

## **MINISTER IN DISCERNMENT INFORMATION SHEET**

### Application

1. This is a category combining certain aspects of each of Member in Discernment and Privilege of Call and applies to those coming to the Committee on Ministry with significant ministerial experience who cannot present an official letter of current ecclesiastical status, comparable to ordained ministerial standing, from another denomination. This includes those coming from denominations without ethical oversight of clergy and those who have lost their credentials or surrendered their credentials *only* because of their sexual orientation or because they have ministered to LGBT people in a way not permitted by their denomination but permitted by the UCC (such as performing same gender marriages).
2. Please be sure you review the Candidate's Letter of Request for Minister in Discernment Status forms for a checklist of documentation required in your initial and final applications.
3. Because Minister in Discernment (Mnid) is officially a type of Member in Discernment (MiD) specific to the NTA, be sure you have reviewed Section 2 of the Manual on Ministry. However, where there is a conflict between the Manual on Ministry and this Information Sheet, the instructions on this sheet control.
4. Papers must be no more than 15 double-spaced pages, 12-point TimesNewRoman font, plus a cover sheet that includes the candidate's name, home church, and date. Be sure there are page numbers on each page. Also, it is very important that you carefully proofread and edit your paper for grammar, spelling and punctuation. You might want to get someone else to look over it to proofread it as well. Papers full of technical errors will be returned for a rewrite and this may delay your meeting with the Committee or approval of Minister in Discernment status.
5. Documentation typically is required to be submitted to the Chairperson of the Committee on Ministry (CoM) via email 3 weeks before the CoM meeting at which the candidate desires to be interviewed. If any documents, such as transcripts, must be sent in hard copy, please contact the CoM Chairperson for the appropriate mailing address. The deadline for email and hard copy documentation is the same. This is a real deadline. If the required documentation is not received by the deadline, you may not be on the agenda for the next CoM meeting.
6. Documents may be submitted one at a time, and do not need to be sent in one batch. PDF format is preferred.

7. You will receive an email within 1 week after the documentation deadline notifying you whether your application is complete. If it is complete, you will be given an appointment time for the next CoM meeting.

### Interviews

8. The purpose of the initial meeting is to offer hospitality to the candidate, to listen prayerfully to the movement of the Spirit throughout the meeting, to engage in conversation about the candidate's spiritual journey, their sense of call to ministry and their specific sense of call to ministry in the UCC, to outline expectations of the process, and to ask and respond to questions.

9. Please arrive about 15 minutes early for your appointment and wait outside the room. There may be signs posted directing you where to wait.

10. The CoM works hard to keep to the schedule, but sometimes circumstances and the movement of the Spirit dictate otherwise. Be prepared to wait. The CoM apologizes in advance if the meeting is running behind. Regardless of whether the meeting is running on time or behind, the CoM will spend as much time with each candidate as needed.

11. Your pastor may accompany you to the interview as support.

12. During the interview, please be prepared to make a brief statement (5-10 minutes) to introduce yourself to the CoM and to discuss your application. The members of the CoM will have received your Pilgrimage and Theology papers to read prior to the meeting.

13. After the interview, you (and your pastor) will be asked to step outside the room so the CoM can discuss your application. Then you will be invited back to hear the results of the CoM's deliberations and to discuss next steps. Upon review of your application and interview, the CoM may provide additional learning objectives that must be fulfilled before the candidate should come back to the CoM for a second interview. Later you will receive a confirmation in writing by email of the outcome of this meeting.

14. Officially, the date of your acceptance as a MniD is the date on which the CoM approves you as an MniD. This date is sometimes needed for scholarship applications and other purposes. For the purposes of the UCC Data Hub, you will be entered as an MiD.

### Period of Discernment

15. The period of discernment is an opportunity for the MniD to explore their call to ministry in the United Church of Christ. During this time, the CoM provides support, assessment, and accountability for the MniD's continuing journey of

discernment and engages in its own discernment to determine whether the MniD's call is to ordained ministry in the UCC.

16. Ministers in Discernment are assigned an Advisor. This will be a UCC clergy member who is not part of the MniD's church. MniDs must meet with their Advisor at least twice each year, and preferably more often. The Advisor will file semi-annual reports on the MniD with the CoM, and a letter of recommendation from the discernment Advisor is a required part of the application for ordination.

17. If the period of discernment continues for a year or more, each MniD must meet with the CoM each year to check in. The impetus for this comes from the candidate. An email to the CoM chairperson asking to be on the agenda for the next CoM meeting, with a brief annual report of progress within the past year, is required. The purpose of this meeting is support for the MniD, discernment, and assessment. This annual review is an opportunity to discern together if the MniD continues to be called toward ordained ministry in the UCC and what kind of progress they are making in preparation for that particular ministry. If geographic distance is an obstacle, it may be possible to meet with the CoM via video conferencing arranged through the Chairperson of the CoM.

