

## SAMPLE PREPARATION AND FORMATION PLAN FOR MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT

### Overview

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

Ongoing adherence to the preparation and formation plan falls largely to the Member in Discernment. Progress on this plan is to be reported by the Member in Discernment to the

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<sup>1</sup> UCC Manual on Ministry, 19.

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

<sup>3</sup> UCC Manual on Ministry, 28.

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

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

- Theological and practical education for ministry, with learning outcomes oriented toward the Marks:
  - ▼ transcripts/courses taken (accompanied by course syllabus);
  - ▼ annotated bibliography of books read that align with the eight categories of the Marks;
  - ▼ reflection papers on learning gained through specific ministry experiences in and beyond the Local Church of membership (e.g., preaching, pastoral care, bible studies taught/developed, community engagement, etc.).
- Successful completion of an approved UCC History, Polity and Theology course:
  - ▼ certificate of completion/grade.
- Supervised ministry training experience (Clinical Pastoral Education, field placement, internship, etc.);
- Marks portfolio<sup>4</sup>: a collection of materials that demonstrate competencies and experiences related to the Marks, for example:

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

- ▼ Term papers;
- ▼ Blog entries;
- ▼ Videos of worship leadership, community engagement, etc.;
- ▼ Sermon transcripts;
- ▼ Liturgies.
- Boundary awareness training:
  - ▼ certificate of completion.
- Anti-Racism training (if required by the Committee on Ministry/Conference):
  - ▼ certificate of completion.
- Evidence of active participation in the UCC Local Church of membership;
- Participation in regional or national Member in Discernment gatherings;
- Evidence of engagement with the wider Church (i.e., participation in Association annual meetings, Conference committees, General Synod, etc.);
- Progress reports on the preparation and formation plan at annual meetings with the Committee on Ministry;
- Ongoing self-assessment based on the Marks (e.g., reflections recorded in *Journaling the Journey*,<sup>5</sup> feedback on sermons, insights gained from the *Discernment Travelogue*);
- Letters of recommendation from instructors/professors, field placement supervisor, or CPE supervisor;
- Periodic meetings with the Member in Discernment Advisor:
  - ▼ record of date, time, place, topics discussed, recommended actions.
- Prior to the Ecclesiastical Council (or ordination interview), a drafted UCC Ministerial Profile.<sup>6</sup>

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

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.ucc.org/ministers\\_profile](https://www.ucc.org/ministers_profile)

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

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

**Member in Discernment Sample Preparation and Formation Plan for:**

[Name of MID] \_\_\_\_\_ *Sally Seashore* \_\_\_\_\_

**Date Entered MID Status:** \_\_\_ *4/8/2019* \_\_\_ **Plan Start Date:** \_\_\_ *5/13/2019* \_\_\_

**Discernment Path<sup>7</sup>:** \_\_\_\_\_ *Regional Theological Education* \_\_\_\_\_

**Committee on Ministry Chair:** *Suzy Sails* **Association/Conference:** *Oceanside, MI*

**Member in Discernment Advisor:** \_\_\_\_\_ *Rev. Peter Shells* \_\_\_\_\_

**Lay Ministerial Standing Supervisor (if MID has Lay Ministerial Standing):** \_\_\_\_\_ *N/A* \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

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

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

## THE MARKS OF FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

### Category: EXHIBITING A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION AND ONGOING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

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

- Loving God, following Jesus Christ, and being guided by the Holy Spirit; living a life of discipleship. \_\_\_\_\_ *Exemplary*
  - Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices. \_\_\_\_\_ *Proficient*
  - Being called to ordained ministry by God and the Church. \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
  - Continuing discernment of one's call in community. \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
  - Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith. \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
  - Exhibiting a commitment to lifelong spiritual development and faithful personal stewardship. \_\_\_\_\_ *Proficient*
- ▼ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ *Proficient*

▼ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate describes a daily practice of morning prayer and scripture reading that she has followed for several years. She attends worship regularly and is part of the worship leader team at her church. Sally feels called to share her faith with others. Exposure to worship at other churches or other faith traditions is limited. Articulates moderate understanding of the Trinity but is open to learning more.*

▼ **Actions:**

- *Continue to adhere to the spiritual practices currently followed. Explore new ways of praying and meditating through practices such as labyrinth walking, drawing, physical movement, contemplation.*
- *Engage in prayer and worship with faith communities from different cultural traditions, varying styles of worship, and larger or smaller ministry settings; urban and rural. Create a depiction (e.g., journal entry, drawing, poem, song, prayer, etc.) of how these experiences impacted your faith.*
- *Share a reflection on your understanding of “the cost and joy of discipleship.”*

