordained Minister include:

- What is your understanding of the particular goals of this ministry, and why are those goals important to you?
- How do you understand this type of ministry in terms of your career in ministry?
- How will you continue to be a part of the United Church of Christ and participate in its ongoing life? How do you understand yourself as a representative of the United Church of Christ in this ministry setting?
- What is the distinctiveness of your ministry in this field?

Following the interview, the Committee on Ministry prayerfully makes its decision whether to endorse the Ordained Minister, and communicates its decision to the minister and to the Endorsement Office. Granting ecclesiastical endorsement is an act of the Committee on Ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

4. Endorsement:

If the decision to endorse is affirmative, the Committee sends all original application documentation along with its Letter of Endorsement⁷⁵ to the Endorsement Office. Once the documentation and Letter of Endorsement are reviewed for completion, the Endorsement Office stamps the denominational seal on the Letter of Endorsement and the Letter is forwarded to the proper professional organization.

The Ordained Minister's original documents and a copy of the stamped Letter of Endorsement are returned to the Committee on Ministry to be maintained in the ministerial file. Some materials from the application may be appropriate to return to the

⁷⁵ See Section 3 for Letter of Endorsement templates.

Ordained Minister, as determined by the Committee on Ministry. At a minimum, the Committee on Ministry retains a copy of the stamped Letter of Endorsement for the ministerial file. The Endorsement Office also retains a copy of the stamped Letter of Endorsement for its records.

UCC professional endorsement is required to apply for, but does not guarantee, certification by a professional agency. An endorsed Ordained Minister is responsible for completing any continued requirements as set forth by the professional agency.

Those Ordained Ministers who have been granted endorsement to professional agencies and are seeking certification should be mindful that the stamped Letter of Endorsement has a one-year lifespan from the date of its stamp. If the certification process continues beyond one year, the Ordained Minister may request an extension from the Committee on Ministry for the lifespan of the Letter of Endorsement. Recently expired Letters of Endorsement may be reissued with the updated date and updated signatures, again with a lifespan of one year. The UCC Endorsement Office recommends no more than two reissues of expired Letters of Endorsement (for a total of three years), after which time the Committee should require the Ordained Minister to meet with the Committee on Ministry to discern appropriate next steps, which may include the discontinuation of support for professional endorsement or the re-initiation of the professional endorsement process.

An endorsed Ordained Minister and their Committee on Ministry maintain an ongoing ecclesial relationship of oversight and support, which can be clarified using a Four-Way Covenant. An endorsed Ordained Minister continues to be subject to all of the requirements of ministerial standing (such as boundary awareness training and continuing education) and oversight processes with the Committee on Ministry in the Association where their standing is held. Likewise the Ordained Minister and the Local Church of their membership remain intentional in their relationship. The Ordained Minister keeps both the Committee on Ministry and the

Endorsement Office informed of any pertinent updates about their ministries and of changes to their contact information; the annual Information Review can be completed to serve this purpose.

If at any time an endorsed chaplain is subject to a fitness review, the Endorsement Office is notified immediately; if an endorsed chaplain's ministerial standing is terminated or resigned, their ecclesiastical endorsement is terminated concurrently. The Endorsement Office notifies the affected professional agency.

5. Continuation of Endorsement:

The United Church of Christ requires that Ordained Ministers who have been granted ecclesiastical endorsement and are certified by professional agencies must apply to their Committees on Ministry every five years for a Letter of Continued Endorsement.⁷⁶ Professional agencies may require a Letter of Continued Endorsement more frequently. To apply for a Letter of Continued Endorsement, the Continuing Endorsement Application Form must be submitted to the Committee on Ministry along with the following materials:

- letter from the governing board of the Local Church of membership, verifying the Ordained Minister's ongoing participation in a Local Church life; this letter is to be no more than one year old;
- at least one letter of reference, preferably from a peer or supervisor in their ministry setting),⁷⁷
- copy of Three- or Four-Way Covenant from current ministry setting (if applicable).

The application is submitted to the Committee on Ministry, which reflects on the documentation and meets with the endorsed Ordained Minister.⁷⁸ Updated contact information is also shared

⁷⁶ See Section 3 for Letter of Continued Endorsement templates and Continued Endorsement Application Form.

⁷⁷ Signatures on all letters submitted with the application must be written in blue ink, so that original signatures are easily verified.

⁷⁸ When geographic distance and/or employment prohibits an endorsed Ordained Minister from meeting in person with the Committee on Ministry, flexibility and the use of technology are encouraged to arrange a meeting.

during the application process, and the UCC Data Hub is updated accordingly. If the Committee on Ministry grants the continuation of ecclesiastical endorsement, the Letter of Continued Endorsement is sent to the Endorsement Office of the National Setting for review and stamping.

LOCAL ENDORSEMENT

Ecclesiastical endorsement may be requested or required by a local organization—such as a hospital, state prison, city fire department, etc.—to verify an Ordained Minister’s capacity and capability to serve faithfully and effectively in that particular setting on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Endorsement to a local organization that does not require certification by a professional agency follows the same application process for professional endorsement, minus the relationship with and reporting to the UCC Endorsement Office. The Committee on Ministry considers the application for endorsement on behalf of its Association only, and only to that specific local organization. A copy of the endorsement letter is added to the ministerial file.

2 Ministerial Authorization

ARTICLE 6: ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT

ONGOING SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Because we belong to God, we belong to one another. Because we belong to one another and to God, we are accountable to our covenantal relationships on earth as in heaven. The covenantal relationships between parts of the Body of Christ are characterized by mutuality, transparency, accountability, and a desire to represent Christ together for the glory of God. These characteristics are particularly essential to—and are to be practiced with prayerful intentionality by—those who are authorized to hold ministerial standing and those who are entrusted with authorizing ministers on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

For the covenants of ministerial standing, oversight by a Committee on Ministry on behalf of the Association—with processes of support and accountability—is fundamental to all types of ministerial standing. Oversight serves to strengthen covenantal relationships, to provide relational support for those with ministerial standing as well as their ministry settings, to affirm or assess standing, and to promote ongoing discernment of and suitability for continued ministerial authorization. The underlying goal of all forms of oversight is to support ministerial excellence throughout the United Church of Christ.

Persons with ministerial standing⁷⁹ in the United Church of Christ are obligated to participate in an Association's processes of support and accountability in order to maintain standing. Associations

All processes of support and accountability require accurate recordkeeping. Depending on the Association or Conference, the responsibility for maintaining ministerial files and updating the UCC Data Hub may rest with Committee on Ministry or Association/Conference Office. Regardless of who holds this responsibility, communication among all judicatory partners and effective file maintenance are necessary. See Section 3 for best practices on ministerial files.

⁷⁹ Especially in Section 2 Article 6, the terms “minister,” “person with standing,” and “person who holds standing” are used interchangeably to indicate all persons with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ who are obligated to participate in processes of support and accountability.

through their Committees on Ministry are similarly obligated to provide sufficient opportunities for those with ministerial standing to fulfill these requirements. Committees must also maintain accurate committee records and ministerial files of oversight processes and ensure that the UCC Data Hub is updated appropriately.

Processes of support and accountability are the responsibility of Committees on Ministry in the Associations where standing is held. When first granting ministerial standing (through initial authorization or receipt of transferred ministerial standing) a Committee on Ministry communicates its requirements for maintaining standing, and the minister fulfills those requirements as evidenced in the annual Information Review. When the minister serves in a ministry setting that is located outside of their Association of standing, the need for intentional communication about the expectations of ministerial standing and the methods for participating in processes of support and accountability are especially critical.

OVERVIEW OF SUPPORT PROCESSES

The ongoing support of ministry by a Committee on Ministry includes providing (whether directly or indirectly) opportunities for those with standing to grow and to be healthy in their vocations with respect to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers and the UCC Ministerial Code. In support of those with standing, the Committee on Ministry encourages, hosts, and/or sponsors spaces for persons to reflect regularly on their ministries alongside peers, and to discern their ongoing sense of call in conversation with the Committee.

