

Guidelines for The Ministerial Discernment Process

(Commonly Known As Section 4)

Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee

Vermont Conference
United Church of Christ



Prepared by the
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Introduction

The purpose of these *Discernment Guidelines* is to describe the entire process associated with being a *Member in Discernment*, as practiced by the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee (MSSC) of the Vermont Conference.

The Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization Ministry Team (MESA) and those working to implement the Pronouncement passed at General Synod 25 — "Ministry Issues: Forming and Preparing Pastoral Leaders for God's Church" — has recommended a change from Student In Care status to Member in Discernment status that will appear in the next revision of *Manual on Ministry*. This terminology change represents a shift in terms of the emphasis on and the understanding of ministerial formation and discernment, both for candidates and those who will assess their fitness for ordained ministry. This shift is reflected in these *Discernment Guidelines*. However, during this time of transition, the terms should be considered essentially interchangeable.

In addition to describing the journey to be taken by the Member in Discernment (MID) these *Discernment Guidelines* also state the relationship of the candidate for ordained ministry to each of the following Covenantal Partners:

- I. The Local Church Discernment Committee (LCDC)
- II. The Local Church Sponsoring Body (e.g., Church Council or Board of Deacons)
- III. The Association, including the following who serve on its behalf:
 - Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee (MSSC)
 - The Discernment Partner
 - The MSSC Liaison

The process that the candidate will follow is the responsibility of the **MSSC**. The MSSC is made up of both clergy and lay members from the eight Associations of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ, though it serves on behalf of the following Associations only: Addison, Champlain, Northeast, Washington, and Windham-Union. Among its several responsibilities is recommending the licensing, commissioning, and ordaining of ministers to its constituent Associations and working with **Members in Discernment (MID)** (also referred to in this document as a "candidate for ordained ministry" or, simply, "the candidate"). Each of the other **Covenantal Partners** listed above makes contributions toward the candidate's readiness for ministry and helps in discerning the candidate's fitness for ministry.

No single set of guidelines can hope to cover all possible situations. However, it is expected that deviations will be rare. When the MSSC feels that deviations are warranted it will attempt to make exceptions in a way that is respectful of all parties involved in the process, and in the best interest of the United Church of Christ and the candidate, insofar as it can discern them. **These *Discernment Guidelines* with all attachments shall be reviewed and updated if necessary every 3 years by the MSSC. The next review year is 2018.** **Note:** Throughout this document there are references to the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry*. References are cited as section number followed by page numbers. *Manual on Ministry* is available on line at www.ucc.org.

Application for Member in Discernment Relationship — An Overview

When to Apply

A person considering ordination in the United Church of Christ is strongly encouraged to apply for Member in Discernment (MID) status upon enrollment in an accredited theological seminary, if not before. To be considered for MID status a candidate must minimally have already acquired a high school diploma and be participating in a bachelors degree program or its equivalent as determined by the MSSC.

Purpose for Seeking Member in Discernment Status

The purpose of being in Discernment is to seek support and guidance in the process of discerning a call to the ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ. MID status is also a requirement for being considered for ordination within one of the five Vermont Conference Associations served by the MSSC (i.e., Addison, Champlain, Northeast, Washington, and Windham-Union).

Length of Relationship

In order to be considered for ordination the candidate should expect to be in the Member in Discernment process for *at least two full years*. Member in Discernment status is not automatically transferable from one Association to the Associations on whose behalf the MSSC functions. Members in Discernment (or those who have been received “In Care” by an Association) who are moving from another Association in the United Church of Christ to one of the MSSC’s constituent Associations and who wish to continue their Member in Discernment (or In Care) status must make application as outlined in these guidelines. Consideration will be given to years already in Discernment (or In Care) and where the candidate currently is in her or his process. MID status once granted is renewed on a yearly basis. Those Members in Discernment who have completed their education and have been granted ordination pending call from an Ecclesiastical Council of the one of the five constituent Associations of the MSSC will continue as a Member in Discernment until receiving a ministerial call. Though the formal advisory relationship will cease, candidates approved for ordination pending call will meet with the MSSC at least annually in an agreed upon review process, in addition to maintaining their participation in the local church.

The Discernment Journey

The Discernment relationship is covenantal, with the purpose of helping the candidate in the discernment of a call to ordained Christian ministry and the process of moving toward ordination. This journey begins with an individual's seeking to clarify his or her call to ministry and moves from there to application for Member in Discernment status. If Member in Discernment status is granted, the journey continues until such time as the candidate is ordained or the Discernment relationship is terminated by either the candidate or the MSSC.

It is expected that all Members in Discernment will have a copy of these *Discernment Guidelines* and will obtain a complete current copy of the United Church of Christ publication, *The Manual on Ministry*. This is available on line at www.ucc.org. Members in Discernment are expected to be familiar with both of these publications and any updates.

Each person granted Discernment status is expected to be familiar with the Codes of Conduct as outlined in the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry*. While Members in Discernment, candidates are held accountable to the ethics outlined in "The Church's Expectations of Its Applicants for Student In-Care," Section 2, p. 18, *Manual on Ministry*. Any breach of these ethics will be investigated by the MSSC. A serious or chronic breach of ethics may be grounds for terminating Member in Discernment status.

I. The Local Church Discernment Committee (LCDC)

- A. The candidate for ordination (hereafter referred to as "the candidate") will seek out the pastor of the local church in which she or he holds membership to discuss his or her sense of call. The pastor will listen to and counsel the candidate regarding his or her call, and will continue to be available throughout the successive stages of the process.
- B. The candidate may obtain a copy of the Discernment Guidelines from their pastor, from the Conference Office, or on the web at <http://www.vtcucc.org/docs/church%20and%20ministry/Discernment%20Process.pdf>

Once the Conference Office has been notified of a candidate's interest in ordination, the MSSC will appoint a liaison for the candidate.

- C. A Local Church Discernment Committee (LCDC) is formed by the local church, consisting of representatives from the local congregation. Its purpose is to meet with the candidate to discern and clarify the call that the candidate has received. The LCDC should explore with the candidate the issues outlined in Section 2, page 4, of *Manual on Ministry*. The composition of the LCDC is left to the local church to determine. This may be a pre-existing committee (e.g., Council or Board of Deacons) or one created specifically for the purpose. The candidate and the LCDC may be helpfully guided in their work of initial discernment through the use of the resource, "Ask the Question: A Resource for Discernment of Call," available upon request from the Vermont Conference Office or at www.askthequestion.org.
- D. When both the LCDC and the candidate agree that the candidate is prepared to enter into the Member in Discernment process with the MSSC, the candidate will be presented to an authorized group of the congregation's choice (e.g., Church Council or Board of Deacons) by the LCDC to request formal sponsorship by the local church as a Member in Discernment. Note: This step may

be omitted if the Sponsoring Body has already acted as the LCDC (see below).

II. The Local Church Sponsoring Body

- A. When a candidate is ready to make a formal request to the local church for its sponsorship in the Member in Discernment (MID) process with the MSSC, the local church will determine which group within the congregation will serve as the Sponsoring Body (e.g., Council or Board of Deacons).
- B. A lay leader or pastor notifies the chair of the MSSC. A representative from the MSSC will meet with the pastor, the candidate, and the LCDC which in some churches may be the same as the Sponsoring Body outline the Discernment journey and the requirements and expectations of all those in the *Discernment Covenant*, Appendix E.
- C. When the LCDC feels the candidate is ready, they will present the candidate to the Sponsoring Body for consideration. At this time, the Sponsoring Body will have an indepth interview with the candidate which might include issues outlined in Section 2, page 4, of the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry*.