**Category: NURTURING UCC IDENTITY**

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

- Acknowledging Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the Church. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory
- Communicating passion for the oneness of the Body of Christ (John 17:21). Rudimentary
- Holding active membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ. Proficient
- Participating in the various settings of the United Church of Christ, including Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, General Synod, and global ministries. Inadequate
- Knowing and appreciating UCC history, polity, and theology. \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate
- Exhibiting a commitment to the core values of the United Church of Christ: continuing testament, extravagant welcome, and changing lives. \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate

▼ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate

▼ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate knows very little about the UCC, other than what she has read in the church newsletter. She has been a member of her church for 2 years but has not participated in Association or Conference meetings or activities. Does not convey an understanding of covenant or how the UCC relates to other denominations.*

▼ **Actions:**

- *Learn about the ministries of the UCC through the UCC website (www.ucc.org). Write one 1-2 page reflection paper discussing three of them that you were unfamiliar with (for example, Global Ministries, Justice and Local Church Ministries, Office of the General Minister and President, Sacred Conversations to End Racism, etc.)*
- *Take a UCC history, theology, and polity course. Verify the Committee on Ministry approves of the course before enrolling. Write an essay on how your learning contributed to your sense of call to the UCC.*
- *Attend 4-6 other UCC settings and the next Association meeting and prepare a 1-2 page report on what you observed and learned.*

**Category: BUILDING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

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

- *Empowering the Church to be faithful to God's call, reflective of Christ's mission, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate*
- *Strategically creating the future of God's Church. \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate*
- *Witnessing in the public square to God's redeeming power. \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate*
- *Performing necessary and appropriate administrative tasks. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory*
- *Working collaboratively with intercultural awareness and sensitivity. \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary*
- *Encouraging leadership development of self and others through continuing education and lifelong learning. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory*

▼ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary

▼ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate states youth are the future of the church yet is uncomfortable in engaging with them. Candidate appears unaware of how to relate current events issues to*

*faithful actions, especially when issues concern persons in communities other than her own. Candidate appeared prepared for the **interview** with the Committee on Ministry and presented her documents in an organized manner.*

▼ **Actions:**

- *Work with the youth ministry at your church to gain experience working with youth.*
- *Develop public speaking skills through teaching (e.g., Sunday School or Confirmation) and preaching (e.g., pulpit supply, preach at your home church).*
- *Attend community relations meetings addressing injustice issues. Listen for perspectives that differ from your own. Journal your reactions.*
- *Watch films or documentaries about discrimination or religious intolerance. Journal your reactions.*

**Category: ENGAGING SACRED STORIES AND TRADITIONS**

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

- Exhibiting knowledge, understanding, and continuing study of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory
  - Maturing in effective proclamation and preaching. \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary
  - Understanding the history of the Christian Church, from biblical times forward Inadequate
  - Bringing life to sacred stories and traditions in worship, proclamation, and witness. \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary
  - Leading faith formation effectively across generations. \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary
  - Holding the Holy with integrity especially as represented in the Sacraments. Inadequate
- ▼ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary

▼ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate demonstrates overall knowledge of the Bible and participates in Bible study class regularly. However, she states she doesn't know much about how the Bible was developed or anything about church history. Little understanding of sacrament. Has led prayer in Bible study and given a biblical reflection at a women's retreat.*

▼ **Actions:**

- Enroll in a biblical exegesis course to deepen understanding of Biblical texts
- Enroll in a Church History course to gain perspective of the heritage of the Christian Church and the UCC.
- Observe 3 preachers you admire and take notes of their oratorical style, depth of biblical content, and relation to current life. Discuss with your Mentor how their styles differ from your own and what you may consider incorporating into your own style and method.
- Read “They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God” by Dr. Frank Thomas and “Shaping the Claim” by Dr. Marvin McMickle.<sup>8</sup> Write a 1-2 reflection paper on each book.

**Category: CARING FOR ALL CREATION**

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

- Nurturing care and compassion for God’s creation. \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary
- Maintaining a basic understanding of mental health and wellness. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory
- Practicing self-care and life balance. \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary
- Providing hope and healing to a hurting world. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory
- Attending to one’s own spiritual and pastoral care, including engagement in supervision as appropriate. \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary
- Stewarding the resources of the Church. \_\_\_\_\_ Inadequate

▪ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ Rudimentary

▪ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate leads a very busy life. Between work, family, and church commitments, she finds very little time to care for herself. It was impressed upon her to consider the extra demands of preparing for professional ministry and that self-care would be even more important. She expressed understanding of this and indicated she would work on self-care. Candidate hasn’t given much thought to ‘stewarding the resources of the Church’ but does contribute financially to her church.*

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, Frank A. *They Like to Never Quit Praisin’ God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching*. Pilgrim Press, 2013; McMickle, Marvin A. *Shaping the Claim: From Text to Sermon*, Fortress Press, 2008.

