

Ministers and Ministerial Authorization

MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT, MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SEARCH AND CALL

prepare

What's behind all this?

In the United Church of Christ, we believe that all people are ministers by virtue of their baptism. This is known as the priesthood of all believers. Each person lives out and lives into a ministry, in whatever their vocation.

Some people within the Church are called to a particular form of ministry that includes preaching, teaching, serving sacraments, and representing God in Christ to the Church and to the world. Through a process of mutual discernment between an individual and a Committee on Ministry within their local association, those who will serve in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ are ordained and authorized for ministry.

Committees on Ministry and associations are also entrusted with ministerial oversight and accountability. Committees on Ministry and associations do this in a variety of ways including information reviews, vocational support, situational support consultations, and fitness reviews. Through these oversight processes, Committees on Ministry and associations assist ministers in the continuing discernment of their call and vocation, maintaining healthy behavior and relationships, and upholding the Minister's Code, a document that outlines expectations for ministers.

Once approved by their Committee on Ministry (and ecclesiastical council in some cases) as ready to be authorized for ministry, UCC ministers can enter the search and call process. This is the process whereby a church in search of a new minister and a minister desiring to serve a church are able to discern together whether they are a good fit for one another.

Participants' Perspectives

- Participants may currently or in the past may have served on a Committee on Ministry. They may have mentored a Member in Discernment through the process or may be beginning to do so, or they may be discerning a sense of call themselves and trying to learn more about authorization. Engaging the material on Authorization for Ministry and Members in Discernment will be of help.
- Accountability and oversight is often not a widely discussed subject but is vital work for the health of ministers and congregations. Engaging the materials on

As you prepare for this session

- Check the length of any videos
- Make a timeline for this session
- Choose your "engage" activity/activities
- Double-check the materials needed

Where is this going?

Participants will explore the role of Committees on Ministry in local associations, their work in mutual discernment with Members in Discernment, and their processes for oversight of ministers in their association.

Participants will also explore the basics of the search and call process and its connection to our polity.

Ministers and Ministerial Authority

MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT, MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SEARCH AND CALL

ministerial oversight and accountability will be of help in understanding the processes and why they are important.

- Some participants may have experience with the search and call process or be in the beginning stages of searching, either as a church or as a minister. The search and call process is a significant time of discernment with many questions. Engaging the material on search and call will be of help in understanding the tools and resources available.

encounter

Video

1. Choose a Topic or Topics for Focus

There are a variety of topics within this section that relate to ministers and ministerial authorization in the UCC. Depending on your setting, you may want to choose one area for time together, combine different focus topics into one session, or cover the different topics of focus over multiple gatherings. Each has a video to frame the topic and coordinating activity to help participants explore the topic further.

2. Watch

“The Work of Committees on Ministry: Members in Discernment and Authorization for Ministry”

“Discerning a Call to Authorized Ministry: The Journey of a Member in Discernment”

“The Work of Committees on Ministry: Ministerial Oversight and Accountability”

“Search and Call: When Congregations Are Seeking New Pastoral Leadership”

3. Unpack

Focus Area (first two videos above): Members in Discernment and Authorization for Ministry

- What is the priesthood of all believers? Why is it important in the UCC? How does it relate to how the UCC interprets the sacrament of baptism?
- Which of our historic traditions brought the idea of the priesthood of all believers into the UCC?
- What is a Member in Discernment? What is the basic process for a Member in Discernment? With whom do they work?
- What does it mean to say that someone is “in discernment?”
- Ordained ministers are ordained in and on behalf of the whole

Materials:

-Ability to show video

Ministers and Ministerial Authority

MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT, MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SEARCH AND CALL

UCC to serve the Church and the world. In what ways do they often serve?

Focus Area: Ministerial Oversight and Accountability

- Who has the authority in the UCC to provide oversight of ministers?
- How are various kinds of oversight practiced?
- What is the Minister's Code? How is it used for maintaining accountability?
- Why is oversight of ministers and the practice of accountability important?

Focus Area: Search and Call

- What happens in a search and call process?
- How is discernment practiced?

engage

Choose one or more activities to explore the session's themes.

Activity One: Members in Discernment and Authorization for Ministry

In the UCC, authorization for ministry--determining who is called and prepared to serve in pastoral leadership in our churches--is the responsibility of each association. The Committee on Ministry in an association works with individuals to discern how a candidate is called by God and whether they are ready to serve in and on behalf of the UCC. Authorization for ministry is granted by the association after a period of preparation and mutual discernment by both the candidate and the committee. A final step may be an ecclesiastical council within the association.