The Sponsoring Body, on behalf of the local church, then decides whether or not to recommend the candidate to the MSSC to be received as a Member in Discernment. If the Sponsoring Body approves the request for sponsorship, the *Application for Member in Discernment Status*, Appendix A, should be filled out and added to the candidate's application materials.

- D. Only with the formal sponsorship of the local church may the candidate be presented to the MSSC for consideration of MID status. It is expected that the candidate will continue her or his membership and relationship with the sponsoring congregation.
- E. If MID status is granted by the MSSC, the pastor and the local church can participate with the candidate in the following ways:
 1. Assist in providing annual financial support. Financial aid to the candidate after approval for MID status by the MSSC is recommended when appropriate. The local church is also encouraged to defray the costs of travel for interviews. The church will also be required to share 1/3 the cost of the mandatory psychological and career assessment.
 2. Maintain contact to remind the candidate of the constant prayer and support that she or he receives from many different sources. Examples:
 - a) Regular public prayers for the Member in Discernment may be offered by the pastor or lay leaders.
 - b) The pastor may be asked to read a rough draft of the candidate's ordination paper in advance of an Ordination Interview.
 3. While the candidate is in seminary, the local church is strongly encouraged to keep him or her on mailing lists and remember him or her through prayer and cards on birthdays, anniversaries, and holidays. Visits by local church members when in the geographic area of the seminary are also encouraged.
 4. The Member in Discernment's participation in worship when the candidate is at home is another way in which the ongoing relationship between the sponsoring church and the

candidate can be strengthened.

5. Continuing conversations between the local pastor, local church board, and candidate may reveal concerns that may need to be conveyed to the MSSC for its consideration, advice, and assistance.
 6. Participate in the candidate's Annual Reviews (Section VI, G. Also, see the format in *Manual on Ministry*, Section 2, pages 10-11, entitled "The Person and Local Church.")
 7. The LCDC might create a *Student Profile* that lists the individual's past and continuing experience with his or her local church (e.g., keeping records of conferences attended, teaching Church School, singing in the choir, Peace & Justice Committee work). The LCDC, along with the local pastor, could create a plan for a year of participation when attending the local church. This plan would help fill out the profile of experience, including but not limited to: preaching and participating in worship; learning how to conduct a funeral, baptism, or wedding; working with the ministries of stewardship, evangelism and missions; and ministering to the dying and their families.
- F. At the completion of the Discernment journey, and upon recommendation of the MSSC, the Sponsoring Body of the local church will request in writing that the Association of which it is a member examine the candidate for ordination at an Ecclesiastical Council. This letter will be sent to the Conference Office. The MSSC will make the official request to the Association.

III. The Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee (MSSC)

A. Relationship.

The MSSC is the authorized body that makes final decisions concerning Discernment status. It also makes recommendations to the candidate's home Association regarding Ecclesiastical Councils for the purpose of examining candidates for ordination. Candidates seeking Member in Discernment status and ordination will be required to meet with the MSSC at specific times during the process.

B. Initial Interview.

Candidates seeking MID status will be required to meet with the MSSC following submission of all required paperwork listed in Section VI (C). Following this interview, the MSSC will vote to either receive the candidate as a Member in Discernment or deny the request for MID status. If MID status is denied, the MSSC will discuss with the candidate its reasons for the denial. The candidate may then choose to work on the problem areas the MSSC has outlined and may later reapply to the MSSC for reconsideration.

IV. MSSC Liaison

A. The MSSC Liaison is a member of the MSSC.

B. The primary responsibility of the MSSC Liaison is to support the MID in fulfilling the logistical requirements of the MID process as delineated in the *Manual on Ministry*, Section 2, and these

Discernment Guidelines. Fulfillment of this responsibility includes:

1. Pray.
2. Connect with the MID as soon as possible after the MID is accepted into the covenantal relationship with MSSC for the purposes of reviewing the expectations, requirements, and procedures of the discernment relationship as outlined in these Guidelines. Initiate the signing of the Discernment Covenant, Appendix E, in these Guidelines.
3. In conversation with the MID, establish a system of communication that will provide consistent review of the MID's status (at least quarterly) as well as offer a reliable, accessible opportunity for the MID to raise questions or concerns about the relationships and process outlined in these Guidelines.
4. Encourage the MID to maintain consistent communication with all covenantal partners in the discernment process as outlined in these Guidelines, including the home church, home pastor, Discernment Partner, Association, and other related advisors and supervisors participating in the MID's ministerial formation. Redirect questions and conversations to the appropriate setting.
5. Advise the MID regarding the required materials to be provided to the MSSC throughout the period of discernment.

C. In addition, the MSSC Liaison will have the following responsibilities:

1. Discuss with the MSSC if questions arise regarding the MID.
2. Encourage the MID to take an active part in the various settings of the UCC: Association, Conference, and National.
3. Provide the MID with recommendations for further development, including reading, formal and informal opportunities for learning or growth, and mentors.
4. As invited, provide preparation support and attend the MID's ecclesiastical council and ordination service.

D. When a MSSC Liaison's relationship with a MID has ended for any reason, all confidential records (transcripts, evaluations, etc.) relevant to the MID will be returned to the MSSC and placed in the MID's files or destroyed.

IV. Discernment Partner

When a candidate is accepted as a Member-in-Discernment (MID), the MSSC assigns a Discernment Partner who will be an additional covenantal partners with the MID, alongside the MID's home church, home church pastor, the Association, and other relevant advisors or supervisors involved in the MID's ministerial formation. Together, this group participates in a

communal discernment process with the MID as the MID prayerfully and practically pursues their understanding of God's call.

- A. The Discernment Partner is typically an ordained, licensed, or commissioned minister but, on occasion, may be a qualified layperson.
- B. The primary responsibility of the Discernment Partner is to engage the MID in theological and spiritual reflection relative to the MID's evolving sense of call and experience of ministerial formation. Fulfillment of this responsibility includes:
 1. Pray.
 2. Conversations (in-person, if at all possible) with the MID at least four times a year, with an intentional focus on how the MID is experiencing God in the midst of his/her formation; the MID's understanding of call; the joys and challenges of the MID's spiritual life and practice; and reflection upon the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministry.
 3. Be accessible for the MID to raise and explore questions about faith, the church, and the Christian ministry throughout the year.
 4. Contribute to the MID Annual Review process as requested by the MID or the MSSC. Accompany the MID to the seminary middler review or its equivalent.
 5. Advise the MID on the drafting of the ordination paper prior to the paper being submitted to the MSSC for the Final Year Review.
 6. Accompany the MID to the ordination interview with the MSSC and actively engage in the conversation, as invited.
 7. Provide written references on behalf of the MID when requested, as appropriate.
- C. In addition, the Discernment Partner will have the following responsibilities:
 1. Be familiar with the general process and covenantal partners involved with the MID's experience as a MID.
 2. Communicate with the MSSC if concerns arise regarding the MID.
 3. Encourage the MID to take an active part in the various settings of the UCC: Association, Conference, and National.
 4. Provide the MID with recommendations for further development, including reading, formal and informal opportunities for learning or growth, and mentors.
 5. As invited, provide preparation support and attend the MID's ecclesiastical council and ordination service.