- **Vocational Support:** Ministry is never done in isolation. Committees on Ministry are key conversation partners in ongoing discernment of call as well as providing support mechanisms for clergy growth. Vocational Support from Committees on Ministry fall into two categories: ongoing and periodic.

“Healthy” is used holistically to include mental, physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, personal, and professional health, along with the wise integration of life and ministry, in order to serve effectively and faithfully on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

- ▼ **Ongoing Peer Support:** Committees on Ministry host or recommend opportunities for ongoing peer support so that those with standing build relationships on a regular basis with their colleagues in ministry. Those with standing are encouraged to seek out and engage in ongoing peer support.
- ▼ **Periodic Vocational Support:** Committees on Ministry designate time every three to five years to meet in person with those who hold standing in order to reflect together on their current ministries and ongoing vocational discernment. Such support is guided by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.
- **Situational Support Consultation:** The Committee on Ministry makes itself available as needed for Situational Support Consultation between a person with ministerial standing and the ministry setting to address circumstances or dynamics within the covenantal relationship that need support. Any partner in the covenantal relationship—the person with standing, the Local Church of membership, the ministry setting if separate from the Local Church, or the Committee on Ministry—may request a Situational Support Consultation. Situational Support Consultations are not appropriate when concerns are raised of possible unethical behavior or misconduct on the part of the person who holds standing.

OVERVIEW OF ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESSES

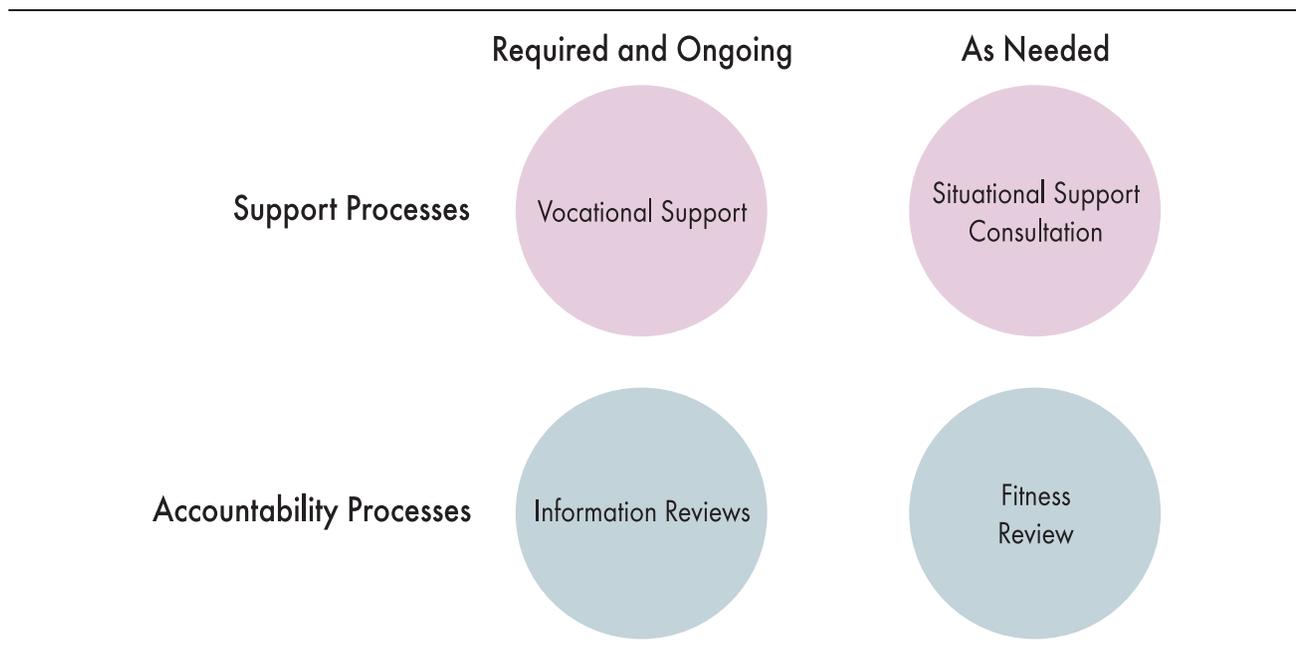
The purpose of accountability processes includes holding those with standing accountable for their conduct and assessing their continued qualification for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Processes for accountability and their frequency are recommended as follows:

- **Information Reviews** require those with standing to complete annually an Information Review form so that the Committee on Ministry can confirm each person's most up-to-date contact information and ministry setting.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ See Section 3 for a recommended Information Review Form.

(Committees on Ministry, through their Association or Conference administrators, are in turn obligated to keep current each person’s record in the UCC Data Hub.) Space is to be provided in Information Reviews to indicate which peer support, boundary awareness, and continuing education programs were completed in the past year, and the Committee on Ministry is encouraged to take advantage of the submission of Information Reviews to update persons with standing about upcoming opportunities to meet the standing requirements set by the Committee.

- ▼ **Boundary awareness** is required at least once every three to five years, with the Association hosting a diversity of opportunities on a range of boundary topics (sexual, financial, familial, social media, retirement, etc.).
- ▼ **Continuing education** is required annually, with the Committee on Ministry clarifying to those with standing what opportunities qualify as continuing education and whether particular topics must be engaged (e.g. anti-racism training every three to five years).



- **Fitness Reviews:** As needed, an accountability process may be conducted in response to questions regarding unhealthy behavior or misconduct of a person with standing in light of the UCC Ministerial Code. During a Fitness Review, those affected by the minister's conduct have the opportunity to share their stories, the person has the opportunity to share their perspective and to reflect on others' stories, and the Committee on Ministry determines whether the minister continues to have the capacity for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

SUPPORT PROCESS: VOCATIONAL SUPPORT

Vocational Support is designed to reduce isolation, honor the evolving call of the spirit, and provide for an ever-deepening relationship between the Committee on Ministry and those ministers who hold standing in that Association.

Ongoing Peer Support:

The purpose of Ongoing Peer Support is to build relationships on a regular basis among those with standing in an Association. Peer relationships are critical to ministerial health and growth, and regular support helps to prevent the need for Fitness Reviews. Associations may develop, host, or sponsor a variety of activities for Ongoing Peer Support, including but not limited to clergy retreats, communities of practice, Association ministeriums, etc. Ministers may also form or locate additional communities of peer support throughout the year, including but not limited to ecumenical groups, cohorts related to geographic location, and areas of common interest or field of specialized ministry. Ongoing Peer Support opportunities should be available throughout the year and participated in regularly.

Periodic Vocational Support:

The purpose of Periodic Vocational Support is to encourage the vocational development and ongoing discernment of those with standing. This meeting between a Committee on Ministry

and a person with standing, held once every three to five years, also provides an opportunity to strengthen UCC covenantal relationships and to clarify the Association's expectations for ministerial standing. Periodic Vocational Support is not intended to address fitness concerns.

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers serve as the primary tool for Periodic Vocational Support conversations.⁸¹ Additional questions that may serve to shed light on the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers might include:

- How does the minister view their spiritual and professional development?
- In what types of continuing education has the minister participated and found meaningful?
- Does this person have regular and trusted sources of support and feedback?
- How is the Local Church of membership supporting the minister's continued development?
- Does the minister have a sense of fulfillment in the current ministry setting and in their overall vocation?

Periodic Vocational Support is also a Committee on Ministry's opportunity to update those with standing on any new expectations and/or opportunities for maintaining standing with the Association.

As much as possible, Committees on Ministry should strive to hold in-person meetings for Periodic Vocational Support, while also offering flexibility in the method of meeting with those who hold standing in the Association but do not reside regularly in that Association (such as those in specialized or deployed settings). The precise structure of Periodic Vocational Support meetings may vary by Association, such as in-person meetings between those with standing and their Committees on Ministry, on-site meetings with representatives from a Committee on Ministry at a person's ministry setting, group meetings of several persons

⁸¹ See Section 3 for additional tools, conversation suggestions, and process recommendations.

who hold ministerial standing together with their Committee on Ministry to foster collegial support, and retreats hosted for ministers by the Association and attended as well by Committee on Ministry members.

