

Application for Member in Discernment

Covenant of Discernment and Formation

Committee on Ministry
Fox Valley Association
Illinois Conference U.C.C.



The Call to Authorized Ministry

One of the distinguishing aspects of ministry in the United Church of Christ is the affirmation that ministerial leadership is always defined by an ongoing sacred covenant or agreement among partners; thus ministry is both communal and individual, and **the call to authorized ministry is always discerned with others**. The use of the word “covenant” stands as a constant reminder that commitments and promises have been made in the name of God. God initiates covenant, God holds us accountable when we neglect covenant, and God continually acts to renew covenant.

Within that covenantal understanding of call, the United Church of Christ uses the term “authorization” to describe the designation and consecration of certain individuals called to particular representative leadership in and on behalf of the U.C.C. Authorization identifies certain persons who are to have particular responsibilities for at least one of the following functions: ensuring the unity, good order, and continuity of the Church; calling the Church to faithfulness to God’s mission; representing the Church and its commitments to justice and peace in society; ensuring the integrity of theological and sacramental traditions; encouraging and equipping God’s people for the work of ministry; and serving others in and on behalf of the Church. These ministries of leadership take place in or on behalf of particular faith communities, while they also are activities of and for the whole Church.

The United Church of Christ recognizes three forms of authorized ministry: licensed ministry, commissioned ministry, and ordained ministry.

A Licensed Minister of the United Church of Christ is one of its lay members whom God has called and who has been recognized and authorized by an association to perform specified duties in a designated local church or within that association, mainly preaching and conducting services of worship, for a designated time, under the supervision and guidance of that association. For example, a person might be licensed to a church to preach and lead communion for a period of time while the ordained pastor is on vacation.

A Commissioned Minister in the United Church of Christ is one of its lay members who has been called by God and commissioned for a specific church-related ministry. An example of this might be a Christian educator who has added skills for worship leadership, theology and more, who might seek to become a Commissioned Minister of Christian Education.

An Ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ is one of its members who has been called by God and ordained to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership. These would be persons commonly referred to as “clergy”.

The purpose of the discernment process in the United Church of Christ is the development of future leaders to meet the needs of the Church. It is *not* about what any individual person wants or needs. There will be many decision points along the way when the candidate, the

local church, and the COM must prayerfully decide if authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ is the right path for the person's sense of call. **The Covenant does not automatically lead to authorization.**

Call is not a single moment, but a continuing openness to hearing God's direction. Those preparing for authorized ministry must recognize that vital and engaged spiritual leadership requires attentiveness to the ongoing nature of call. Processes of preparation and formation and the everyday practice of authorized ministry to and within the United Church of Christ may lead to unexpected results and changes of course.

Call to authorized ministry is discerned with others. Members considering authorized ministry as well as those in a formal process of preparation must be in a consistent relationship and regular conversation with Committees on the Ministry, local church leaders, trusted guides, mentors, teachers and supervisors in order to follow the Biblical example of communal discernment of call. While personal reflection and decision-making is a key component of discernment of call, from the earliest days of the Christian Church through to the last edition of the *Manual on Ministry*, personal call is shaped and confirmed in the community of those representing the church in which ministry is to be practiced.

Procedures for Authorization

I. The Local Church

In preparing to become a candidate for authorized ministry in this association of the United Church of Christ, the candidate must begin with a solid foundation in a local church of the Fox Valley Association. It is true that our candidates historically reflect the same diversity of denominational background that we see within our local congregations. However, before being entering into a Covenant of Discernment and Formation, *a candidate must have demonstrated an intentional commitment to the United Church of Christ by holding membership for at least one year in a U.C.C. church. The candidate's current membership must be in a Fox Valley Association church, which commits to sponsor and support the candidate throughout the discernment process.*

We strongly recommend the formation of a Ministry Discernment Committee¹ within the local church. This group will create a caring and exploratory environment in which the candidate can risk testing his or her vocational aspirations, provide a forum for exploring the meaning of ministry in general and looking specifically at differences between the call to authorized ministry and the baptismal call of all Christ's people, and help the candidate realistically and prayerfully examine the challenges that will be faced as the candidate considers preparation for authorized ministry.

¹ Information on forming this committee can be found in the document *Called from this Community*, available from the Association.

At the appropriate time, if and when the Ministry Discernment Committee believes the candidate is ready to pursue a Covenant of Discernment and Formation² with the Association, the committee recommends the candidate to the governing body of the local church. The governing body will make the formal request to the Association Committee on the Ministry (COM) that the candidate be received into a Covenant of Discernment and Formation.