- D. When a Discernment Partner's relationship with a MID has ended for any reason, all confidential records (transcripts, evaluations, etc.) relevant to the MID will be returned to the MSSC and placed in the MID's files or destroyed.

VI. The Discernment Process

- A. Ideally, a member of the MSSC will have met with the pastor, the candidate, and the Local Church Discernment Committee to outline the Discernment journey and the requirements and expectations of all those in the Discernment covenant before the Sponsoring Body congregation decides whether or not to recommend the candidate to the MSSC for MID status.
- B. Upon the approval by the local church Sponsoring Body, the candidate is introduced in person to the MSSC by the local pastor and a lay member (the chair of the Deacons or other key layperson) of the local church at a preliminary interview.
- C. The following documents must be submitted to the MSSC in advance of this initial meeting (see note below*):
1. *The Application for Member in Discernment Status and Background Disclosure*, Appendices A and B.
 2. Written verification of membership by a local church of the United Church of Christ.
 3. *The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers* (referred to as *MARKS*). *MARKS* are to be completed by the candidate and three people one of whom is the candidate's pastor prior to MID status. The *MARKS* Assessment can be found at the United Church of Christ website www.ucc.org/ministers/marks.html.
 4. The background materials the candidate presented to the LCDC, revised if necessary, including the person's life pilgrimage, understanding of call, and formal education.
 5. A letter from the Sponsoring Body describing the process used by the local church to examine the candidate.
 6. A written statement from the candidate outlining a financial plan for pursuing theological education and living with the financial limitations that accompany ordained ministry. The candidate should respond to the following questions:
 - How will you financially support your seminary education?
 - How do you feel about potentially accruing significant seminary debt with the prospect of not making much money in ministry once you have completed your education?
 - Do you have any significant financial factors that may affect your proposed choices in ministry (e.g., mortgage payments, elderly parents to support, child's college tuition to pay, etc.)

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- Are you currently able to meet your debts as they become due? Do you expect this situation to change? Please explain.
- Do you now need or do you anticipate needing financial assistance?
- Do you have health care coverage?
- With whom have you consulted in making your financial plans?

7. Any other materials that were provided to the LCDC, revised if necessary.

*Note: All materials to be submitted to the MSSC throughout the Discernment process should be mailed directly to the Conference Office for inclusion in the candidate's official file.

D. The MSSC will examine the candidate at the preliminary meeting based upon the material submitted, as well as the oral presentation and dialogue. This is a two-way interview; the candidate should take the opportunity to ask questions regarding the Discernment relationship and process, as well as any special concerns related to the candidate's particular situation. These questions or any others may and should be raised by the candidate at any point in the Discernment process if these matters require clarification.

E. Psychological and Career Assessment.

Following the preliminary interview, and if the MSSC agrees to continue the process towards granting MID status, the candidate is provided with the information needed to make arrangements for a psychological and career assessment by an examiner approved by the MSSC.

1. When making arrangements for the assessment, the candidate signs and sends the *Authorization and Release* form, Appendix D, to the assessment center.
2. A copy of the assessment goes to the candidate which she or he is encouraged to later share with her or his Discernment Partner.
3. The results of the assessment are confidential and are sent directly to the Vermont Conference Office. The MSSC chair shares them with the whole group.
4. The cost of the assessment will be shared in equal portions by the candidate, the local church, and the Association of which the candidate's sponsoring congregation is a member.
5. The assessment summary will reside solely in a locked file at the Vermont Conference Office at the point when the candidate receives MID status by the MSSC.

Once the assessment report has been received and reviewed by the MSSC, the candidate may be invited to a follow-up interview to discuss the report's implications for the candidate, his or her discernment process, and further formation and training for ordained ministry.

F. Member in Discernment Status Decision.

1. After reviewing the candidate's materials and interviewing the candidate, the MSSC will vote on the candidate's MID status. The decision can be (1) "Yes", (2) "Yes, but", (3) "No, but", or (4) "No". See Manual On Ministry, Section 2, Pg. 6-7 for full details of each of these.
2. If the MSSC approves MID status for the candidate, it will be subject to MSSC's approval of the results of the Psychological and Career Assessment. The testing appointment must be scheduled within six months after the MID interview and completed before the next interview, which will be no sooner than one year after the meeting at which the candidate was accepted into the MID process.

Once officially an approved MID candidate, the MSSC will assign a Discernment Partner and enter into a *Discernment Covenant*, Appendix E.

3. If approved, the MID Chair will send a letter to the Association Moderator and copy anyone on the MSSC who is from the candidate's association. The Member in Discernment will be presented during worship at a meeting of his or her Association. A liturgy for this is available in the Book of Worship. If possible, an MSSC member will be present.
4. If the MSSC decides not to grant MID status, the person seeking MID status will be informed and invited to discuss the Group's concerns. The candidate may choose to address the concerns the MSSC has outlined and may later reapply for MID status.

G. Annual Reviews.

1. Annual Reviews are held with the MSSC for the purpose of evaluating the past year and looking ahead to the next year of the Discernment journey. The Annual Review also seeks to maintain the covenantal relationship with the candidate and explores ways to improve the supportive relationship between the MSSC and the Member in Discernment.
2. Dates for each Annual Review will be determined by the MSSC in consultation with the candidate.
3. The pastor and/or a member of the candidate's local church and the Discernment Partner are expected to participate in each Annual Review. The Annual Review is expected to be face-to-face. If this is not possible, it is the candidate's responsibility to notify the chair of the MSSC to consider other possibilities.
4. Annual Reviews with the candidate and MSSC consist of four parts:
 - a. review of seminary transcripts, evaluations, and reviews;
 - b. an oral, face-to-face interview (or another approved alternative);
 - c. written responses to the questions assigned for each Annual Review (see H-J below);
 - d. A copy of MARKS filled out by your pastor or LCDC member, your Discernment Partner, and yourself. The current MARKS form is on the web [HERE](http://www.vtcucc.org/docs/church%20and%20ministry/MSSC%20Marks.pdf) or at <http://www.vtcucc.org/docs/church%20and%20ministry/MSSC%20Marks.pdf>

5. Candidates are asked to forward to the Conference Office, no less than four weeks prior to each Annual Review (see note below*):
 - a. all seminary grades, transcripts, or field education evaluations;
 - b. any CPE evaluations;
 - c. any review processes initiated by the seminary in any area (including but not limited to Mid-Program Reviews);
 - d. and written reflections to Annual Review questions as outlined in the directions for each Annual Review, covering each subject adequately but concisely (see H-J below).

*Note: The *Authorization & Release Form*, Appendix D, should be used whenever necessary to ensure that the above documents may be released to the MSSC for consideration.

6. Several questions will be given to the candidate to respond to orally during each Annual Review. They may include any or all of the following (or questions created for the specific candidate):
 - a. What is the nature of your involvement in the life of the United Church of Christ in its Association and Conference spheres?
 - b. What aspects of your academic program do you most and least value?
 - c. What is your understanding of the ordination requirements and what progress do you see yourself making toward meeting them?
 - d. Describe a time when your relationship with God changed or deepened this year.
 - e. Name a person who has made an impact on your spiritual life and describe that impact.
 - f. How do you experience the influence of Jesus in your life?
 - g. What inhibits you from living out your faith?
 - h. What do you do to take care of your physical being?