Periodic Vocational Support may result in one or more outcomes, including:

- affirmation of a person's particular strengths in ministry and recommendations for their continued professional development;
- acknowledgment of a person's vocational struggles and encouragement for specific areas for vocational growth and/or discernment;
- encouragement for continued or improved care of self and personal relationships;
- connection to peer groups and networks;
- referrals for support resources appropriate to address difficult circumstances;
- a program of personal or vocational development that may be carried out in consultation with the Committee on the Ministry;
- referral to a Situational Support Consultation.

SUPPORT PROCESS: SITUATIONAL SUPPORT CONSULTATION

The purpose of a Situational Support Consultation is to address in-depth a particular relationship or situation of concern that has arisen between a person with standing and their ministry setting. This meeting may be requested by any covenantal partner: the person with standing, the ministry setting, or the Committee on Ministry. If concerns are raised of possible unethical behavior or misconduct on the part of the minister, a Situational Support Consultation is not appropriate and a Fitness Review should be considered.

Situational Support Consultations address areas that may impede faithful and effective ministry on the part of any covenanted ministry partner. A Situational Support Consultation should not be used in lieu of or to gather information for a Fitness Review. Fitness Reviews are designed to address violations of the UCC Ministerial Code by a minister with UCC standing. Situational Support Consultations can be referred to Fitness Reviews, and Fitness Reviews can give rise to Situational Support Consultations.

In a Situational Support Consultation, the Committee on Ministry seeks to clarify the specific issues or circumstances that have arisen, and helps to identify ways to promote effective and collaborative ministries in response to these circumstances. The desired outcome is for all covenantal partners involved to agree to a course of action that will be evaluated together at a specified later date.

When a Situational Support Consultation is convened, it is appropriate to include the covenantal partners most directly involved in the situation. Concerns leading to a Situational Support Consultation may vary widely, such as:

- a situation in ministry or life that may be hindering a person's capacity to practice ministry effectively;
- significant changes in life circumstances including deployment, birth or adoption of a child, death in the minister's immediate family, or significant changes in health;
- a concern involving varying expectations of priorities, direction, or effectiveness between covenantal partners;
- a concern involving changes to the terms of a call agreement;
- a concern about relational conflict that has arisen between a minister and their ministry setting, or certain members within that ministry setting;
- other issues or concerns involving the relationships between parties in Three- or Four-Way Covenants.

The Situational Support Consultation allows the Committee on Ministry to address issues in a nurturing, pastoral manner: clarifying the issues, determining the concerns that need to be addressed, and working toward a plan of action with all covenantal partners. If, during the course of the consultation, the Committee becomes aware of information that raises a question about ministerial misconduct, the Committee considers initiating a Fitness Review.

The precise structure of Situational Support Consultations may vary by Association and, more importantly, by the situation at hand. Most often, representatives from the Committee on Ministry meet with those involved to gather information about the situation and clarify the concern. The Committee may meet with the persons involved individually or in a group as the Committee prayerfully discerns the extent to which the identified situation impedes faithful and effective ministry and to explore available options for dealing with the situation. This process may take place over a series of meetings, held in the ministry setting or at the Committee on Ministry's meeting location or in a neutral environment.

Situational Support Consultations may result in several possible outcomes:

- *No further action required.* The concern is explored and the consultation provides sufficient opportunity for reflection by those parties involved and affected. No further action is needed.
- *Mutually agreed-upon plan of action.* The situation is explored and a plan is agreed upon to address or correct the situation, with checkpoints predetermined with the Committee on Ministry to review progress. The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers may be a resource in relationship to both the ministry setting and the person with standing when developing a plan of action or entering a season of discernment.⁸²
- *Advisory statement.* If all parties cannot agree to or follow a mutually agreed-upon plan of action, then the Committee on Ministry prepares an advisory statement about the situation to convey to those involved the Committee's best recommendations. The statement is shared with all involved covenantal members.

⁸² See also *A Sure Foundation: Resources for the Relationship Between Pastors and Congregations*.

- *Season of discernment.* As a result of this process it may become clear that a season of intentional discernment is needed for a ministry setting and/or the minister. A season of discernment may include opportunities for a ministry setting to engage in deeper conversations around its mission and ministry; for congregations especially this discernment may occur in dialogue with Conference or Association staff. A season of discernment may also include administrative leave (determined by the ministry setting as a matter of employment) or a Leave of Absence in dialogue with the Committee on Ministry. Many possible outcomes may result from a season of discernment, including (but not limited to) a recommitment to mutual ministry between the person and the ministry setting, a graceful closure of the mutual ministry, a commitment on the part of the ministry setting to fully address systemic dysfunction, or a graceful transition of the minister out of ministry. The Committee is a conversation partner in the season of discernment, encouraging faithful and effective ministry on the part of the ministry setting and the person with standing.
- *Referral to a Fitness Review.* If concerns regarding misconduct arise, a Situational Support Consultation may be referred to a Fitness Review.

ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS: INFORMATION REVIEW

The purpose of an annual Information Review is to provide current contact and ministry information to Committees on Ministry about each person who holds standing in that Association. The annual Information Review is a basic obligation to maintain ministerial standing, and it is usually accomplished through the use of a form that collects the following:

- the person's current contact information;
- current ministry setting (or confirmation that the person is: between calls but searching; not currently engaged in a

call but active in other ministerial services such as pulpit supply or Conference committee membership; on a Leave of Absence; holding Exempt Standing; etc.);

- Local Church of membership;
- most recent continuing education experience (with documentation as requested);
- most recent boundary awareness training (including documentation).

Persons who hold standing are obligated to participate in Information Reviews annually, and Committees on Ministry are obligated to provide annual communication to those with standing about the Information Reviews and to maintain up-to-date ministerial files and committee records (including ongoing cooperation to ensure regular updates to the UCC Data Hub).

Based on the information collected (or, at times, the lack of information collected), the annual Information Review may result in a variety of outcomes:

- *Standing affirmed.* All basic requirements for continued standing are met. The Committee updates records as appropriate.
- *Changes in ecclesial records.* Standing is affirmed; however, the Committee on Ministry notices significant changes from the previous year. The Committee initiates further communication to verify changes in ministry setting or ecclesial standing. The Committee may notice, for example, that a change in information indicates that ministerial standing should be transferred and it may initiate that process. The Committee files and UCC Data Hub are updated accordingly.
- *More information needed.* The use of the Information Review form by the minister does not clearly demonstrate that the requirements for standing are being met, and the Committee on Ministry contacts the minister for additional information.

The collection of the annual Information Review Form may be an opportunity for the Committee on Ministry to pray over the forms for the ministers and ministry represented on behalf of the Association.

- *Standing suspended or removed.* The requirements for standing are not being met for two or more consecutive years. The Committee on Ministry invites conversation and clarification with the minister regarding reasons why the requirements have not been met; a process of support or accountability may be appropriate at this time. Should the person refuse to participate or communicate, the Committee may vote to remove standing.

The annual Information Review may provide an opportunity for the Committee on Ministry to recognize significant ordination anniversaries, as well as an opportunity to communicate any changes in standing requirements or upcoming opportunities for fellowship and/or vocational support.

In the event that an Information Review (or lack thereof) reveals that the requirements of ministerial standing are not being met, the Committee on Ministry takes the following steps:

1. Committee on Ministry contacts the person with standing to indicate that the requirements for standing are not being met and/or that necessary documentation has not been submitted. The requirements for standing are emphasized, and opportunities to meet those requirements are highlighted. A grace period of six months is communicated clearly, during which time the minister is encouraged to meet the requirements they have missed. The Committee on Ministry documents its communication as well as the response of the minister.
2. If the individual continues not to participate in the requirements of ministerial standing, the Committee on Ministry chair and/or a Conference or Association staff member should reach out to the person to inquire about and respond to any pastoral needs that may affect the person's ability to participate in requirements of standing. Depending on the circumstance, the minister and the Committee on Ministry may discern that Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing is appropriate.

