

**Introduction to The Member in Discernment Process**  
*Committee on Ministry: Preparation*  
St. Louis Association of the Missouri Mid-South Conference  
United Church of Christ

**Definition**

The designation “Member in Discernment” (MID) is used to describe the person engaged in a period of preparation, assessment and discernment that precedes a decision by an Association to permit a person to seek an ordainable call in the United Church of Christ. The Committee on Ministry: Preparation (COM:P) of the St. Louis Association acts on behalf of the entire UCC and is called to counsel, evaluate and discern each candidate’s call, gifts and preparation for ordained ministry within the UCC. The local St. Louis Association church where the candidate is a member sponsors the candidate through the process and is responsible for providing nurture and support, opportunities to grow in ministerial proficiencies and candid feedback. Many other entities and individuals contribute to ministerial formation. Becoming familiar with and following the requirements is the responsibility of the candidate seeking ordination. Additionally, it is the candidate’s responsibility to convey expectations to others who contribute on their behalf throughout the process. The COM:P greatly appreciates the roles each plays in the discernment decision the COM:P makes on behalf of the entire UCC.

**General Time Line and Overview of Requirements**

COM:P accepts people into the discernment process from many faith traditions and backgrounds. It feels deep experience with, understanding of and love for the UCC is critical in people who would lead its local churches or serve in other settings. Therefore, the COM:P will be especially attentive to the depth and breadth of each candidate’s experience of church life and their discernment and decision-making process if the person is coming from another or no faith tradition. Plans to gain leadership experience in the UCC should be formulated as soon as a call to authorized ministry is perceived--even before someone meets with the COM:P.

This process will take more than two years to complete. The candidate must be an active member of a St. Louis Association church for one year before being recommended by that local church to the COM:P. The candidate must remain an active member of this sponsoring church for the entire time they are in the process. The discernment process with COM:P lasts at least one year as the Ordination Interview cannot happen until the candidate is an MID for at least a year. The candidate will have had a minimum of two visits with COM:P before the Ordination Interview: 1) an initial visit and 2) at least one update interview.

COM:P recommends that candidates prepare to be received into the discernment process during their first year in seminary. Some candidates may seek to begin this process even before their seminary education begins.

## **Helpful Links**

The discernment process is outlined in the UCC *Manual on Ministry*, [http://www.ucc.org/ministers\\_manual](http://www.ucc.org/ministers_manual). (Pay particular attention to section 2.)

The specific St. Louis Association process is detailed in a series of documents provided to MIDs upon their entry into the discernment process.

Another important resource for MIDs, local churches, COM:P and advisors is the *Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry*, [http://www.ucc.org/ministers\\_marks](http://www.ucc.org/ministers_marks).