II. The Candidate

The candidate presents to the pastor and governing body of the local church the completed application packet *including*:

- An autobiography
- A paper on his or her Christian journey
- An official transcript of undergraduate degree if complete; if not, grades to date
- An explanation of plans made to prepare for authorized ministry

The pastor and governing body review these materials and interview the candidate. If the governing body feels that the candidate is ready, it forwards to the Association office:

- A signed request from the church's governing board that the candidate be received into a Covenant of Discernment and Formation with the Association, with a description of the process used to reach that decision
- Verification of the candidate's membership in that local church and date joined
- A letter of reference from the pastor and two other letters of recommendation.
- Copies of all papers and documentation provided to the governing board

It is vitally important that all parties to the proposed Covenant understand:

- The Committee on Ministry takes seriously its mandate to ensure that candidates for authorization are prepared both academically and practically; that they are competent; are morally, ethically, and emotionally mature; and are authentic in their intentions. For this reason, *a candidate is required to be In Discernment with this Association for a minimum of two years*, and the Covenant is often extended for months or years until the COM feels the candidate is ready.
- The covenantal relationship between each candidate and the Committee on Ministry is fundamental to the In Discernment process. The United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry states unequivocally that In Discernment status is not transferable. *A candidate's full time in Discernment, from initial acceptance into a Covenant of Discernment and Formation through final authorization, must take place under the auspices of a single association.*

² "Covenant of Discernment and Formation" is the agreement between the candidate, the local church, and the Committee on Ministry that undergirds the process of preparing for authorized ministry in the U.C.C.

- The purpose of the discernment process in the United Church of Christ is the development of future leaders to meet the needs of the Church. It is not about what any individual person wants or needs. There will be many decision points along the way when the candidate, the local church, and the COM must prayerfully decide if authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ is the right path for the person's sense of call. *The Covenant does not automatically lead to authorization.*

III. The Committee on Ministry

The Committee on Ministry (COM) is the body within the Fox Valley Association that has oversight of all authorized Ministers and candidates for authorized ministry within the Association. Shortly after a candidate requests an application packet, a member of the Committee on Ministry is assigned as the candidate's Committee Contact. This person will be available to answer questions about the process or necessary documentation, and will serve as a liaison between the candidate and the Committee on Ministry.

All application materials must be received in the Fox Valley Association's office forty days before an interview can be scheduled with the Committee on Ministry. The pastor or a representative of the local church is encouraged to come to the COM meeting. The COM will visit with the candidate and receive a report from the local pastor or representative, and will vote on receiving the candidate into a Covenant of Discernment and Formation.

The candidate will be provided with an information packet when first received into the Covenant of Discernment and Formation that contains all of the Association's report forms, policies, and procedures related to this process. It is an addendum to the *Manual on Ministry*. The Manual is available on line at ucc.org or for purchase from United Church Press. It is the candidate's responsibility to be familiar with both of these documents. The candidate will be assigned both a mentor and a committee contact person, but ultimately, the candidate bears the responsibility of making sure reports are turned in on time and all requirements are met. The month that the candidate is accepted by the Committee as a Member in Discernment becomes the candidate's "anniversary", and the COM will look forward to meeting with that candidate annually during his or her anniversary month. This anniversary date also sets the timelines for various reports.

Application to Become a Member In Discernment

Name _____ Phone _____

Responding to a desire to prepare for Authorized Ministry in the United Church of Christ, I hereby apply to the Committee on Ministry of Fox Valley Association for acceptance into a Covenant of Discernment and Formation. I affirm that the attached application form is accurate and complete.

- I. I met with my local church governing board and this body hereby recommends that I be considered for acceptance into a Covenant of Discernment and Formation. Attached is their written recommendation, describing the process used to make their decision.
- II. I enclose with this application:
 1. Introductory Information form and Statement of Consent.
 2. Verification of one year of membership in a local church of the United Church of Christ; and current membership in a Fox Valley Association church.
 3. Three letters of reference, including one from my local church pastor.
 4. A statement describing my Christian pilgrimage, biography, educational and vocational plans.
 5. Official transcript of undergraduate degree if complete. If not, copy of grades to date.
 6. Written and signed recommendation from the local church governing board including a description of the process used to make their decision. (*See I. above.*)
- III. I agree to complete during my first year In Discernment or, if a seminary education is planned, after completing one year of seminary studies (whichever is later) the "Candidate Assessment" program of the Ministry Development Network. These results shall be available to the Committee on Ministry.

DATE _____ SIGNATURE _____

Please return completed application and all documentation to:

Fox Valley Association Office
Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ
1840 Westchester Blvd., Suite 200
Westchester, IL 60154

Introductory Information

Date _____

Personal data

Name _____

Home address _____

_____ Home phone (____) _____

Business phone (____) _____ email _____

Date of birth ____/____/____ Place of birth _____

When and where were you baptized? _____

Have you ever been known by any other name(s)? ____ yes ____ no

If yes, please provide other name(s): _____

Name & address of Fox Valley UCC Church where membership is held and which is recommending you as a Member In Discernment:

Date of membership: _____

If you have not been a member of this church for one year, please list name and address of previous UCC Church where you were a member, and dates of membership.

Current family status: _____

Spouse/partner name: _____

Children _____

Education	Institution	Graduated?	Date	Degree
High school	_____	_____	_____	_____
College	_____	_____	_____	_____
Seminary	_____	_____	_____	_____
Other	_____	_____	_____	_____

Special interests and hobbies

General information

History of involvement in your local church as a leader and a member:

Please indicate your community interests and service involvement _____

List the conference or association experiences and responsibilities you have undertaken in the past:

List any special leadership abilities, areas, etc., in which you are especially skilled:

In what ways do you think the church should be involved in addressing social issues?

