

Creating a Proposal: Preparation and Formation Plan for Members in Discernment

The United Church of Christ recognizes that the 21st century Church needs wise, knowledgeable, and ever curious ministers to serve as its leaders.

Therefore, with a spirit of collaboration and accountability, each Member in Discernment (MID) in consultation with their Local Church Discernment Committee must propose a comprehensive Preparation and Formation Plan that will help them achieve the competencies outlined in the UCC's Marks for Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers—the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for ordained ministry. Once a plan is proposed, the Conference Committee for Authorized Ministry (CCAM) reviews and works with the MID to create an actionable Preparation and Formation plan.

The MID will

- In conversation with their Local Church Discernment Committee, their Pastor, and their MID Advisor, review the UCC's Marks for Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers, identify important areas of growth, and list needed experiences, programs, and courses to both achieve the competencies outlined in the Marks and their vocational goals
- Discern which context and style of formal theological education will best enable them to excel in ministry—either an accredited seminary or theological school, a recognized UCC regional theological education program, or an approved ecumenical partner's theological education program.¹ The CCAM is available to discuss various graduate programs as well as theological education programs for candidates to consider.
- Write a proposal for a Preparation and Formation Plan using the Creating a Proposal Worksheet or an equivalent descriptive proposal. The Proposal should include specific details about a planned program of theological study, participation in the Wider UCC, Clinical Pastoral Education, boundary training, and other requirements set forth in the policy for MIDs.
- Submit a completed Proposal for a Preparation and Formation Plan to CCAM within two months of becoming an MID.

After the CCAM receives the MID's proposal, the CCAM will schedule a conversation with the MID, their Local Church Discernment Committee, and their Pastor to discuss and finalize the Preparation and Formation Plan. At each of the MID's Annual Reviews, the CCAM will revisit, evaluate, and revise the plan as needed to best encourage the MID to continue to grow in all areas of the Marks.

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers, or simply known as the Marks, is a tool for discernment and assessment, created especially for use by Members in Discernment, Committees on Ministry, and authorized ministers. They are available at ucc.org and ucctcm.org/mid.

“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.

¹ In the 2005 Ministry Issues Pronouncement of General Synod, the United Church of Christ articulated that a minister's learnedness is shaped through diverse educational experiences, life lessons, personal character, and the Spirit's inspiration. In exceptional cases, MIDs with previous formal theological education and professional experience may choose to propose a course of study comprised of courses and experiences that correspond with the Marks rather than a full graduate degree or regional theological education program. For these MIDs, the proposal for a Preparation and Formation Plan should include additional details and documentation to convey how the Marks have been and/or will be engaged.

Creating a Proposal: Preparation and Formation Plan Worksheet for Members in Discernment

MID's Name:

MID's Congregation of Membership:

Local Church Discernment Committee Chairperson:

Context or setting for ministry MID is feeling called to:

MID's Vocational Goals:

Engagement in Discernment

I plan to engage in ongoing self-assessment based on the Marks by doing the following:

I plan to utilize monthly meetings with my MID Advisor to:

I plan to utilize bimonthly meetings with the Local Church Discernment Committee to:

Participation in the Local and Wider UCC

I plan to participate in my Local Church in the following ways:

I plan to participate in my Association in the following ways:

Questions for reflection
as you work:

How does your proposal encourage an ability to bring to life sacred stories and traditions?

How will you create space and community for practicing discernment?

Have you included studying the development of Christian thought? What about systematic theology?

What training do you need to lead faith formation across various life stages?

How will you cultivate expansive understanding of spiritual disciplines?

What cultural sensitivity, diversity training, or similar opportunities do you need?

What experiences do you need in preaching to develop your prophetic voice?

How does your coursework incorporate exegesis and interpretation?

Does your plan incorporate womanist, feminist, queer, or other marginalized theologians and disciplines?

Would you benefit from learning about business administration, finances, or community organizing?

I plan to participate in my Conference in the following ways:

I plan to participate in the Wider UCC in the following ways:

Clinical Pastoral Education

I plan to apply for this type of CPE unit: intensive extended

I plan to apply for the unit of CPE that starts (season, year):

I plan to apply to the following CPE Centers:

UCC History, Polity, and Theology Course

I plan to take this course through (name of institution):

I plan to take the course (semester, year):

Boundary Training

I plan to complete boundary training (season, year, location):

Theological Education

I plan to engage in a theological education program from (beginning date-anticipated graduation/completion date):

Name of Theological Education Institution:

Type of program:

Duration of program:

Website for the program:

Questions for reflection as you work:

What experience in interfaith work would expand your learning?

How will you continue to grow in your intercultural awareness and sensitivity?

What will help you develop your theology of worship and the sacraments? What about skills in worship leadership?

How does your coursework challenge you to overcome implicit and explicit bias in your life and the life of the church?

What experiences will help you to be able to lead change in a community?

How will you engage the core values of the UCC in developing your ministry?

What parts of the proposal tend to your own spiritual and physical wellbeing?

Are there areas of training you need in family systems? Asset based community leadership? Conflict transformation?

How will you draw on the ministry of Jesus to confront injustice and oppression?

In what ways will you practice and continue to grow in your abilities for public ministry?

What experience do you need to practice pastoral care to those needing hope and healing in a hurting world?

Experiences and Opportunities

I will attend the following retreats, trainings, and/or events:

I will seek out the opportunity to:

I will encourage the evaluation through feedback by doing the following:

Additional Plans