18. Psychological Evaluation. All those in discernment about authorized ministry in the UCC must have a psychological evaluation. The process is outlined in a separate information sheet on the NTA website. The cost is split 3 ways; a third each to the MniD, the local church which has lifted up the MniD, and the Association. This is part of the discernment process, not the final application for ordination, and should be completed as soon as possible.

19. If church membership moves at any time before full authorization, the MniD must restart the process with their new local church. MniD status is not transferable. However, if the new local church is in the NTA, documents currently in the MniD's file (such as transcripts) need not be resubmitted. However, a new, updated Pilgrimage Paper is required.

20. The minimum discernment period for an MniD is 6 months. If during the period of discernment, the MniD discerns that their call is not to ordained ministry in the UCC, that determination should be communicated to the CoM.

### Second Interview

21. After at least 6 months, and when the MniD has completed the required advisement and learning objectives, a second application must be submitted to the CoM with the Second Interview Letter of Request and required documentation.

22. Although the Theology paper will have been submitted with the initial application, it may be revised and resubmitted as part of the second application. The final paper should be no more than 25 double-spaced pages (including the Theology

paper), 12-point TimesNewRoman font, plus a cover sheet that includes the candidate's name, home church, and date. Be sure there are page numbers on each page. Also, it is very important that you carefully proofread and edit your paper for grammar, spelling and punctuation. You might want to get someone else to look over it to proofread it as well. Papers full of technical errors will be returned for a rewrite and this may delay your meeting with the Committee or recommendation for Ecclesiastical Council.

23. At this interview you will be examined for authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ. Be prepared to discuss your sense of call, your journey of preparation for authorized ministry in the UCC, your Theology paper, and History and Polity paper, and other aspects of your application, and to be evaluated based on the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. Information about the Marks is available of the UCC website. The members of the CoM will have received your papers to read prior to the meeting.

24. Your Pastor or Discernment Advisor may accompany you to the interview as support.

25. After the interview, you (and your pastor/advisor) will be asked to step outside the room so that the CoM can discuss your application. Then you will be invited back to hear the results of the CoM's deliberations and to discuss next steps. The CoM will make one of the following decisions:

- *Yes.* The CoM commends the MniD to the NTA for its approval and blessing for authorized standing or ordination (pending receipt of an authorizable call) at an Ecclesiastical Council.
- *Yes, but ...* The CoM continues the process of discernment and defines certain learning outcomes or behaviors that must be demonstrated and reassessed by a specific time.
- *No, but ...* The CoM does not recommend the MniD for authorized standing at this time, but affirms the candidate's call to ordained ministry in the UCC and offers constructive feedback for learning outcomes or behaviors that could be addressed and an application for ordination submitted at another time. MniD status continues.
- *No.* The Com does not recommend the MniD for authorized standing in the UCC and concludes that its process of discernment is complete with this decision. MniD status is terminated, either with or without bias to reapply to the NTA CoM in the future.

26. Later you will receive confirmation in writing by email of the outcome of this meeting, with information about the upcoming NTA meeting where the Ecclesiastical Council will be held.

### Ecclesiastical Council

27. The NTA sits as an Ecclesiastical Council twice a year, at the Fall and Spring meetings of the Association.
28. Copies of the candidate's Authorized Ministry paper will be circulated to all ministers and churches in the NTA to be read by delegates prior to the NTA meeting.
29. Candidates should come to the Ecclesiastical Council prepared to make a brief statement (about 5-10 minutes) about their faith journey, sense of call to ordained ministry in the UCC and fundamental theology and be prepared to answer questions from the delegates.
30. When there are no further questions, the candidate will be escorted out of the room, so that the delegates may deliberate. If the Ecclesiastical Council's vote is *Yes*, the candidate is approved for privilege of call or ordination pending receipt of an authorizable call (except occasionally when a call has already been received). If the Ecclesiastical Council's vote is *No*, MniD status is terminated, either with or without bias to reapply to the NTA.

#### Approved Pending Receipt of a Call/Search and Call Process

31. If the MniD was previously ordained in a denomination that recognizes that ordination for all time, then that ordination will be recognized by the UCC, and the MniD's status will change to "privilege of call granted," so that the MniD may enter the UCC search and call process. If the MniD was not previously ordained by a denomination, or their ordination was to a local church only, then their status will be changed to "approved for ordination pending receipt of an authorizable call"
32. The candidate who has been approved for privilege of call or ordination pending a call remains an MniD until an authorizable/ordainable call is received. Meetings with Discernment Advisors are no longer required, but are recommended. A UCC Profile may now be completed and circulated.
33. The status of "privilege of call" or "approved for ordination pending a call" must be renewed yearly by a simple request to the CoM, explaining where you are in the search and call process. If more than 4 years pass, another meeting with the CoM will be required.
34. The Search and Call process can be long and frustrating. MniDs are always welcome to request a meeting with the CoM during the time of search and call for support or to discuss their discernment around search and call.
35. Ordination requires an "ordainable" call. In the privilege of call context, that is referred to as an "authorizable" call, but the requirements are the same. Traditionally this has been a call to be a minister of a local church or to serve as chaplain in a staff position at an institution such as a hospital, hospice, police or fire department, or school which require the authorization to perform the sacraments.

