

## COVENANTING FOR DISCERNMENT AND FORMATION

A Covenant of Discernment and Formation is a commitment made ultimately by three parties, the Member in Discernment, the member's local church, and the Association; the initial covenant is between the member and the local church. Each party to the covenant has particular roles and responsibilities within the covenant made. The member, in consultation with her/his local church and Association is discerning what form her/his ministry will take and is preparing for it. The member's local church is that expression of the United Church of Christ that should best know the member. It recommends the member to the Association and provides the nurture and support the member needs to pursue her/his path to ministry. It also provides opportunities for the member to exercise her/his gifts for ministry within the life and witness of the church. The Association receives the request from the local church regarding its member's desire to explore a call to authorized ministry. If the Association enters into the covenant, it works with the member to develop a plan of preparation for the authorization sought (licensure, commissioning, ordination). If the member's covenant of discernment and formation continues toward authorization, it is the Association that is charged, on behalf of the entire United Church of Christ, with bestowing that authorization, as well as providing ongoing oversight for the ministry and ministers so authorized.

For the local church and the Association, particular entities within these bodies carry primary covenantal responsibilities. **The local church is urged to appoint a special discernment committee to work with the member that will represent the governing body and will play a central role in implementing the covenant.** The Association's responsibilities are primarily discharged by its Committee on the Ministry. Association Committees are reminded that the Ministry Issues Pronouncement of 2005 called on them to take particular care when meeting with members. They were asked to:

Adapt their procedures of discernment and decision-making by including members of the candidate's own community in the decision-making processes, taking the time and effort to educate themselves concerning the community's traditions and needs, and acknowledging the validity of the community's discernment when a candidate is a member of a racial/ethnic community which is not represented in significant numbers (50% or more) among the members of the Committee on the Ministry;

Adapt their procedures of discernment and decision-making when a candidate is disabled so as to honor that person's gifts and needs, taking the time and effort to educate themselves appropriately and including other individuals with disabilities in the processes

Along the way, others will participate in the covenant. An advisor will be appointed by the Committee on the Ministry to walk with the member during discernment and preparation. The member will remain in relationship with her/his pastor. S/he will interact in significant ways with teachers, mentors, and/or supervisors, be they at seminary, regional educational programs, individual tutorials or apprenticeships, and/or field education sites. The member will likely develop important collegial friendships with other students or mentees who are in their own covenants of discernment and formation. When a candidate is a member of a racial/ethnic community which is not represented in significant numbers (50% or more) among the members of the Committee on the Ministry, members of the candidate's own community will play a prominent role in the covenant of discernment. In all these covenant relationships the church affirms that God is the primary partner as together church and member seek to increase the love of God and neighbor and to walk together in all God's ways.

### ***Member in Discernment's Covenantal Responsibilities***

- Engage in disciplines of discernment regarding a possible call to authorized ministry.
- Receive the counsel of her/his local church and others regarding the possible call.
- Meet with the designated body in the member's local church regarding the member's call.
- Meet with the Association Committee on the Ministry.
- Explore with the covenant partners what type of authorization (licensure, commissioning, ordination) is the most appropriate response to the member's call.
- Work with the Association to develop an educational plan for the authorized ministry sought.
- Engage in the study and action prescribed in the education plan.
- Discern through prayer and reflection with covenant partners throughout the process.
- At the appropriate time, prepare and submit documentation to the Association and be interviewed by the Association regarding readiness for authorization.

### ***Local Church's Covenantal Responsibilities***

- Interact with the member as s/he undertakes initial exploration of her/his call;
- If the exploration proceeds, the local church recommends the member to the Association.
- After/if the Association enters into the covenant, the local church continues to provide support (including financial and spiritual) as the member engages in preparation for her/his ministry.
- Discern through prayer and reflection with covenant partners throughout the process.

