JOURNALING
THE JOURNEY

Engaging the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ for Personal Discernment and Professional Growth
INTRODUCTION

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ is a discernment and evaluation tool for reflecting upon foundations, competencies, and areas for growth in authorized ministry.

Authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ is never a solo endeavor but is discerned, overseen and supported by covenantal partners: Local Churches, Conferences, Associations, Committees on Ministry, authorized ministers and Members in Discernment, as well as networks of teachers, mentors and colleagues. The Marks is appropriately used as a shared tool for reflection in these vital relationships, in addition to its use for personal reflection by individuals.

Developed in the context of General Synod’s 2005 Ministry Issues Pronouncement and revised in the 2014-2017 work of the Habakkuk Group with the Manual on Ministry, the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers focuses on one’s understandings and strengths for ministry in eight categories:

- Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice
- Nurturing UCC Identity
- Building Transformational Leadership Skills
- Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions
- Caring for All Creation
- Participating in Theological Praxis
- Working Together for Justice and Mercy
- Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets.

The lists of marks within these eight categories are descriptive more than prescriptive and dynamically integrative, serving to highlight a holistic picture of one’s formation for and growth in authorized ministry.

The Marks might be compared to the intricate art forms of a mosaic and a mandala: both hold in creative tension an attention to detail and an appreciation of the whole. At times we “zoom in” to study the details of mosaic tile pattern or a mandala rose window; at other times we “zoom out” to consider the big picture that is formed by the details.
The *Marks* might also be compared to a kaleidoscope. Taken individually, each mark is a distinct piece of colorful glass. As the kaleidoscope turns, as the pieces interact and overlap with shifting lenses in the light, patterns emerge that are beautiful and endlessly creative. Likewise, individual marks are understood to integrate with and influence each other, collectively shaping and illuminating faithful and effective ministry.

The list of marks in the *Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers* is not a complete or closed canon. Those who engage the *Marks* may identify – through reflection and conversation – additional marks within the eight categories that acknowledge cultural manifestations of excellence, diverse learning edges and styles, additional talents and aptitudes. While the *Marks* intend to reflect what is common and essential in core habits of servant leadership, providing consistency across our denomination, they are also meant to be adaptive and contextual. Feel welcome to extend the list of marks given and to share these additions with covenantal partners in discernment; blank space is provided in this journal for such extensions.

*Journaling the Journey* strives to support Local Churches, Members in Discernment (MIDs), authorized ministers, and Committees on Ministry (COMs) in unpacking and utilizing the *Marks*. To do so, *Journaling the Journey* provides reflective space and directed questions based on the eight *Marks* categories and the individual marks. These questions and prompts, like the *Marks*, are not exhaustive or exclusive. Use this journal to gain fresh perspective and to provoke new insights.

Each person, each partner in the covenants of authorized ministry, may develop a different habit for using *Journaling the Journey*:

- A Member in Discernment might use this journal when first becoming a MID in order to develop a formation plan in partnership with their local church and Committee on Ministry; then as the discernment journey nears a decision about ministry authorization, the MID might return to the journal to reflect upon upcoming professional steps (e.g. writing a ministerial profile or charting goals for a non-ministry path).
- A Committee on Ministry member might maintain a separate journal for each MID in the discernment process, as a place to keep a continuous set of notes and as a resource for developing questions for the MID.
- An authorized minister might approach *Journaling the Journey* as a tool for planning one’s sabbatical or reflecting on a ministerial transition (e.g. a new call or retirement), or as a community-building resource with colleagues.
Remember that *discernment* is not synonymous with *decision*. Discernment is the process of sifting through, of praying and examining and testing. The extensive work of discernment then informs a decision: at some point in the processes of discernment regarding authorized ministry, at some point during discussions on the *Marks* (including the work of assessment using the tool in the *Marks* booklet), at some point in the time spent reflecting with *Journaling the Journey*, a decision will become clear.

For all who use *Journaling the Journey* and the *Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers*, be mindful in balancing your study of the details and your reflection upon the whole. Remember that the goal is ongoing formation and the integration of competencies for a more excellent ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ.
EXHIBITING A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION AND ONGOING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Loving God, following Jesus Christ, and being guided by the Holy Spirit;
  living a life of discipleship.

*Write three brief stories: one story that demonstrates an occasion when you embodied the love of God, another story that describes your trust in Jesus, and one that testifies to your openness to the Spirit.*
EXHIBITING A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION AND ONGOING SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

- Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices.

Describe a spiritual practice that you have seen work well for a community. What recognizable growth was experienced by the community as a result?

What seeds are being sown in you – by God, by others, by you – for future spiritual growth?
WORKING TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE AND MERCY

○ Practicing the radical hospitality of God.

Where do you see the UCC’s commitment to inclusion and justice being modeled well? How do you strive to embody these commitments in your own life and ministry?
WORKING TOGETHER FOR JUSTICE AND MERCY

- Identifying and working to overcome explicit and implicit bias in the life of the Church.

Where do you see covenant working well in our UCC polity and structures?

Where do you dream for a more faithful demonstration of covenant in the UCC?