Be aware that many chaplain positions may require specific training such as Clinical Pastoral Education, or a certificate of chaplaincy from a recognized organization in addition to seminary training and ordination.

36. The CoM recognizes the need to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit and the new things God is doing in the church. Therefore, the CoM may be asked to consider approval of a ministerial setting that does not fit the traditional definition of “ordainable/authorizable call” if it meets the following criteria:

- *The Call is Covenantal.* The call demonstrates a clear connectedness with a local church as partners in ministry with an Association in the shared ministry of the UCC (as demonstrated by a 3- or 4-way covenant agreement, see below).
- *The Call Responds to the Needs of the Church.* The call, whether to a local church setting or a setting beyond the local church, shows intent, authenticity, and validity to serve the ongoing and expanding needs of the Church.
- *The Call Involves Mutuality of Ministry Between the Minister and the Community.* Whether a minister is serving in a local church or in a specialized setting while holding membership in a local church that supports the authorized minister and the ministry setting, it is expected that there are ongoing structures of both support and accountability in place to encourage the long-term well-being of the minister and on-going viability of the ministry being undertaken.

37. In the NTA, there are no minimum number of hours to be worked or minimum salary for a call to be considered an “ordainable/authorizable call.” Of course, it is always preferable that the call agreement provide for a salary in line with Conference guidelines or higher. Call agreements will be reviewed with an eye towards fairness. However, a minister may be ordained or authorized to a volunteer position.

38. For MniDs who are seeking ordination, regardless of where you receive your call, you will be ordained by the NTA. Therefore, look to the NTA’s requirements for an “ordainable call,” not those of the Association where you will be serving your call.

39. Once a call is received, a copy of the call agreement or call letter that includes details of the ministry to be undertaken should be submitted to the CoM for approval as an “ordainable” or “authorizable” call. Where the call is to a local church setting, the call agreement or call letter is considered a 3-way covenant between the minister, the local church and the Association. If the call is to a setting beyond the local church, a 4-way covenant agreement is required between the minister, the local church of which the minister is a member and who supports this ministry, the Association, and the calling body (the institution or organization where the minister will serve).

40. When appropriate, approval of a call by the CoM is done by email vote of the CoM. However, the CoM reserves the right to require a meeting with the minister to discuss the call prior to approval for ordination.

#### Ordination/Authorization

41. If the MniD has privilege of call, then once their call is approved by the CoM as “authorizable,” their status changes to “authorized minister with standing in the North Texas Association.” This grants full standing as an authorized and ordained minister in the UCC. If the call is to a ministry setting in the NTA, a service of installation will be performed in conjunction with the local church. Where there is a 4-way covenant, a representative of the calling body should be invited to participate in the installation. The responsibility for the worship service falls on the local church hosting the service and the newly authorized minister. The CoM will provide the liturgy of installation to be included within that worship service.

42. If ordination is required, once a call is approved as “ordainable,” the CoM sets a date for ordination. The CoM may request a selection of dates from the ordinand and/or the local church. Ordination may be performed at a service at either the local church that sponsored the ordinand or at the local church that has called the ordinand as minister. If the call is to a ministry setting in the NTA, a service of installation will be performed in conjunction with the service of ordination. Where there is a 4-way covenant, a representative of the calling body should be invited to participate in the installation.

43. If the call is to a ministry setting in another Association, and the ordinand desires the ordination service to take place in a church in that other Association, the NTA CoM will coordinate with that Association to represent the NTA at the service of ordination. However, the NTA is still the ordaining body. Be aware that some Associations will not perform an installation at the same time as an ordination for those coming from another Association, and a separate service of installation may be needed.

44. The responsibility for the worship service falls on the local church hosting the service and the ordinand. The CoM will provide the liturgy or ordination (and liturgy of installation where appropriate) to be included within that worship service.

45. Announcements of the ordination/installation service are also the responsibility of the local church and/or the ordinand and should be made to the NTA and its clergy as a whole. The announcement or invitation should indicate whether clergy attending should robe and if so what color stole is preferred. If clergy robe, typically they process formally into the sanctuary (and out) and sit in a designated area.

46. The ordinand should choose and indicate during the service or in the bulletin where the offering taken during the service will go. Traditionally it goes to support seminary education in some way. As the NTA is connected to the CUE seminaries (Chicago, United, Eden), that is always a good option for this offering.

47. At or after the ordination service, you will receive a certificate of ordination.

48. For both those with privilege of call, or who will be ordained, if the call is to a ministry setting in another Association, after the ordination or receipt of full standing you should apply to transfer your standing from the NTA to your new Association. Contact your new Association to see what processes they require. As part of the transfer, your file will be transferred from the NTA to your new Association.