The process towards authorization begins with discernment within the local congregation. As the sense of call is affirmed in community, the person begins meeting with the Committee on Ministry, who will help the person understand the process used with Members in Discernment.

As Members in Discernment engage in education and spiritual formation in preparation for ministry, The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers will be a helpful tool for discernment and assessment. This tool was created especially for use by Members in Discernment, Committees on Ministry, and authorized ministers.

With participants, look through the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. Please note that no person will have full mastery of all of the Marks.

Materials:

-Copies of the Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers

Ministers and Ministerial Authority

MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT, MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SEARCH AND CALL

Some Marks may help identify areas of strength and others areas for growth. After looking at the Marks, ask participants

- What themes did you notice?
- What skills and gifts are highlighted as essential for ministry?
- How is a UCC identity and theological orientation infused into different areas of the Marks?
- What role does spiritual formation play in the formation of ministers and the fruitfulness of their ministry?
- If you are an authorized minister or Member in Discernment, what Marks reflect your strengths? What Marks reflect your growing edges? How might you work towards growth?
- Though this tool was designed for authorized ministers, if you are a lay person (knowing the UCC values the priesthood of all believers and understands that each person is called to a ministry), consider what Marks reflect your strengths and what Marks reflect perhaps places for growth and development. How might you work towards growth?

Activity Two: Ministerial Oversight and Accountability

Associations and Committees on Ministry receive specific training on how to provide the various kinds of oversight. This work is sensitive in nature and thus proper training is vital. Rather than use this time for that specific training, give participants a first exposure to this process by reviewing the Minister's Code and coming to a working understanding of what ministers are held accountable to. The latest version of the Minister's Code is available on ucc.org.

If participants are members of a Committee on Ministry or are authorized ministers, ask participants to reflect on the Code and assess how they live into the Code already and what areas of growth are needed in their lives and ministry. Is there a form of support or accountability they could they benefit from (vocational or situational, clergy groups or coaching, etc.)? What would that look like? What if any next steps are there for them to take?

If participants are lay members, ask them to draft a Lay Member's Code. Hang newsprint around the room for small groups to write their own or do this as an individual activity. Following similar themes to the Minister's Code, invite participants to think through what lay people ought commit to and be held accountable to in their lives, ministry, behavior, ethics, prophetic witness, etc.

Materials:

- Copies of the Minister's Code
- Newsprint or paper for note taking
- Markers or pens

Ministers and Ministerial Authority

MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT, MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY, AND SEARCH AND CALL

Activity Three: Search and Call

The search and call process is supported by your local conference or association. They can provide training and conversation partners as your church or you as a minister enter the search and call process. There are also several resources on ucc.org under the search and call section.

One of resources you'll find there is the local church profile. The local church profile is used by a searching congregation to explain who they are, who they are called to be, and what their hopes for ministry and leadership are going into the future. The local church profile, however, is not only for searching congregations. Rather it is the recommendation that all churches create profiles, review them yearly, and update them regularly. The very practice of doing this can help your congregation more fully articulate who it is now as well as its vision, mission, and purpose; its sense of who God is calling it to be; and its hope for the future. In the process, you'll identify ministry goals and potential areas of growth and spiritual formation, as well as the ministerial gifts and graces of the whole congregation, not just of authorized ministers, for becoming the church God is calling you to be.

Invite participants to divide up into smaller groups and give them the local church profile. There isn't a need to fill in all the spaces (like minister's compensation) at this point. Rather, ask them to focus more on evaluating more reflective and visionary questions about who they are, who is their neighbor, and who they are growing to become. After they have had a chance to work, gather back into one bigger group and invite participants to share their answers and discuss.

Take it one step further:

Creating a local church profile will be a necessary part of a search and call process, but if your church is not currently in the search and call process, consider engaging a process for completing the profile and reviewing it annually. Additional resources are available on ucc.org and through your conference's leadership.

Materials:

-Copies of the local church profile

wrap-up

Regroup

Gather to share and reflect on what you've discovered and learned today.

Questions for conversation:

- What was one new learning for you today?
- What do you want to think about more?
- What will you do in response?

Ministers and Ministerial Authority

MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT, MINISTERIAL
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Closing

Close time together by having each participant share one thing they are grateful for from their time together.

Sending

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the many ways in which God's people are called to and serve in ministry. Offer a blessing for communities of faith and people who are in intentional periods of discernment about what comes next in their ministry and for your participants who are likewise in continual discernment about who God is calling them and the Church to be.