3. If, after the six-month grace period, the person has not fulfilled the requirements of standing and has not engaged the Committee on Ministry to make a plan for meeting those requirements, the person is considered to no longer be upholding their obligation to the covenants of ministerial standing. At this time the Committee may vote to suspend ministerial standing. The Committee clearly communicates its decision to the minister, warning of the potential for termination of standing and outlining options for meeting the requirements of ministerial standing (or recommending Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing, if appropriate). This communication is best sent by certified mail. The person's ministry setting and Local Church of membership are notified of the suspension, and the UCC Data Hub is updated. The person's Ministerial Profile is recalled, if in circulation. If the person complies with the requirements of standing within six months of this suspension to the Committee's satisfaction, the person will not be required to report this suspension on their Ministerial Profile in the future. These actions should be accompanied by an ongoing effort to address any pastoral needs of the person, which may affect the Committee's discernment about the person's capacity to meet the requirements of ministerial standing. Documentation of suspension and of renewed compliance with standing requirements are added to the Ministerial File.
4. If, six months after the conclusion of the grace period (one year after the Committee's first indication to the person that the requirements of ministerial standing have not been met), the person has not fulfilled the requirements of ministerial standing or re-engaged the Committee, the Committee on Ministry terminates ministerial standing (with bias) and communicates their decision to the minister, to the ministry setting, and to the person's Local Church of membership. The UCC Data Hub is updated to indicate the termination.

Suspension: if ministerial standing is suspended and the minister is not currently engaged in a Three or Four-Way Covenant, it is expected that they will refrain from all ministry-related activities, including service on a Conference-wide committee or pulpit supply.

5. If the person seeks to have their ministerial standing reinstated, they must return to the Committee on Ministry that terminated their standing. Even if later reinstated, all terminations of standing must be reported on subsequent ministerial profiles.

ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS: FITNESS REVIEW

“Fitness” is used holistically to describe the demonstration of integrity and ethics throughout a person’s personal and professional behavior.

A Committee on Ministry may conduct a Fitness Review on:

- persons with Ordained Ministerial Standing, including those on a Leave of Absence or with Exempt Standing;
- persons who hold Lay Ministerial Standing;
- persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing serving in UCC contexts;
- persons with Dual Standing.

Conference Ministers are subject to a slightly different Fitness Review process; see Section 3. Concerns about a Conference Minister’s behavior and/or fitness for ministry should be directed to the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

A Fitness Review is a serious proceeding that involves a reassessment of a person’s overall fitness for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. For this reason, it is important that a Fitness Review be thorough so that a Committee on Ministry can be fully informed in its discernment and decision in response to an identified concern. Such careful thoroughness is intended to ensure faithfulness and integrity in the deliberation of persons’ ministerial standing, and effective representation of the United Church of Christ through those to whom it grants ministerial standing. In matters of Fitness Reviews, the Committee acts in and on behalf of the entire United Church of Christ.

The process of a Fitness Review balances appropriate confidentiality with transparency. Confidentiality requires that the Committee on Ministry share information only with those who need to know at the time they need to know, and that some details of a Fitness Review are not shared broadly. Confidentiality does not guarantee anonymity for those involved in the Fitness Review. For the sake of transparency and accountability in covenant, all parties in the Fitness Review process—the minister in question, the ministry setting, the one(s) who raised the concern, the Committee on Ministry, the Response Team members, and Association/Conference staff—are expected to act within the scope of the Fitness Review process according to their roles and responsibilities.⁸³ Transparency also requires that the Committee on Ministry shares information about Fitness Review outcomes with its Association (for example, through reports to the Association Annual Meeting), with other Associations

⁸³ See Section 3 for resources on the Fitness Review process and the roles of various judicatory partners.

through the ministerial file if ministerial standing is transferred for the person at a later date (only after the Fitness Review with any related obligations has reached its conclusion), and through the UCC Data Hub. Above all, confidentiality and transparency are necessary to convey the Committee on Ministry's sense of responsibility to a process that is thorough and fair so that its outcomes are trusted.

Before initiating a Fitness Review, a Committee on Ministry should ensure that the Fitness Review process is not used to address concerns unrelated to a person's fitness for ministerial standing.

The following roles and responsibilities related to a Fitness Review should be clearly identified and followed:

- The recommended role of a **Conference/Association staff member** is that of coordinating—and assigning, as needed—the various roles within a Fitness Review process and encouraging timeliness in the process.
- The **person raising a concern** is encouraged to participate in the Fitness Review process appropriately. The person raising a concern is invited to be interviewed by the Response Team. Refusal to do so, while it may impede the gathering of information, does not affect the Committee's responsibility to fully investigate the concern raised. If circumstances arise where there is no clearly identified person raising a concern, the Committee on Ministry can still proceed with a Fitness Review, gathering information as appropriate. A written complaint is not required to initiate a Fitness Review. Aside from the person who originally raises the concern, additional persons with information related to the concerns may be interviewed by the Response Team.
- The person whose ongoing fitness for ministerial standing is under review—identified as the **minister in question**—is obligated to participate in the oversight processes of the

Organizational structures for Committee on Ministry vary throughout the United Church of Christ. Many Conferences utilize Unified Fitness Review Committees that adjudicate on behalf of each of the Association Committees on Ministry within their Conference. See section 3 for resources on Unified Fitness Review Committees.

For the purposes of oversight processes, the terms "minister" and "minister in question" are used to indicate all those who hold any form of ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ.

United Church of Christ with the Committee on Ministry. Failure to participate in the Fitness Review process (such as the failure to sign or abide by the confidentiality notice, or the refusal to be interviewed by the Response Team or the Committee on Ministry) is a failure to participate in the covenantal relationships of ministerial standing as required by the UCC Ministerial Code and is grounds for termination of standing at the conclusion of the Fitness Review.

- The **Committee on Ministry**, on behalf of the Association, is the body that receives a fitness concern, receives and discerns over the report of the Response Team, meets with the minister in question as well as the person raising the concern, determines the appropriate outcome of the Fitness Review, monitors programs of growth (if appropriate), and determines ministerial standing in light of the Fitness Review outcome.
- The **Conference or Association staff member** works with the Committee on Ministry to identify, train, and support a pool of **Response Team** members—persons not currently serving on the Committee on Ministry—who can ably serve in two roles:
 - ▼ an **Interview Team**, usually composed of two or three persons who interview those with information related to the concern, gather documentation related to the concern (such as letters, emails, receipts, photographs, etc.), draft interview summaries for review by those interviewed, and share interview summaries and documentation with the Committee on Ministry;
 - ▼ **Process Guides**, serving as information liaisons from the Committee on Ministry to the person raising the concern, to the minister in question, and to the ministry setting where the minister in question serves (with one Process Guide assigned to each person/party). Process Guides provide information about the Fitness Review

Response Teams are cohorts of persons outside of the Committee on Ministry who are trained to observe and report while reserving judgment.

process as appropriate and answer questions; they may also refer persons/parties to additional resources.

- Although not obligated to do so, the Committee on Ministry may identify spiritual support for the minister in question and the person raising the concern. Those providing spiritual support are not involved in the Fitness Review process; they do not advocate to or meet with the Committee on Ministry on behalf of persons affected by the Fitness Review. Their role is to provide pastoral care and spiritual guidance if such support is not already in place for the minister in question and person raising a concern.
- Although not obligated to do so, the Committee on Ministry may identify a cultural consultant to inform the Committee's understanding and discernment. A cultural consultant is a person who helps to observe differences in cultural norms when those attributes are not already present within the Committee on Ministry. A cultural consultant might take a teaching role to help the Committee consider a person's context—whether the minister in question or the person raising the concern—in order to relieve that person from the work of teaching the Committee.

Once a Fitness Review is underway, the person raising a concern and the minister in question are informed of the process that will be followed. Their pastoral care by persons unrelated to the process is encouraged by the Committee.