H. First Year Annual Review Questions.

1. Reflect upon this past year's seminary experience in terms of expectations met and/or surpassed, disappointments, and overall impressions.
2. In the midst of all the pressures of going to school, be specific about how you have been able to attend to your spiritual journey.
3. How are you meeting your seminary's requirements for theological education and/or those suggestions made by your Discernment Partner?
4. Share any significant developments in your thinking in matters of faith, style of ministry, and ordination or authorization plans.
5. Name at least one issue that you believe the Church, in any of its various settings, needs to

address as it moves into the next decade.

6. Are there physical or emotional health issues that you want to share with the MSSC?

I. Second Year Annual Review Questions.

1. Describe a difficult real-life situation you encountered this past year, and comment on the theological/spiritual concepts which may apply in this situation.

2. Reflect upon the past year's seminary or general discernment experience in terms of expectations met and/or surpassed disappointments, and overall impressions.

3. Describe how you make moral decisions for yourself. Address how you might deal with a congregation when your decisions run contrary to the norms of the majority of the congregation using one of the following issues or another of your choice:

abortion	AIDS	child custody
divorce	gambling	inclusive language
justice	issues of sexual orientation	denominational loyalty
women in ministry	peace/war	race
politics	church U.S. flag display	human sexuality

4. What do you see as your special personal qualities? What will you uniquely bring to the United Church of Christ that is needed?

5. How are you meeting your seminary's requirements for theological education and/or those suggestions made by your Discernment Partner?

6. Do you have physical or emotional health issues that you wish to share with the MSSC?

J. Third and subsequent year Annual Review questions.

These will be developed each additional year, except for the final year, and given to the candidate four weeks prior to their due date.

K. Following each Annual Review:

1. One copy of all materials is placed in the candidate's permanent file.

2. A vote is taken by the MSSC to either renew or terminate the candidate's MID status.

3. If the MSSC votes to recommend termination of MID based on failure to adequately fulfill the requirements, the candidate will be informed and invited to discuss this decision.

4. Following a vote to renew MID status, the candidate will be notified in writing.

C. Final Year/Ordination Interview.

The final interview before a candidate is granted authorization for an Ecclesiastical Council is the Final Year/Ordination Interview. The primary purpose of the Ordination Interview is to determine the candidate's readiness and fitness for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ.

NOTE: The MSSC may require that a candidate have a final year review prior to an ordination interview, should the majority of the committee feel that a particular candidate's situation and their individual discernment path warrants such a meeting. This is at the sole discretion of the MSSC.

1. The following are required of candidates for the Ordination Interview:
 - a. A completed Ministerial Profile. The Ministerial Profile may be completed as early as six months prior to graduation from seminary though it may not be circulated until an Ecclesiastical Council has been held and the candidate is "approved for ordination, pending call."
 - b. Successful completion of the following:
 - 1) The requirements for an undergraduate degree from an accredited college or university or its equivalent as determined by the MSSC together with an appropriate seminary degree relative to her or his particular area of ministry.
 - 2) At least one basic unit of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) that is accepted by the MSSC and the candidate's seminary.
 - 3) One school year of a field education program accepted by the MSSC.
 - 4) A Clergy Boundary Training workshop or seminar accepted by the MSSC.
 - 5) A United Church of Christ history, polity, and identity course.
 - c. At least four letters of reference, including one from the seminary, one from the candidate's Discernment Partner, and one from an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, mailed directly to the Conference Office by the reference writers (see Section 3, page 25, *Manual on Ministry*).
 - d. A sermon recently delivered should be sent to the Conference Office no less than 30 days before the interview.
 - e. The candidate's ordination paper submitted no less than 30 days before the Final Year/Ordination Interview to the Conference Office.
 - f. Preparation for engaging in four areas of dialogue, as follows:
 - 1) The candidate's personal faith and her or his journey to this day.
 - 2) The candidate's theological knowledge and perspective on:
 - a) the Bible;
 - b) theology;
 - c) pastoral care;
 - d) ecumenism;
 - e) worship and sacraments;
 - f) Christian education;
 - g) stewardship;

- h) ministerial ethics;
- i) and mission.

- 3) The candidate's knowledge of the history, polity, and identity of the United Church of Christ.
 - 4) The candidate's ability to articulate thoughts and feelings meaningfully and authentically.
2. The Discernment Partner will accompany the candidate to the Ordination Interview and will be free to participate.
 3. Upon completion of the Ordination Interview, a vote is taken by the MSSC to determine whether or not to recommend ordained ministerial authorization to the Association in which the candidate is a member. The decision can be (1) "Yes", (2) "Yes, but", (3) "No, but", or (4) "No".
 - a. If there is a negative vote by the MSSC, a sub MSSC committee will meet with the candidate and explain the committee's concerns.
 - 1) The MSSC may decide that there are areas the candidate needs to work on before a recommendation can be made, such as a rewrite of the ordination paper. The candidate may then choose to work on the areas of concern the MSSC has outlined and return for further examination or the candidate may terminate his or her MID status.
 - 2) The MSSC may decide that its decision to deny a recommendation is final. In this case the MID status is terminated with regret.
 - b. If the vote is favorable, the candidate is recommended for an Ecclesiastical Council in the candidate's home Association for the purpose of determining whether or not to award ordination pending call.

D. Ecclesiastical Council.

1. The MSSC chair will notify in writing the candidate's Association Moderator to pass on the MSSC's recommendation concerning the Ecclesiastical Council.
2. The candidate, the Association Moderator, and the Conference Office will coordinate to set the date and time for an Ecclesiastical Council.
3. The Association Moderator plans with the candidate how the candidate's ordination paper will be shared with delegates to the Ecclesiastical Council.
4. The Scribe of the candidate's home Association sends out the missive and one copy of the ordination paper to each church in the Association.
5. The Ecclesiastical Council is held in accordance with the by-laws of the candidate's home Association, following the outline provided in Appendix H.

Section 4: Discernment Guidelines

6. If the vote of the Ecclesiastical Council is in the affirmative, “ordination pending call” status may be granted.
7. The Member in Discernment is authorized to circulate his or her Ministerial Profile.

E. Ordination Service Process.

1. When the candidate receives a call, the ordination date is set by the Association Moderator, in consultation with the Conference Office, Discernment Partner, the ordinand, and the sponsoring church. Coordination of the event is handled by the candidate and the Association Moderator. The Scribe of the candidate’s home Association sends out the missive to the churches in the Association.
2. The ordination liturgy is based on the United Church of Christ *Book of Worship*. The ordinand might look at sample ordination bulletins, in consultation with his/her Discernment Partner, for ideas.
3. The Association Moderator is responsible for ministries support and will coordinate with the Conference Office who will order the Ordination Certificate and Bible from the National setting of the United Church of Christ. .
4. Before starting the candidate’s new ministerial position, he/she must fill out Appendix I – Pre-Ordination Agreement. This insures the ordinand has been notified of all benefit requirements

Appendix A — Application for Member in Discernment Status

For those candidates whose sponsoring church is a member of those Associations served by the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ

Request of _____
(Name of church)

at _____ Telephone _____
(Church address) (Church phone)

that _____
(Name of candidate being sponsored)

of _____ Telephone _____
(Candidate's address) (Candidate's phone)

be accepted as a Member in Discernment of the _____ Association of the United Church of Christ.