- **Actions:**

- Read “*Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*” by Wayne Muller.<sup>9</sup>
- Schedule a minimum of 1 day each week as your Sabbath. Begin a “*Sabbath Journal*” and include your understanding of what constitutes sabbath for you and how you intend to practice it. Describe your experiences.

**Category: PARTICIPATING IN THEOLOGICAL PRAXIS**

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

- Practicing theological reflection and engagement as part of one’s sense of ministerial identity. \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
- Integrating theological reflection in teaching, preaching, and ecclesial and community leadership. \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*
- Articulating a theology and practice of ministry consistent with the UCC Manual on Ministry. \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*
- Demonstrating an appreciation for and participation in the ecumenical and interfaith partnerships of the UCC. \_\_\_\_\_ *Inadequate*
- Experiencing and appreciating a variety of theological perspectives. \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*
- Embodying the UCC Ministerial Code. \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*

▼ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*

▼ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate has had minimal opportunity to interact with people of different faiths or cultural groups. Candidate has shared her faith positions with family members who hold differing ideals from her own. Those interactions have led to a desire to better understand other perspectives. She indicates that she journals about her own faith questions.*

▼ **Actions:**

- Read the theological grounding of ministry in section 1 of the *Manual on Ministry*. Write an essay describing where your

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<sup>9</sup> Muller, Wayne. *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in Our Busy Lives*, Bantam, 2000.

*understanding of ministry intersects with or diverges from the perspective in the Manual on Ministry. Include specific examples.*

- *Interview your Member in Discernment Advisor, Pastor, or Mentor on their experiences with ministering to those whose theological perspectives differed significantly from their own. Write your reaction to what is shared.*
- *Attend a worship service that is other than Christian and discuss your experience with peers and your Mentor, and how your approach to ministry may be influenced.*

### **Category: WORKING TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE AND MERCY**

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

- Drawing on the ministry of Jesus Christ to confront injustice and oppression. \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*
- Practicing the radical hospitality of God. \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
- Identifying and working to overcome explicit and implicit bias in the life of the Church. \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*
- Understanding community context and navigating change with a community. \_\_\_\_\_ *Rudimentary*
- Engaging in mission and outreach. \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
- Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence. \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
- ▼ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ *Satisfactory*
- ▼ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate expresses passion for meeting the needs of people in the community. She assists with the food ministry of her church but feels it could be run better. Candidate enjoys meeting the people who come to get food and often prays with them. She gets along well with ministry co-workers and encourages them as they learn the system. Candidate hasn't applied concept of Jesus' ministry to her thinking about creating systemic change in the community. Candidate states "following the golden rule is something I try to do with everyone because we all go through things at some time in our lives."*

▼ **Actions:**

- Develop a strategic plan to expand the food distribution program in your ministry setting. Include projected impact on the community and congregation. Share it with others as appropriate in your context and with your Mentor(s).
- Identify specific cultural or underrepresented groups who are not presently involved in leadership (lay and clergy) in your ministry setting. Write a proposal that purports why those groups are not involved and recommend actions to attract and involve them.

**Category: STRENGTHENING INTER- AND INTRA- PERSONAL ASSETS**

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

- Developing and maintaining a healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and life experiences. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory
- Living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory
- Exhibiting strong moral character and personal integrity. \_\_\_\_\_ Proficient
- Respecting the dignity of all God's people. \_\_\_\_\_ Proficient
- Understanding and ministering to stages of human development across the life span. \_\_\_\_\_ Satisfactory
- Demonstrating excellent communication skills. \_\_\_\_\_ Proficient

▼ **Overall Competency:** \_\_\_\_\_ Proficient

▼ **Interpretive Comments:**

*Candidate expresses a strong sense of self, as one called by God to minister to God's people and feels humbled that God would want to use her in such a profound way. Candidate says her family keeps her grounded and are her greatest support and source of pride. Candidate states "everybody wants to be loved and God loves everybody, but some people don't know or believe that God loves them. I want to help people come to know the truth of God's love for themselves."*

▼ **Actions:**

- Write a personal reflection describing 1 of each kind of experience that left you feeling humbled, empowered, or transformed.

- Describe the group of people you feel the most challenged to minister to (young children, youth/teens, adults, seniors, etc.) Identify 3-5 resources you have employed to grow your effectiveness in that area. Write an assessment of the outcome of your efforts.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- Enrollment in a lay ministry program approved by the Committee on Ministry.
- Member in Discernment to meet with Member in Discernment Advisor and Mentor at least quarterly and give written quarterly progress reports on compliance with this plan to the Committee on Ministry, Member in Discernment Advisor, and Local Church Discernment Committee.
- Consult with Pastor about leadership opportunities.
- Request to schedule next annual meeting with the Committee on Ministry.
- Member in Discernment and Member in Discernment Advisor consult on the timeline to achieve each of the above actions.

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

Signatures below indicate acknowledgement and agreement with the above plan:

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Member in Discernment

Date

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Committee on Ministry Representative

Date