If a person chooses to resign standing in order to avoid a Fitness Review process, the process must be suspended. Ministerial standing cannot be reinstated without resuming the incomplete Fitness Review.

1. Information Surfaces

Concerns about the ministerial ethics, behavior, and/or ongoing capacity to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code of a person with

If needed, Committees are encouraged to obtain additional information in order to review the redacted case and/or conduct the Fitness Review, seeking information from secular authorities, cultural consultants, ecumenical judicatory staff, or other sources as necessary. Legal representation of the minister in question, person raising the concern, or other persons interviewed is not permitted in the Fitness Review process.

The initiation of any Fitness Review must be reported in a timely manner to the UCC National Setting. Ministerial Profiles cannot be validated or circulated during the adjudication of a Fitness Review, and ministerial standing cannot be transferred during this time. The National Setting updates Fitness Review information in the UCC Data Hub about the minister in question.

Circumstances in which a Committee on Ministry needs to transfer the adjudication of a Fitness Review include: when multiple Committee members must recuse themselves from the process, and when a Committee member, Conference Minister, or supervising Associate Conference Minister is the subject of the Fitness Review. Unified Fitness Review Committees also need to transfer Fitness Review adjudication in these circumstances. The National Setting supports Committees in such transfers.

standing should be taken seriously and not dismissed without careful consideration and response. While a question about ministerial behavior may surface as the result of a formal complaint, this is not always so. Concerns may be raised and information received through other means, such as social media or news reports or a documented conversation with Conference staff, and the person who raises the concern might or might not have a direct relationship with the minister in question or the ministry setting. Deliberate follow-through enables the Committee to responsibly address the faithfulness and effectiveness of all ministers in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Once a concern is received, the Committee on Ministry chair and an Association or Conference staff person determine whether the information provided is sufficient for the full Committee to decide whether the concern is most appropriately addressed through a Fitness Review or referred to another ecclesial process. This initial assessment is not an investigation or assessment of the concern but rather a clarification of the information and a determination of appropriate next steps. If the concern relates to ministerial fitness, the Committee chair and Association or Conference staff person create a redacted case to take to the Committee.⁸⁴

2. Committee on Ministry Makes Initial Decision(s)

The whole Committee on Ministry receives the redacted case, prayerfully considering whether the identified concern is a matter related to the UCC Ministerial Code and asking: “If this concern is found to be true, does it call into question the person’s fitness for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ?” If *Yes*, the Committee votes to initiate a Fitness Review. If *No*, the Committee determines whether a Situational Support Consultation is appropriate. Once the Committee determines *Yes* or *No*, the identity of the minister about whom the concern was

⁸⁴ Redacted case: A brief summary of the concern that has been raised, excluding (to the extent possible) any identifying details of the person, the ministry setting, or those affected, so that the Committee on Ministry can consider the concern without bias for or against those involved.

raised is revealed to the Committee. This identification allows for Committee on Ministry members to recuse themselves from the Fitness Review if appropriate⁸⁵ and/or for the Committee to transfer adjudication of the Fitness Review as needed. If another Association, Conference, or Unified Fitness Review Committee will conduct the Fitness Review, the Committee on Ministry votes at this time to transfer the process to, and to accept the outcome from, that other body, agreeing not to pursue its own investigation.

In some instances, a Committee on Ministry may choose to suspend the ministerial standing of the person under review, pending the outcome of the Fitness Review. This decision is based on the need of the United Church of Christ (as assessed by the Committee on Ministry) not to have the person in representative servant leadership during the course of the Fitness Review. Separate from the Committee on Ministry's decision, in some instances a ministry setting or employer may choose to put the minister in question on administrative leave until the outcome of the Fitness Review is reached. Administrative leave (or employment termination) is a decision of the ministry setting or employer, not the decision of a Committee on Ministry. (Administrative leave should not be confused with Leave of Absence, which is a type of ministerial standing.)

3. Committee on Ministry Prepares Fitness Review

The Committee on Ministry (or other adjudicating body) reviews the Fitness Review process, including appeals; summarizes the concern by framing it within the UCC Ministerial Code; and recuses any members with conflicts of interest. The Committee identifies Response Team members from within the pool of trained volunteers to serve as Process Guides and Interview Team. The Committee creates an initial list of questions to be asked by the Interview Team and an initial list of persons to be interviewed. The Committee chair and/or Association staff person reviews the

⁸⁵ See the recommended conflict of interest policy in the Committees on Ministry Orientation Booklet in Section 3.

Fitness Review process with the Response Team and provides the Response Team with documentation related to the concern.

The Committee on Ministry chair or Association staff member, in conversation with the assigned Process Guide, contacts the minister in question as soon as possible following the Committee's vote to initiate the Fitness Review. They inform the minister of the Fitness Review process, share the summarized concern, introduce the Process Guide, inquire about the minister's systems for spiritual support, have the minister sign the confidentiality notice,⁸⁶ and answer any questions about the process.

The Committee chair, Association or Conference staff member, and/or Process Guide speaks with the person who raised the concern in order to inform them of the Fitness Review process, to clarify the confidential nature of the process, to have the person sign the confidentiality notice, and to answer any questions about the process.

The Committee chair, Association or Conference staff member, and/or assigned Process Guide contacts the ministry setting's leadership to notify them of the Fitness Review and to request a meeting with the governing body. At the meeting, the summarized concern is shared, the Fitness Review process is explained, and the leadership is supported in determining whether and how the rest of the ministry setting will be notified of the Fitness Review. If the Local Church of membership is different than the ministry setting, the leadership of the Local Church is also informed at this time. The Association or Conference staff member notifies the National Setting's Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team of the initiated Fitness Review. If the minister in question holds ecclesiastical endorsement, then the UCC Endorsement Office is informed directly once a Fitness Review is initiated.

4. Information Gathering

The Interview Team gathers relevant information about the concern, meeting with the person raising the concern, persons

⁸⁶ See Section 3 for Fitness Review Confidentiality Notice.

from the ministry setting as needed, others whose names emerge in the interview process who may have relevant information, any additional persons identified by the Committee on Ministry, and finally with the minister in question.⁸⁷ The Interview Team makes a detailed summary of each interview, which is shared with the respective interviewee for their clarifications and signature. Public records and other documentation that confirms information from the interviews may also be gathered by the Interview Team.

The minister in question is last to be interviewed and has the opportunity to review (but not retain copies of) the interview summaries in order to respond to the identified concerns.⁸⁸ The Interview Team makes a detailed summary of the interview and shares it with the minister in question for their clarifications and signature. Occasionally during the course of a Fitness Review, patterns of behavior or specific actions contrary to the UCC Ministerial Code surface that may or may not directly relate to the original concern. The Interview Team includes this new information into its process, and the Committee on Ministry considers the information in its discernment and decision-making.

5. Committee on Ministry Deliberation

The Committee on Ministry receives the collected information from the Response Team and considers it prayerfully alongside the UCC Ministerial Code. The Committee meets with the Response Team to clarify details of the interviews as needed and to thank them for their work.

The Committee on Ministry prepares for, schedules, and hosts a deliberation meeting during which both the minister in question and the person raising the concern have a separate opportunity to share their perspectives with the Committee and to address questions. If either party declines to participate in the process,

⁸⁷ Best practices for Interview Teams can be found in Section 3.

⁸⁸ If, in the Interview Team's work, the minister in question or other interviewee identifies previously un-interviewed persons who may have relevant first-hand information, the Interview Team may schedule additional interviews.

the Committee includes this information in their deliberation and continues to move forward in determining the outcome. The Committee prayerfully considers all information. Questions for reflection include: Were the specific concerns found to have merit? Is the minister in question currently fit to hold ministerial standing in and to serve on behalf of the United Church of Christ? What is the rationale for this decision? Based on the Committee's deliberations, what outcome is discerned to be appropriate?

The Committee on Ministry makes its decision regarding the fitness of the minister to continue serving in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ and the capacity of the minister to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code. Fitness Review outcomes are reported to the National Setting's Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team and noted in the ministerial file.