At an official meeting of the _____ of
(Name of board, council or the congregation)

_____ United Church of Christ
(Name of church)

on _____, 20____, it was voted to inform the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of our desire that _____
(Name of Candidate)

a member of this church, be examined, and if found fit, be recommended to the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee for reception into Member in Discernment status.

Signed _____
(For the Local Church)

Official Position _____

**This completed form should be mailed directly to the Vermont Conference Office:
36 North Main Street, Randolph, VT 05060**

Action by the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee

Interview Date: _____, 20____

Voted: _____

Name of Partner Assigned: _____

Appendix B - Background Disclosure

I affirm that the position, power and authority associated with a ministry authorized by the United Church of Christ extends and participates in the ministry of Jesus Christ and is intended to be of benefit to all served by this ministry.

True

Commentary

I affirm that I have not been an in-care student/member in discernment, licensed or ordained in any other association/conference/denomination.

True

Commentary

No civil law alleging that I attempted or actually engaged in sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct has ever resulted in a judgment being entered against me, settled out of court, or dismissed because the statute of limitations had expired.

True

Commentary

With respect to driving record include matters of reckless driving, driving while intoxicated and/or under the influence of a controlled substance; with respect to criminal charges do not include acts of civil disobedience:

I have not had my driving license suspended or revoked within the last five years.

I have not been found guilty or plead guilty or no contest to criminal charges.

Commentary

My employment has not been terminated because I attempted or actually engaged in:

sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct

physical abuse

child abuse

financial misconduct

I have not terminated my employment or professional credentials in order to avoid facing or to avoid being terminated because of charges of actual or attempted:

sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation, or misconduct

physical abuse

child abuse

financial misconduct

Commentary

In my judgment, there are no facts or circumstances involving me or my background that would warrant further review before my being entrusted with being a Member in Discernment in the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ.

True

Commentary

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C – MARKS

The MARKS of Ministry document is updated from time to time.

For the current MARKS form, please contact the Conference Office, or look on the website at <http://www.vtcucc.org/docs/church%20and%20ministry/MSSC%20Marks.pdf>

Appendix D — Authorization and Release Form

Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee, Vermont Conference, United Church of Christ

I, _____, hereby authorize
Name of Candidate

_____ to release the evaluation
Person, Program, School

either written or oral of my performance (academic transcripts and reviews, field education evaluations, spiritual development reviews, psychological assessments, Clinical Pastoral Education evaluations) to the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ.

I acknowledge that this evaluation will provide the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ with insights into my fitness for ordained or other authorized ministry on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

I authorize the release of this evaluation to the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ, its staff, officers, committee members, attorneys, and consultants, as well as to Vermont Conference staff. I further authorize the evaluator(s) to answer questions, give opinions, and provide further information related to this evaluation to the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ, its staff, officers, committee members, attorneys, and consultants, as well as to Vermont Conference staff, and to share this evaluation with ecclesiastical officers of other associations or denominations, where I may apply for employment, standing, or authorized minister status.

I release, indemnify, and agree to hold harmless the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee, its staff, officers, committee members, attorneys, and consultants, as well as Vermont Conference staff, from any action or cause of action arising from any action taken under the above authorization, or from any use of the evaluation and further information in reviewing my fitness for ordained ministry, or from the dissemination of the evaluation or further information to or among the persons authorized, or from the unintentional dissemination of the evaluations or further information to other persons.

Any documents provided to the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ in accordance with the Authorization & Release shall become its sole property and may be retained by the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee and the Vermont Conference, notwithstanding any subsequent withdrawal of my application for, or resignation from, authorized ministry status. This Authorization & Release may not be rescinded or modified, except with the express written agreement of the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Executed as a sealed instrument.

Signature of Candidate

Date

Appendix D — Authorization & Release Form Continued

Instructions to the Candidate:

1. Sign your name to the top of the form, print the person(s) program or school from which this evaluation, transcript, or review is coming.
2. Fill in the date on the bottom of the page.
3. Retain a copy for your files.
4. Send a completed form to the following persons and any others required of you by the MSSC:

Psychological Assessor/Examiner

Academic Advisor

Seminary Dean of Students

Seminary Field Education Director

Seminary Field Education Supervisor

Seminary Registrar

Clinical Pastoral Education Director and/or Supervisor

Discernment Partner

MSSC Liaison

Appendix E — Discernment Covenant

Covenant made between a Member in Discernment,
the Member in Discernment's Association and Local Church, and
the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee
of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ

Preamble

A covenant is "an intentional agreement made between or among parties in the name of God. (It) has both horizontal and vertical dimensions and is not accidental, but deliberate."* Recognizing that carrying out the Covenant of Ministry in the United Church of Christ is both delicate and demanding, calling us to live by relationship with God and each other and not by rules — by grace more than law — still the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee feels the need for minimum guidelines for candidates for ordained ministry. These minimal guidelines follow.

The Covenant

The Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ has accepted _____ into the Discernment relationship. If the process leads to the candidate's request for ordination, a minimum of two years of reflection and discernment with the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee and its authorized advisors will be required prior to ordination.

Part 1 — The Association

The _____ Association of the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ covenants:

1. to hold a Service of Recognition of a Member in Discernment for the candidate during a gathering of the Association (see *Book of Worship*, page 394 ff.);
2. to support and hold in prayer _____ as he or she continues the journey of ministerial preparation;
3. to remain faithful to the processes for an Association as described in the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry*;
4. to offer financial assistance to the Member in Discernment, within the limits of available Association funds, in support of seminary preparation for ministry;
5. to assume 1/3 the cost of the candidate's psychological and career assessment;
6. and to prayerfully consider the recommendations that the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee may make concerning the Member in Discernment.

Part 2 — Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee

The Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee covenants:

1. to provide a Partner to guide the candidate toward a vocational understanding consistent with the faith and mission of the United Church of Christ;
2. to encourage the candidate's home Association to offer financial assistance, within the limits of available Association funds, in support of seminary preparation for ministry;
3. to provide advice and counsel regarding the skills and gifts required for the practice of ordained ministry;
4. to provide the opportunity for the candidate's psychological and career assessment, ensuring that the costs for the same will be shared by the candidate's home church, home Association, in addition to the Member in Discernment;
5. and to review and consider annual renewal of the Discernment relationship.

Part 3 — Member in Discernment

_____, as a candidate preparing for ordained ministry in the United Church of Christ, agrees to follow the guidelines for the Discernment process, to accept the fellowship, counsel, evaluations, support, and guidance of the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee, and covenants:

1. to meet at least quarterly with the appointed Discernment Partner to share academic progress and faith, vocational and personal development;
2. to complete a psychological and career assessment for ministry administered by persons chosen by the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee, and to assume 1/3 the cost thereof;
3. to worship regularly according to the faith and order of the United Church of Christ, and to participate in the life and work of a local church, Association, and Conference;
4. to offer the MSSC evidence of developing skills for ministry and continuing growth in faith;
5. and to meet with the MSSC at least once annually for a review of the Discernment relationship and process.

Part 4 — Sponsoring Congregation

The sponsoring congregation, _____ ,
covenants:

1. to support and hold in prayer _____ as he or she continues the journey of ministerial preparation;
2. to assume 1/3 the cost of the candidate's psychological and career assessment;
3. to meet periodically with the candidate to share gifts and experiences that might be mutually beneficial;
4. to consider financial assistance to the candidate to defray the cost of seminary education;
5. and to remain faithful to the processes for a sponsoring congregation as described in the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry*.