Other comments and questions

Describe your educational plans to prepare for authorized ministry:

Provide a brief description of your call to authorized ministry:

At present I feel called to:

_____ Licensed Ministry

_____ Commissioned Ministry in the area of _____

_____ Ordained Ministry

In a separate document, provide a narrative account of your Christian pilgrimage with a description of the people and experiences, which have contributed to your growth as a person of faith and sense of call to ministry.

Have you ever been found guilty, or pled guilty or no contest to a criminal offense?

yes no

If yes, provide a brief description of the charge including the date and place of the circumstances leading to the charge, where the charge was filed, and the disposition of the charge.

Has a civil complaint (lawsuit) ever been made against you alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; or financial misconduct by you?

yes no

If yes, provide a brief description of the complaint including the date, nature, and place of the incident leading to the complaint, where the complaint was filed, and the disposition of the complaint.

Have you ever terminated your employment or had your employment terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse, or financial misconduct by you?

yes no

If yes, give a brief explanation, including the date of termination, name, address, and telephone number of the employer, and the nature and place of the incident(s) leading to your termination.

Have you ever been disciplined by an ecclesiastical body for any reason?

yes no

If yes, give a brief explanation including the name, address, and telephone number of the ecclesiastical body.

Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that would call into question your being entrusted with the responsibilities of authorized ministry on behalf of the United Church Of Christ?

_____ yes _____ no

If yes, provide a brief explanation.

I attest that the information contained in this application form is true and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Signature _____ Date _____

Representative of United Church of Christ local church recommending the above named person for the Covenant of Discernment and Formation.

Signature _____

Print name _____

Title _____

Address _____

Phone: day time _____ evening _____

Date _____

Statement of Consent

The United Church of Christ Constitution recognizes that God calls the whole church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ. God also calls certain of the church's members to various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the church.

Persons beginning a ministry authorization process with their UCC conference or association bring unique gifts, skills, and experiences. The integrity of the In Discernment process in the United Church of Christ depends upon supportive cooperation, and considerate and appropriate sharing of information among national offices, conference and/or association personnel, Committees on Ministry, search committees, local churches, other ministry settings, educational institutions and those persons in discernment about ordination, licensure or commissioning.

We are called to speak the truth in love. Our primary goal is, in all circumstances, to build up the body of Christ. Relationships between church bodies and persons seeking ministerial authorization require honesty, integrity, and truthfulness for the health of the church. In that spirit:

I attest that the information shared with the Committee on Ministry is true and complete to the best of my knowledge. I understand that any misrepresentation or omission may be grounds for rejection of consideration for, or termination of, the ministerial authorization process or ministerial authorization itself after that authorization is approved.

An open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for continuing and healthy relationships between calling bodies and persons seeking a ministry position. In that spirit:

I authorize any member of the Committee on Ministry or the appropriate staff person of the conference to make inquiries regarding all statements contained in the information provided to the Committee on Ministry. I also authorize all persons, entities, former employers, committees on the ministry and their agents, courts, and law enforcement, educational institutions and other public agencies to respond to inquiries concerning me, and to supply verification of the information provided to any member of the Committee on Ministry or the appropriate staff person of the conference. I understand that such persons may comment on and state their opinions regarding my background and character to any member of the Committee on Ministry or the appropriate staff person of the Conference. To encourage such persons to speak openly and responsibly, I hereby release them from all liability arising from their responses and comments made in good faith and without malice.

Name (please print)

Signature

Date

SCHEDULING PROCESS FOR COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY MEETING APPOINTMENTS

1. At each meeting, as the Committee goes over the Ministerial Report, they will make note of those candidates who are due to be seen over the next several months.
 - A list is made by the Committee to be given to the Associate Conference Minister concerning who needs to be scheduled, when they are due and what paperwork is needed from them and others.
 - Committee Contacts should also be in contact with their candidates concerning the upcoming appointments and what needs to be submitted beforehand.
 - This is not to take away the responsibility of the candidate to take charge of his/her own process and be aware of what materials need to be submitted and when.
2. The Association Office is given the list and due dates.
 - The Association Office will send an email/letter stating that the person is due to be seen at an up-coming meeting (date) along with a list of information/forms which must be submitted for that interview. Mentors should also be contacted for any appropriate reports.
 - In this same correspondence, it should be emphasized that an appointment will only be tentatively scheduled until the FVA office has received all materials.
 - o For interviews involving simple applications, reports, etc. such materials must be received by the Fox Valley Association office no later than 2 weeks before the scheduled meeting.
 - o For In Discernment applications, pre-ecclesiastical interviews and any other interview, which requires a longer paper and materials, all materials must be received for the committee to review no later than 40 days before the interview.
 - If all materials are not received on time, the appointment will be delayed until the next available time.
 - Committee contacts will check with the Fox Valley Association office and their assigned candidate and mentor in a timely fashion to assure that all materials are being submitted on time.
3. When a person is taken In Discernment, that person shall receive the entire packet of materials for In Discernment status including all forms in electronic format.