6. Outcomes

Outcomes of a Fitness Review include:

- *Affirmation of Standing.* The minister's current fitness for ministry is affirmed. This is an appropriate outcome when the specific concerns were unfounded or unsupported by the information available to the Committee, or when the identified concern is not a fitness matter.
- *Admonishment.* The concern is found to have validity and acknowledged by the minister as a mistake; the Committee on Ministry likewise determines that the behavior is not habitual. There is evidence that the minister in question has already made acts of repentance and has taken steps to demonstrate their responsibility for the behavior in question, including measures to avoid similar mistakes in the future. A program of growth is not required, the admonishment is not reported on the UCC Ministerial Profile, and the person's ministerial standing is reaffirmed.

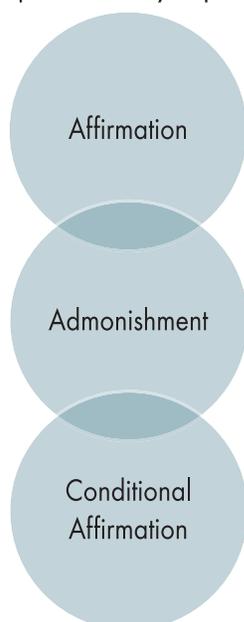
A program of growth should include specific, realistic, and measureable goals that address the identified concern(s). Such goals consist of clear expectations for actions to be taken or ceased, as well as clear expectations for outcomes of those actions, all of which must take place prior to the review and potential reaffirmation of standing. Programs of growth should also include a timeline for review. If a program of growth is not completed to the satisfaction of a Committee on Ministry or according to the timeline, new benchmarks may be set and the reaffirmation of standing may be delayed or termination of standing may be considered. See Section 3 for sample programs of growth.

- *Conditional Affirmation of Standing with Program of Growth.* The concern is found to be true, affecting overall demonstration of one or more aspects of the UCC Ministerial Code. The Committee determines that the person may continue in their ministry but that constructive growth and healing must be undertaken at the same time, to be reassessed by the Committee at a future date. Using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers alongside the UCC Ministerial Code, the Committee creates a program of growth to address specific concerns. Conditional affirmation must be reported on the person's UCC Ministerial Profile until the program of growth is completed to the satisfaction of the Committee on Ministry. Those with conditional affirmation and a program of growth may circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile with disclosure of a current program of growth, and may transfer standing, including the transfer of the program of growth after clear communication between the sending and receiving Associations' Committees on Ministry. Following the successful completion of a program of growth, the Committee reviews and may reaffirm the minister's standing. Once standing has been reaffirmed, conditional affirmation no longer is required to be disclosed on the Ministerial Profile.
- *Censure with Program of Growth.* The concern is found to have validity, affecting overall demonstration of one or more aspects of the UCC Ministerial Code. The Committee determines that the person may continue in ministry but that the actions were severe enough or habitual enough to warrant a permanent record on their UCC Ministerial Profile. In addition, using the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers alongside the UCC Ministerial Code, the Committee creates a program of growth to address specific concerns raised in the Fitness Review. A censure does not permit the person to circulate

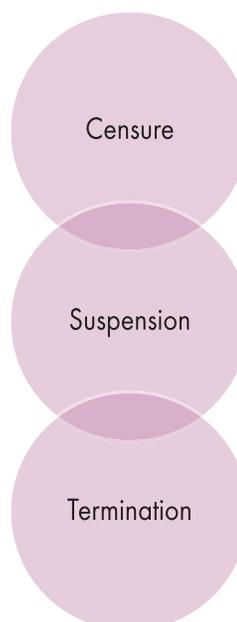
a ministerial profile until the Committee is satisfied with the completion of the program of growth. Censure must be reported on a UCC Ministerial Profile in perpetuity. Following the completion of a program of growth, the Committee reviews and may reaffirm the person's standing or may determine that further action is required.

- *Suspension of Standing with Program of Growth.* The concern is found to have validity, and the Committee determines that the minister is not currently fit for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. A program of growth is created and agreed upon, with reassessment by the Committee at a future date. For the duration of the suspension, the minister may not represent themselves as serving in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and the minister may not circulate a UCC Ministerial Profile. Suspension must be reported on the UCC Ministerial Profile in perpetuity. Following the completion of a program of growth, the Committee may reaffirm standing, continue suspension with a revised program of growth, or terminate standing, as determined by the Committee on Ministry's reassessment of the minister's fitness to maintain ministerial standing.
- *Termination.* The concern is found to have validity, and the Committee on Ministry determines that the person is not currently and is unlikely to become fit for ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. Standing is terminated, and the person may no longer represent themselves as a minister of the United Church of Christ. If reinstatement of standing is sought at a later date, the person must return to the Committee on Ministry in the Association where standing was terminated, at which time the Fitness Review and its outcome are factors in a Committee's reconsideration of ministerial standing.

Outcomes not permanently reported



Outcomes permanently reported on the UCC Ministerial Profile



7. Alternate Conclusions to a Fitness Review

In addition to the above decisions, there are two other ways in which a Fitness Review might conclude:

- *Referral to a Situational Support Consultation.* The minister's current fitness for ministry is affirmed, and the concern is referred to a Situational Support Consultation. This outcome is appropriate when, after examining the gathered information, the Committee on Ministry finds that the concern does not call into question a minister's capacity to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code but identifies a concern that can be addressed more appropriately through a Situational Support Consultation.
- *Resignation of Standing.* At any time in a Fitness Review, the minister in question may resign their ministerial standing, at which point the Fitness Review process cannot finish. The resignation is received by the Committee on Ministry, and it is recorded in the UCC Data Hub (with

A person who has resigned their ministerial standing or had their standing terminated by a Committee on Ministry cannot represent themselves as a minister of the United Church of Christ.

After the determination of an outcome by a Committee on Ministry, the minister and those who are affected by the behavior of a minister may desire to engage together in relational (but not ecclesial) processes that seek reconciliation and restoration. Such processes are the choice of those parties and not to be construed or represented as ecclesial actions of the Committee on Ministry on behalf of its Association. These processes should not interfere with the Committee on Ministry's work in a Fitness Review and—if engaged by some or all parties—are to be held only after an outcome is determined. See Section 3 for suggested resources related to restorative processes.

bias), noting the incomplete Fitness Review. Prior to any consideration of reinstatement of standing at a later date, the incomplete Fitness Review must be addressed to the Association where the person resigned standing. Reinstatement of standing requires the completion of the Fitness Review process.

8. Decision Communicated

The Committee on Ministry conveys its decision first to the minister in question, preferably in person by a representative of the Committee. The representative provides information as needed about the decision, any program of growth, and appeal process; this same information is provided to the minister in question in writing for their signature. When a program of growth is required, a copy of the growth plan is provided and a signature is required from the minister in question. The refusal of the minister to sign these documents is considered a refusal to participate in the covenantal relationships of ministerial standing, and the Committee may choose to terminate standing based on this refusal.

The Committee on Ministry then conveys the outcome of the Fitness Review to all covenantal partners, including the ministry setting (with which a copy of the growth plan is shared, if there is one), the Local Church of membership, the person raising the concern, the Association, the Conference, and the National Setting. The appropriate release of Fitness Review information is not hindered by the refusal of a minister under review to sign documents, as the process and documentation are the property of the United Church of Christ. The documentation of the Fitness Review itself is held in a packet within the ministerial file, with a summary report attached to the packet.

9. Programs of Growth

When a Committee on Ministry discerns that a program of growth is an appropriate part of a Fitness Review outcome, the Committee

considers: What changes need to be demonstrated by the person to the Committee before they can be reaffirmed to ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ? Are there specific actions that need to be taken by the person to right wrongs (such as written or verbal apologies, repayment of financial debt, etc.)? What timeline is anticipated for assessing the program of growth? What tools, resources, or contacts will enable the minister to achieve the growth necessary to faithfully and effectively minister in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ?