So Signed:

Member in Discernment (date)

Chair, MSSC (date)

Discernment Partner (date)

Association Moderator (date)

Sponsoring Church Representative (date)

MSSC Liaison (date)

* "Covenant" definition by Elizabeth Nordbeck, faculty member and former Dean of the Faculty and Vice-President for Academic Affairs, Andover Newton Theological School.

Note: A copy of this Covenant should be given to the following: Member in Discernment, MSSC Chair, Discernment Partner, Vermont Conference Ministers, Association Moderator, and the Local Sponsoring Church.

Appendix F — Annual Review Preparation Sheet

PART ONE: Be prepared to answer and discuss the following:

1. Are you knowledgeable and familiar with the current Discernment process and requirements? Yes / No
2. If in seminary, what year and semester are you in currently? _____
3. In your judgment, are you on track for meeting seminary and/or MSSC required educational standing? Yes / No

If no, please list areas of suspected/acknowledged deficiency:

Biblical Exegesis Ethics Attention to Spiritual Direction
 O.T. Liturgies Christian Education
 N.T. Church History Personal Fitness for Ministry
 Systematic Theology UCC History and Polity
 Other: _____

4. Please speak to any deficiencies in your progress in coursework.
5. Please rate your overall academic performance to date: Excellent/Good/Fair/Poor
6. Do you have any concerns that should be addressed in your yearly interview?
7. Do you have any physical or emotional health issues that should be addressed?
8. Be prepared to comment on your spiritual development.
9. What is your relationship with your Discernment Partner?
10. Are you happy with your relationship to the MSSC?
11. Have you submitted MARKS for this review?
12. Are you meeting with your LCDC?

PART TWO:

Completed MARKS by your Discernment Partner and you are to be submitted to Conference Office a minimum of two weeks prior to MSSC meeting. Please double check with office to make sure they have been received. Failure to get MARKS in on time may mean rescheduling your appointment.

Appendix G — Recommended Ordination Paper Outlines

The following three outlines for ordination papers are accepted by the MSSC. Any other outlines must be approved by the MSSC before writing the paper.

Outline I

Based on the *Manual on Ministry*, Section 3 pages 3-6

I. Theological Perspectives

- A. What is your understanding of the historic Christian faith?
- B. What is your own theological perspective? Refer to the UCC Statement of Faith and paragraph two of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ.

II. The United Church of Christ

- A. How do you understand the historical and theological roots of the United Church of Christ?
- B. How would you explain the polity and practice of the United Church of Christ? (Please address the issues of covenant, unity, autonomy, etc., and discuss paragraphs 3, 7, 14,15,16 of the *Constitution of the United Church of Christ*.)

III. Ministry and Pilgrimage

- A. How would you relate the previously discussed issues to your own faith pilgrimage?
 - 1. What is your understanding of call, ordination, church, mission, and ministry?
 - 2. What is the challenge and vision of your own ministry?
 - 3. How do you see your gifts fitting into your call?
 - 4. What is the meaning of ordination in the United Church of Christ?
- F. How do you understand your commitment to the United Church of Christ and the ecumenical church?
- G. What aspects of the history, polity, and practice of the United Church of Christ are most valued by you?

Outline II

Based on the United Church of Christ *The Book of Worship*, pages 407-408

- I. Are you persuaded that God has called you to be an ordained minister in the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and are you ready to enter this ministry and faithfully serve in it?
 - A. Briefly relate a summary of your faith journey and your call to the Christian Ministry in the United Church of Christ.
 - B. Within the context of the universal ministry of God's people, why have you chosen to seek ordination, and what particular gifts do you bring to this ministry?

- II. Do you, with the Church throughout the world, hear the Word of God in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and do you accept it as the rule of Christian faith and practice?
 - A. How do you understand the nature of the Word of God as it is revealed in the Scripture of the Old and New Testaments?
 - B. What does it mean to accept this Word as the rule of Christian faith and practice?

- III. Do you promise to be diligent in your private prayers and reading of the scriptures, as well as in the public duties of your office?
 - A. How do you practice your devotional life and what is the place of prayer in your life?
 - B. How do you intend to find rest and renewal in the context of the Biblical theme of Sabbath within the context of the "public duties of your office," and how do the present (or future) demands of family life (or of single life) fit within the context of those duties?

- IV. Will you be zealous in maintaining both the "truth of the gospel" and "the peace of the Church," speaking the truth in love?
 - A. Concerning the "truth of the gospel," what is your understanding of the doctrine of salvation: the person of Christ, the incarnation, the Cross and Resurrection, sin, repentance, forgiveness judgment, grace, and eschatology?
 - B. Concerning the "peace of the Church," how would you deal with those conflict situations when you are called to speak the prophetic word of "truth in love," both in personal and social justice situations?

- V. Do you accept the "faith and order" of the United Church of Christ; and will you, as an ordained minister in this communion show compassionate affection toward all who are in Christ?
 - A. How do you understand the "faith and order" of the United Church of Christ, specifically concerning the Trinity, Baptism, Communion, Covenant, and the Statement of Faith?
 - B. What is your understanding of "The Church," local church, covenant, the wider church, and how does "The Church" relate to the world through evangelism, social action, and mission?

Outline III

I. Statement of Christian Experience

- A. Home and local church
- B. Education
- C. Call to the Ministry

II Statement of Christian Beliefs

- A. God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit
 - 1. Creation and providence; Judgment and Grace
 - 2. Person of Christ; Incarnation, Atonement (problem of evil). Salvation Resurrection
 - 3. Revelation and the Holy Scriptures
- B. Humanity
 - 1. Sin, Repentance, Forgiveness
 - 2. Prayer
 - 3. Eternal Life
- C. The Church and the Kingdom
 - 1. Doctrine of history and the second coming
 - 2. Church and the world (including evangelism, social action, mission)
 - 3. My denomination and the Church
 - 4. Baptism and the Lord's Supper
 - 5. The ministry (lay and ordained)

III. Conclusion: Including "Why I desire ordination in the United Church of Christ"

Appendix H — Outline for the Ecclesiastical Council

- I. The meeting is called to order and the purpose of the Council is stated. (Assn. Moderator)
- II. The role is called to determine if a quorum is present. (Assn. Registrar)
- III. The status of guests is determined. (Moderator)

The Moderator notes the presence of guests at the Council, asking the Candidate to formally introduce special guests in attendance. The Moderator then calls for a motion in the following form: "I move that guests be given voice without vote." The Moderator asks for a second. Following discussion, the Moderator calls for a vote on the motion. The Moderator declares the status of guests.

- IV. A prayer is requested to constitute the Council. (Moderator)
- V. The Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee makes a presentation. (MSSC Representative)

A representative of the MSSC introduces the candidate and presents the committee's recommendation that the candidate be authorized for ordination. The MSSC will provide a detailed rationale supporting its recommendation including: the MSSC's experience with the person through the period of discernment, the process used by the MSSC to reach its recommendation, notation of major commendations from references, something about the candidate's theological and polity understandings, and an evaluation of the candidate by the Discernment Partner.

- VI. The Candidate makes a presentation. (Member in Discernment)

The candidate makes a presentation based on her or his ordination paper. The candidate will consult with the Association Moderator regarding plans for how to share the ordination paper with the Council. The presentation should demonstrate the candidate's theological, polity, and functional understandings of ordained ministry and relate these to her or his commitment and preparation of the person for the particular type of ordained ministry position to which she or her is seeking a call.