### ***Association's Covenantal Responsibilities (primarily carried out through the Committee on the Ministry)***

- Receive the recommendation and supporting materials from a local church regarding its member's request to enter a covenant of discernment and formation
- Interview the member; if the Association enters the covenant, work with the member to discern the form of authorization (licensure, commissioning, ordination) most appropriate for the members call.
- Appoint an advisor to guide the member during the covenantal period.
- When a candidate is a member of a racial/ethnic community which is not represented in significant numbers (50% or more) among the members of the Committee on the Ministry, adapt its procedures of discernment and decision-making by including members of the Member in Discernment's own community in the decision-making processes, taking the time and effort to educate itself concerning the community's traditions and needs, and acknowledging the validity of the member's community's discernment.
- When the Member in Discernment is a person with disabilities, adapts its procedures of discernment and decision-making so as to honor that member's gifts and needs, taking the time and effort to educate itself appropriately and including other individuals with disabilities in the processes of discernment.
- Work with the member to develop a plan of preparation.
- Meet at agreed upon intervals with the member and representative of the local church to review the member's progress on her/his path of preparation.
- Discern through prayer and reflection with covenant partners throughout the process.
- At the appropriate time, request appropriate documentation from member and interview member to determine readiness for authorization.
- Decide whether to proceed with authorization in covenant with the member, her/his local church and, when appropriate, the member's particular community.

## ***Service Recognizing the beginning of a Covenant of Discernment and Formation***

\_\_\_\_\_ United of Christ, after carefully considering the call to explore authorized ministry of \_\_\_\_\_ respectfully requests that the \_\_\_\_\_ Association receive \_\_\_\_\_ as a Member in Discernment of this Association, according to the faith and order of the United Church of Christ

Association Representative:

The recognition of the establishment of a Covenant of Discernment and Formation is the way an Association affirms the process of a member responding to God's call to explore authorized ministry and to explore it in covenant community with her/his local church and the Association. The \_\_\_\_\_ Association celebrates this covenant with \_\_\_\_\_ (member) and \_\_\_\_\_ (church).

(To the member) Your intention to prepare yourself for authorized ministry will require diligent and prayerful work. This Association, through its committee on the ministry, joins with your local church in promising to assist you in your pilgrimage of education and formation. With you, we seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the future opens before all of us in this covenant. We invite you to call upon the Association wherever we may be helpful to you in your preparation and formation.

Vows

*Association Representative addressing the Member in Discernment*

As you enter into this covenant with \_\_\_\_\_ (church) and this Association, do you promise to seek the guidance of the congregation and Association, to receive support of both, and to communicate regularly with each?

I do with the help of God.

*Association Representative addressing the local church representative*

As a representative of \_\_\_\_\_ (church) entering into this covenant of discernment and formation with one of your members and with this Association, do you promise on behalf of your congregation to encourage your member in her/his preparation for authorized ministry, undergirding her/him with prayer, support and nurture?

We do with the help of God.

*Association Representative addressing a representative of the Committee on the Ministry*

Adapted from *Book of Worship* service recognizing In Care relationship. The Ministry Issues Implementation Committee anticipates that, as the project moves forward, new liturgies will be created and offered to the Church.

As a representative of this Association's Committee on the Ministry, do you promise to faithfully engage in this covenant with \_\_\_\_\_ (member) and \_\_\_\_\_ (church)? Will you be generous with your counsel, supportive of the member's preparation, honest in your feedback, and diligent in your assessing the readiness of this Member in Discernment for authorized ministry?

We will with the help of God.

*Association Representative addressing the Member in Discernment's advisor*

As advisor of this Member in Discernment, do you join this covenant, pledging to support, guide, and walk alongside this member as s/he continues the pilgrimage of education and formation, maintaining regular contact both with her/him and the Association's Committee on the Ministry?

I do with the help of God.

*Association Representative addressing the members of the Association*

Do you the ministers and delegates of this Association confirm the covenant made this day among this Association, \_\_\_\_\_ (church) and \_\_\_\_\_ (Member in Discernment)? Do you offer encouragement for this Member in Discernment, and will you pledge to sustain her/him in the continued preparation for authorized ministry in the church of Jesus Christ, to pray for her/him and to recognize this special covenant into which s/he enters with her/his congregation and this Association?

We do and we will with praise the thanksgiving to God.

#### Prayer

Enter, O God, into this covenant made today. Pour out your Holy Spirit on this Association, congregation and \_\_\_\_\_ (member), that the promises we have made today will bear the fruit of ministry in your name, ministry of the whole people of God and ministry of those authorized for specific callings. Equip \_\_\_\_\_ (member) to be diligent in her/his discernment and preparation and \_\_\_\_\_ (church) and this Association to be faithful in offering encouragement and guidance. May our mutual ministry manifest mighty and gentle works of justice, compassion and peace, service in the service of others, and a witness to your realm that has no end. Blessing and honor, glory and power, be unto you, Amen.