The program of growth should have specific goals that facilitate the person's self-knowledge and help the minister understand the conditions that gave rise to misconduct. A comprehensive program of growth takes into account the vulnerability of the minister as well as the harm done to others, providing opportunities as appropriate for a minister to take responsibility for their actions and to develop preventative strategies against similar actions in the future. Effective programs of growth are holistic and hopeful, believing that persons can rededicate themselves to effective ministry alongside healthy life and relationship choices. Psychological assessment is typically included in programs of growth, as well as therapeutic work and/or spiritual direction. Costs for such services are typically borne by the minister.

10. Fitness Review Appeals⁸⁹

An appeal may be requested by the minister in question within thirty days of the Committee on Ministry informing the minister of the Fitness Review outcome. Appeals may be based only on the Committee on Ministry's faithfulness in executing the Fitness Review process; outcomes are not appealable. The Fitness Review is the only ecclesial process of Committees on Ministry that may be appealed.

If the request for an appeal is granted, following its bylaws and the UCC Manual on Ministry, an Association holds a meeting

⁸⁹ Section 3 includes recommendations for a Fitness Review Appeal Process and Media Guidelines during a Fitness Review.

of its appeal body, giving opportunity for both the minister under review and the Committee to address the procedures used in (and purported failures of) the Fitness Review process. The purpose of the meeting of the appeal body is not to re-examine the information but to determine whether the process used by the Committee was consistent with the Fitness Review process adopted by the Association. If the process was consistent, the appeal is denied. If the process was not consistent, the appeal is sustained, and the appeal body directs the Committee on Ministry to review and reenact as appropriate the action or step in the Fitness Review process that has been found to be inconsistent, following the adopted process of the Association. Information obtained by reviewing or completing the identified actions or steps may impact the discernment and final outcome decided by the Committee.

11. Reinstatement of Standing

Following a resignation or termination of ministerial standing, a person may seek reinstatement of standing through the Committee on Ministry of the Association where standing ended. If the Committee on Ministry chooses to consider the request, it convenes for a time of discernment and considers the following:

- the circumstances of the resignation or termination of standing;
- whether and how the person exhibits the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers as well as a capacity to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code;
- the perspective of those who may have been harmed by the person's behavior;
- the degree to which responsibility for previous actions is acknowledged;
- any other relevant information.

If a person resigned ministerial standing in the midst of a Fitness Review or prior to the completion of a program of growth, those processes must be completed before the reinstatement of standing can be considered by the Committee on Ministry. If standing is reinstated, the person must fully disclose the previous termination or resignation of standing on the UCC Ministerial Profile in perpetuity.

Fitness Reviews happen infrequently in the life of the Church and are difficult, stress-producing experiences for all involved. Regardless of the outcome, a host of pastoral work remains to be done upon its conclusion for those affected by the minister's behaviors and by the process of a Fitness Review, including but not limited to the minister who was reviewed, the Local Church of membership, the person raising the concern, and the ministry setting. The Committee on Ministry should work collaboratively with the Association and Conference to determine the appropriateness and availability of any ongoing support.⁹⁰

A Fitness Review also has a considerable impact on those involved in conducting it, including members of the Committee on Ministry, the Response Team, and Association staff. Some Associations and Conferences find it helpful to provide an opportunity for these parties to gather with a facilitator to debrief and reflect on the impact of the Fitness Review following its conclusion.

⁹⁰ See Section 3 for resources for those affected by clergy sexual misconduct.

3 Resources for Committees on Ministry

TABLE OF CONTENTS FOR ONLINE RESOURCES

The following Manual on Ministry resources for Committees on Ministries are maintained online and kept current by the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team of the National Setting. As needed, these resources will be updated or removed, and new resources may be added, to support the best practices of Committees on Ministry. Additional resources that are not specific to MESA are included as relevant references for understanding the Manual on Ministry and the polity of the United Church of Christ.

SECTION 1 COVENANTAL POLITY

UCC Constitution and Bylaws

Manual on Ministry (1986/2002), Section 1 “Partners in Authorizing Ministry”

SECTION 1 THEOLOGY OF AUTHORIZED MINISTRY

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (World Council of Churches 1982)

Ministry Issues Pronouncement (2005) and Background Document (2010)

Sample liturgy for local commissioning

Sample liturgy for ordination

Transitional resource for Committees on Ministry with current licensed and commissioned ministers

SECTION 1 MARKS OF FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers
Marks Assessment Rubric
Journaling the Journey
Marks Mosaic cards

SECTION 1 MINISTRY OF COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY

Discernment Travelogue
Committee on Ministry Orientation Booklet
Committee on Ministry Research Report
Sample Ministerial File
Ministerial File Chart
Registrar Orientation and Instructions

SECTION 2:1 MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT

Local Church Discernment Committee best practices
Member in Discernment application form
Sample Outline of Discernment Expectations
Discernment Travelogue
Psychological Assessments best practices
Member in Discernment Advisor best practices
Sample Preparation and Formation Plan (multiple paths)
Sample outlines of Portfolio Presentations and Ordination Papers
Best practices for Ecclesiastical Councils
Ordination Interview Sample

SECTION 2:2 ECUMENICALLY ORDAINED MINISTERS

UCC Ministerial Standing application form

Sample Four- and Five-Way OMPS Covenants

Formula of Agreement Orderly Exchange

SECTION 2:3 ORDAINED MINISTERIAL STANDING

UCC Ministerial Code

Journal on Ministerial Code

Access to Profiles Portal/Eligibility for UCC Ministerial Profile

Transfer of Standing Chart

Standings in Ministry flow chart

Leave of Absence form

Sample Leave of Absence covenant

Leave of Absence best practices

Exempt Standing Application

Sample Exempt Standing Covenant

SECTION 2:4 LAY MINISTERIAL STANDING

Discussion Guide

Lay Ministerial Standing Application

Sample Lay Ministerial Standing Covenant

Sample Covenant for Member in Discernment with Lay Ministerial Standing

LMS Supervisor best practices

SECTION 2:5 CALLS, COVENANTS, AND ENDORSEMENTS

Guidelines for discerning an ordainable call

Guidelines for discerning an authorizable call

Three-Way Covenant template

Four-Way Covenant template

Understanding ordination vs. endorsement

Endorsement guidelines for Chaplain Candidate Program
Endorsement guidelines for professional organizations
Endorsement guidelines for federal government chaplaincy
Guidelines for transfer of endorsement

SECTION 2:6 ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT

Guiding principles for oversight
Sample Information Review Form
Marks of Faithful and Effective Boundary Trainers
Recommendations for organizing/hosting Peer Support
Periodic Vocational Support best practices
Situational Support Consultation: sample agenda, case studies, sample report
Between the raising of concern and the start of a Fitness Review
Roles of the Response Team
Fitness Review Reporting Form
Fitness Review Confidentiality Notices
Fitness Review flow chart
Recommended Guidelines for Fitness Reviews of Conference Ministers
Sample Programs of Growth
Best practices for Unified Fitness Review Committees
Media Guidelines in a Fitness Review
Overview of Fitness Review Appeals
Suggested resources for victims of clergy sexual misconduct
Suggested resources for restorative practices

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Apostolic Ministry. The United Church of Christ “claims as its own the faith of the historic church” and joins the witness of Jesus’ apostles; Ordained Ministers bear particular responsibility to this witness as they engage in the ministries of Word and Sacrament on behalf of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal.

Association. That body within a Conference of the United Church of Christ that is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area and that is empowered by the United Church of Christ Constitution and Bylaws to authorize and oversee ministerial standing.

Call. In the life of the Church, the word “call” holds a variety of meanings, including but not limited to God’s provocation of a person to faith and vocation, the Church’s invitation to and authorization of a particular person for a particular ministry on its behalf, and the ministry setting in which a person is asked to serve on behalf of the Church.

Calling Body. An organization, ministry setting, or Local Church that has an identifiable structure of leadership and governance, a willingness to recognize and provide appropriate oversight for a person’s ministry, and a commitment to participation with the wider church. A calling body may extend an ordainable or authorizable call.

Conference. That body of the United Church that is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area (except Calvin Synod), within which are Associations. Certain Conferences act as Associations in the work of authorizing and overseeing ministerial standing.