- VII. The Candidate is examined.

The Ecclesiastical Council engages in an examination of the candidate in order to satisfy itself as to the preparedness of the candidate for ordained ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The examination is not limited to the presentation or ordination paper of the candidate.

- VIII. The Candidate (and family) is requested to leave the Council. (Moderator)

IX. A vote on approval is taken. (Moderator)

On completion of the examination, the Ecclesiastical Council votes whether or not to authorize ordination pending an approved call and the establishment of a covenantal relationship among the partners to the call. The decision the Association makes is a decision made for the entire United Church of Christ and will be binding on and honored by the other Associations of the United Church of Christ.

The Moderator calls for a motion in the following form: "I move that _____ be approved for ordination pending call." The Moderator asks for a second. Following discussion, the Moderator calls for a vote on the motion. The Moderator declares the outcome of the vote.

X. The Candidate (and family) is invited to return to hear the result of the vote. (Moderator)

If in the affirmative, the Moderator reminds the Candidate and all gathered that "A service of ordination is to be held no sooner than one month after the vote to authorize ordination has taken place (i.e., no sooner than one month from today)."

XI. The Council is declared "in recess until the service of ordination and will be adjourned following the benediction that day." (Moderator)

XII. A closing prayer is requested. (Moderator)

*Note: As soon as possible, minutes of the Council should be sent to:

Vermont Conference — United Church of Christ
36 North Main Street
Randolph, Vermont 05060

Appendix I — Pre-Ordination Agreement

Vermont Conference, United Church of Christ

I have read the information regarding United Church of Christ benefits (i.e., Annuity Fund, Life Insurance and Disability Income Benefit Plan, Medical and Dental Benefits Plans, Vision Plan, and Flexible Spending Account) as well as the information concerning Social Security and Worker's Compensation.

I understand that it is my responsibility to contact the appropriate agencies and make arrangements for applying or opting out of membership in the above programs within the timelines for each.

Ordinand's signature

date

MSSC Chairperson's signature

date

Vermont Conference Minister's signature

date

Note: One copy is retained by the ordinand and one copy is kept in the Vermont Conference office.

INFORMATION CONCERNING UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST BENEFITS, SOCIAL SECURITY & WORKER'S COMPENSATION

A number of decisions must be made at the time of ordination. This document: (1) serves as a reminder of those decisions and (2) provides them to you in writing. Since benefits details change annually, candidates for ordained ministry are strongly advised to speak to a Benefits Representative or visit the Pension Boards website to ensure that they have the most fully up-to-date information regarding benefits. To receive enrollment applications or to obtain additional information about benefits available through the Pension Boards, contact:

The Pension Boards	1.212.729.2700
United Church of Christ	
475 Riverside Drive	1.800.642.6543
New York, NY 10115	<u>www.pbucc.org</u>

I. THE ANNUITY FUND - UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Membership in the Annuity Fund is open to anyone working for a UCC employer. The Annuity fund is an accumulation plan. Contributions to your Annuity Fund account can be directed to as many as eight types of investment funds, each professionally managed with lower fees than most mutual funds. The earlier you participate, the more time your account has to grow. Early enrollment is, therefore, important. The General Synod recommends that 14% of salary basis be contributed by the employer. For more information on the Annuity Fund, please see the *Rules of the Annuity Fund UCC*.

You can supplement your employer's contributions and defer taxes at the same time by contributing to the PBUCS Tax-Sheltered Annuity (TSA). It makes saving for your retirement easy through regular payroll deductions and reduces your taxes at the same time. The money you set aside and the earnings on that money are not taxed until your retirement benefits are paid to you. And if you're a minister, payments from the TSA are eligible for housing allowance tax exclusion which is not true for distributions from IRA's or other similar retirement accounts. You can open a TSA with as little as \$25 a month. Please see the brochure, *PBUCC Tax-Sheltered Annuity*, for more information.

The maximum that can be contributed each year varies. Since the maximum amounts change each year and depend on your salary, if you would like to contribute the maximum allowable under the law, please use the online calculator provided at www.pbucc.org or contact the Pension Boards to assist you.

You may also make post-tax contributions to the Annuity Fund. The amount of your contribution is deducted from your paycheck after taxes have been deducted. The earnings on those contributions are not taxed until your retirement benefits are paid to you. Since post-tax contributions were already taxed, they are not taxable at retirement.

When the *Annuity Fund Membership* form is returned and approved, the church will be billed for both the employer and employee contributions. No money should be sent until the church receives a bill.

If you currently have money in other retirement accounts (IRA, 401(k), 403(b) or other pre-tax accounts), you can consolidate them in a PBUCC Retirement Savings Account (RSA). Consolidating your accounts in one place will make it easier to track your investments while having the advantage of our low-fee, professional management.

II. LIFE INSURANCE AND DISABILITY INCOME BENEFIT PLAN (LIDI)

Employees working a minimum of twenty hours per week are eligible for the low-cost life insurance and disability income insurance plan (refer to the Pension Boards website for detailed information about the plan). The contribution for the Life Insurance and Disability Benefit (LIDI) Plan is 1.5% of salary basis payable quarterly. You may also purchase additional life insurance coverage up to \$100,000 or 3 times your salary, whichever is less.

In order to avoid the need for providing a statement of health and underwriting review, enrollment must occur within ninety (90) days of initial UCC employment. The underwriting review is conducted by the benefit provider and not the Pension Boards. When review is necessary, coverage will be made effective on the first day of the month following underwriting approval.

III. MEDICAL AND DENTAL BENEFITS PLANS

Enrollment in the UCC Medical and Dental Benefits Plans is open to any individual who is employed by a UCC church or affiliated organization and working at least twenty (20) hours per week. Please contact the Pension Boards UCC at 1.800.642.6543 for the rates.

In order to avoid the need for providing a statement of health and underwriting review, enrollment must occur within ninety (90) days of initial UCC employment. The underwriting review is conducted by an independent claim administrator, and not the Pension Boards. When review is necessary, coverage will be made effective on the first day of the month following underwriting approval.

If approved for health, the member and qualifying dependent(s) will be eligible to enroll in the Dental Benefits Plan at that time. If the member does not enroll in the Dental Benefits Plan at the time of enrollment in the Medical Benefits Plan, they will be required to wait until a period of "open enrollment" is offered.

IV. UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST VISION PLAN

This optional vision coverage is a stand-alone plan available to employees of a UCC entity regardless of participation in the UCC Medical Benefits Plan. Participants must apply for individual coverage in order to apply for dependent coverage.

V. UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNT (FSA)

This Plan offers you an opportunity to save on qualified health and dependent care expenses. Many people currently pay for these expenses with money on which taxes have already been paid. The FSA Plan allows you to set aside a portion of your earnings to pay for these expenses with before tax dollars. Each pay period during the year, dollars are deducted from your salary and placed in the FSA. When an eligible expense is incurred, you notify the FSA and a reimbursement up to the amount of the elected deferral is made from the FSA.

If your employer is not currently enrolled in the United Church of Christ FSA, your employer is required to pay an initial one time set up fee of \$100.00 plus a monthly administrative fee of \$12.00 per FSA enrolled employee. *The employer is not required to pay the monthly administrative fee for participants in the UCC Medical Benefits Plan.* If you do not choose to participate in the FSA Plan at this time, you will have an opportunity to join on any January 1. There are no requirements to provide health information regardless of when you choose to join the FSA.