Covenant. Sacred commitments to relationship. The formal articulation of the relational and behavioral expectations for UCC ministerial standing is called a Three- or Four-Way Covenant, depending on the number of covenantal relationships pertaining to a particular minister’s standing and vocation.

Cultural Consultant. A person who helps to observe and teach differences in cultural norms to Committees on Ministry, when those attributes are not already present within the Committee.

Culture of Call. The characteristics of a Local Church that foster a dynamic atmosphere for equipping and empowering all persons to discern, test, and live out their unique ministries for the sake of the Church.

Dual Standing. A temporary form of UCC ministerial standing that may be granted to ecumenically ordained (or otherwise ecumenically authorized) ministers who are called to serve in a UCC ministry setting but who keep their affiliation with their denomination of origin.

Ecclesial. Related to church.

Ecclesial Status. A relationship of discernment between a person seeking ministerial standing and an Association through its Committee on Ministry. Ecclesial statuses cannot be transferred between Associations. Persons with ecclesial status do not have the authority to represent the United Church of Christ. In the United Church of Christ, ecclesial statuses include (but are not limited to) Member in Discernment and Privilege of Call.

Ecclesiastical Council. A gathering of an Association's delegates for the purpose of exercising the Association's authority to approve (or not) a person for ordination and Ordained Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ.

Ecclesiastical Endorsement. The assessment and verification—by an Association through its Committee on Ministry in collaboration with the UCC Endorsement Office—of an Ordained Minister's standing, qualifying experience, and capacity to represent the United Church of Christ faithfully and sensitively in diverse and pluralistic settings. Ecclesiastical endorsement is sought by an Ordained Minister when required by a professional or governmental agency for ministry in that setting.

Exempt Standing. A ministerial standing for Ordained Ministers who have discerned a conclusion to their public ministry and who have covenanted to no longer perform acts of public ministry. Exempt Standing modifies the expectations for the ecclesial relationship between the Ordained Minister and their Association, including optional exemptions from such requirements as boundary awareness training and continuing education. Exempt Standing is not to be confused with retirement, which is an employment-related decision by a minister and not a ministerial standing.

Lay Ministerial Standing. A temporary, accountable covenantal relationship among an Association, a lay member, and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ.

Leave of Absence. A ministerial standing for Ordained Ministers experiencing a prolonged (but not unlimited) life season when they are neither seeking nor actively engaged in professional ministry. Leave of Absence temporarily modifies the expectations for the ecclesial relationship between the Ordained Minister and their Association in order to make room for life changes and/or vocational discernment. Leave of Absence is not to be confused with administrative leave, which is an employment-related decision by a calling body to remove someone from active ministry for a duration of time.

Local Church. A body of Christians who organize for Christian worship, for the continuation of Christian fellowship, and for the ongoing work of Christian witness, in affiliation with the United Church of Christ. The ecclesial standing of a Local Church is held by its Association.

Local Church Discernment Committee. A small group of Local Church members who gather with a person exploring their sense of call, in order to listen, encourage, and provide feedback before and during a discernment process.

Marks Portfolio. A collection of materials that demonstrate competencies and experiences related to the Marks of Faithful

and Effective Authorized Ministers, usually during a process of discernment. This collection may take many forms and is the basis of developing an ordination paper or portfolio presentation for an Ecclesiastical Council.

Member in Discernment. An ecclesial status for a lay member of the United Church of Christ who is exploring and pursuing ordination with a Committee on Ministry.

Minister. Any Christian, regardless of employment or title, created by God, called by Christ and gifted by the Spirit; all Christians are in ministry when serving the needs of the world in God's love and grace. As specified in certain parts of the Manual on Ministry, the term "minister" may be used specifically to refer to someone who holds UCC ministerial standing, e.g. "minister in question" for a Fitness Review in Section 2 Article 6.

Ministerial File. The documentation of a Committee on Ministry's work of support and oversight for any person with UCC ministerial standing.

Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing. A temporary form of ministerial standing for Ordained Ministers of the United Church of Christ, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and The United Church of Canada who serve in a ministry position within one of these three denominations while maintaining affiliation with their denomination of origin. The ecclesial status of an Ordained Minister who is in discernment with a Committee on Ministry (or judicatory body) toward Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing is called Seeking OMPS.

Ordained Ministerial Standing. Formal relationship between an Ordained Minister and the United Church of Christ through an Association.

Priesthood of All Believers. The understanding that all persons have access to God without an intermediary and that all persons have the potential to show God to others (to minister for God).

Privilege of Call. An ecclesial status of the United Church of Christ for an ecumenically ordained minister who is seeking to leave their denomination of origin and who is discerning with a Committee on Ministry the possibility of holding Ordained Ministerial Standing in the United Church of Christ alone. An ecumenically ordained minister with Privilege of Call status may be granted access to the UCC Ministerial Profile. An ecumenically ordained minister who is in discernment with a Committee on Ministry but who has not been granted access to the UCC search and call system has Seeking Privilege of Call status.

Redacted Case. A brief summary of the concern that has been raised about a minister, excluding (to the extent possible) any identifying details of the person, the ministry setting, or those affected, so that the Committee on Ministry can consider the concern without bias for or against those involved in determining whether to initiate a Fitness Review.

Sacraments. Acts of Christian worship and Christian community that are ecumenically recognized as visible signs of divine presence and grace. The United Church of Christ recognizes two sacraments: communion and baptism.

Triune God. The God who is three-in-one; Father, Son, Holy Spirit; Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

United and Uniting Church. Churches and denominations around the world that have historically worked and/or are currently working to unite with other Christian churches and denominations are called “united and uniting churches.” These churches and denominations collaborate through the World Council of Churches, and they offer a distinct witness and response to Jesus’ prayer “that they may all be one” (John 17:21).

LETTER FROM THE HABAKKUK GROUP

Grace, mercy, and peace to each of you involved in the sacred work of authorizing ministry in our beloved United Church of Christ.

The Manual on Ministry (MOM) equips the United Church of Christ to respond faithfully to changes in the Church and in ministry through our practices of ministerial authorization and oversight, both changes that have already occurred as well as those that will occur in the years ahead. This living guide speaks to our shared values and sets out a vision for shared authorization practices, even as it recognizes the diverse local embodiment of these shared principles.

The 2018 edition of MOM is the work of the Habakkuk Group, a 17-member committee representing breadth in life experience, theological and ecclesial perspective, church roles, and voice, called together by the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team of the National Setting. The group's goal, in the spirit of Habakkuk 2:2, was to write the vision of authorized ministry and to make it plain for the United Church of Christ. Its membership included:

Co-chairs Cameron Barr and Eleanore Chong, David Alicea, Liddy Barlow, Martha Ann Baumer, Ben Bohren, Cheryl Burke, Quentin Chin, Yelanda Collins, Sheldon Culver, Lois Farnsworth-Whysong, David Hill, Steve Moore, Jonathan New, Vickye Robinson, David Van Epps, and Bill Worley;

with support by the MESA Team's program staff (Stephen Boyd, Kathryn Clark, Elizabeth Dilley, Rachel Hackenberg, Holly MillerShank, and Malcolm Himschoot) and consultation from the Office of General Counsel (Don Clark, Heather Kimmel, and Richard Hilbrich).

Throughout this journey the Habakkuk Group has grounded itself in deep prayer, study and discernment. We were diligent in our

attention to the Triune God, so that new developments and practices might honor the tradition of making the faith our own in each generation. We listened carefully and thoughtfully to the needs of the Church—the Body of Christ—as they are manifest now and as they may be in the future.

It is with great thanksgiving that we present this gift to the United Church of Christ. May it “make plain” the theological rationale and best practices of ministerial authorization.

We extend profound thanks for your joining us in this sacred work.

Faithfully,

Cameron Barr and Eleanore Chong
Co-chairs of the Habakkuk Group

Holly MillerShank and Rachel Hackenberg
on behalf of the MESA Ministry Team

October 2018



Manual on Ministry

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Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry
of the United Church of Christ