VI. SOCIAL SECURITY

You should be aware that clergy have a dual-tax status under federal law. **Clergy are considered employees for purposes of federal and state tax, but are self-employed for purposes of Social Security and Medicare (the FICA taxes).** This means that clergy can have federal and state taxes withheld from their paychecks if they choose, but the churches that employ them cannot withhold FICA taxes. In other words, clergy pay their own self-employment taxes.

According to the Social Security Act, all ordained ministers are required to belong to the Social Security system and make regular contributions through the Internal Revenue Service. The only exception is that an ordained minister can apply to be exempted from Social Security on the grounds of being conscientiously opposed to the acceptance of public insurance – "by filing for an exemption on or before the due date of the 2nd tax year for which you have had church related earnings." After that time, it is not possible to be exempted from the system or cease payments. Persons considering filing for exemption from self-employment tax should be aware that there are significant tax, financial, and legal implications accompanying their decision. Under no circumstances should they do so without seeking professional tax advice.

You should review your social security account at least once every three years to make sure you're being properly credited with your payment. Obtain a Request for Earnings and Benefit

Estimate Statement from your local Social Security Administration Office to request this information, the number for which may be found in your phonebook.

VII. WORKER'S COMPENSATION

Each church should carry Worker's Compensation for all employees — full and part-time. As you begin to search for your first pastorate, please keep in mind that this insurance is carried by the church for its – and your – protection. Health insurance and the church's property/liability insurance will not cover any church employee who is injured on church property. A word to the wise – make sure any church to which you are called carries this insurance!

Appendix J — Glossary of Terms

Association: The Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee acts on behalf of six of the eight Associations of the Vermont Conference. Those Associations of the Vermont Conference that have turned over responsibility for oversight of authorized ministry, including the Member in Discernment (MID) process (formerly In Care), are the following: Addison, Champlain, Northeast, Southwest, Washington, and Windham-Union. Associations support the Member in Discernment through encouragement, engagement, financial assistance where possible, and, in particular, by paying 1/3 of the fee for the psychological and career assessment. Associations also receive the recommendation of the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee concerning candidates who have completed the discernment process, and call Ecclesiastical Councils for the purpose of examining candidates and determining whether or not to authorize candidates for ordination. Ministerial authorization is conferred by and ministerial standing is held in the Association and not by and in the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee.

Candidate: A term used in this document to refer to persons considering or in discernment about ordained ministry, whether or not these individuals have been formally received as Members in Discernment (MID) by the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee (MSSC).

Committee: When capitalized in this document, the term "Committee" refers to the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee (MSSC) of the Vermont Conference. See below.

Covenantal Relationship: A relationship based on promises of mutual, shared responsibility and caring. Covenantal relationships are the fundamental organizing premise of the entire United Church of Christ.

Covenantal Partners: All participants in the discernment process as defined by those who contribute to the candidate's readiness for ministry and help in discerning the candidate's fitness for ministry (e.g., the Local Church Representative Committee, local church Sponsoring Body, the candidate's pastor, the Association, the MSSC, field education supervisor, CPE supervisor, academic advisor, or Discernment Partner).

Discernment Partner: Upon approval of the candidate for Member in Discernment (MID) status, the MSSC assigns a Discernment Partner who engages the MID in theological and spiritual reflection relative to the MID's evolving sense of call and experience of ministerial formation. The Advisor usually is an ordained, licensed, or commissioned minister in good standing with the candidate's home Association. On occasion the MSSC may assign a candidate to an ordained, licensed, or commissioned United Church of Christ minister not of the candidate's home Association, or a qualified lay person.

Local Church: The candidate for ministry's home church. The local church is a party to the Member in Discernment relationship, and is responsible for continued guidance and support of the candidate as he or she progresses toward ordained ministry.

Local Church Discernment Committee (LCDC): A committee, consisting of representatives from the local congregation, which meets with the candidate to discern and clarify the call that the candidate has received. This group may or may not be a pre-established group such as the Church Council or Board of Deacons. When both the LCDC and the candidate are in agreement that the candidate is prepared to enter into the Member in Discernment process, it presents the candidate to the Sponsoring Body and requests local church sponsorship (unless the LCDC and Sponsoring Body are one and the same; see note on Section I, part D).

Local Church Sponsoring Body: A group within the local church (e.g., Church Council or Board of Deacons) that has been authorized to receive and act upon the request of the candidate for sponsorship as a Member in Discernment. After meeting with the candidate, and hearing from a representative of the MSSC concerning the Discernment process, the Sponsoring Body may approve the request for sponsorship and submit the *Application for Member in Discernment Status* to the MSSC. It is only with the sponsorship of the local church that the candidate may be presented to the MSSC for consideration of Member in Discernment status.

Manual on Ministry: The United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry* provides perspectives and procedures for ecclesiastical authorization of ministry. All candidates for ordination in the United Church of Christ should obtain a copy of *Manual on Ministry* or view it at www.ucc.org and have a thorough understanding of Sections 2 and 3 ("Student In Care of Association" and "Ordained Ministry").

Member in Discernment: Also referred to in this document as a "candidate" or, more simply, as a "MID." This term describes a relationship and a process. The relationship is expressed as a covenant between the Member in Discernment, the candidate's home church, the candidate's home association, and the MSSC. The MID process is that which the candidate follows on his or her way to ordained ministry, and is largely described in these *Guidelines*. In order to be considered for ordination the candidate should expect to be in the Member in Discernment process for *at least two full years*. While ordination is normally the end result of the Member in Discernment process, this is not automatic, nor is it always the case. (Note: Until recently, this designation and process was referred to in the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry* as "Student In Care of Association.")

MID: Member in Discernment. See above.

Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee (MSSC): The bylaws of the Addison, Champlain, Northeast, Southwest, Washington, and Windham-Union Associations charge this committee of the Vermont Conference with both the support and guidance of Members in Discernment, and for evaluating their readiness for ordination. The MSSC is made up of both clergy and lay members from the eight Associations of the Vermont Conference. Among its several responsibilities is recommending the licensing, commissioning, and ordaining of ministers to its constituent Associations. Though the MSSC recommends candidates for authorized ministry, ministerial authorization is conferred by and ministerial standing is held in the Association and not by and in the Ministerial Standing and Standards Committee or the Vermont Conference.

MSSC Liaison: Upon notification of the candidate's interest for Member in Discernment (MID) status, the MSSC assigns a MSSC Liaison. The MSSC Liaison supports the MID in fulfilling the logistical requirements of the MID process as delineated in the *Manual on Ministry*, Section 2, and these Discernment Guidelines.

Psychological and Career Assessment: A psychological and career assessment is required of every person seeking Member in Discernment status. The assessment helps the candidate and the MSSC determine those areas of ability and aptitude that will give shape and direction to the candidate's ministry, as well as those characteristics of personality and interest where growth would be desirable. The assessment is an essential tool that helps the MSSC offer the candidate guidance and assistance. The MSSC uses the assessment along with other considerations to help assess the candidate's suitability and readiness for ordained ministry. Though valuable, the psychological and career assessment is never the sole criterion for deciding a person's fitness for ministry. The assessment is handled in the strictest confidence. After a candidate has been formally received as a Member in Discernment, one copy of the assessment remains in a secure file in the Conference Office.