

THE ROLE OF THE IN-DISCERNMENT ADVISOR SECTION A, COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

The Committee on Ministry, Section A assigns an Advisor to each Member In Discernment for Ordination or Commissioning to serve as a mentor and support to the person.

The Advisor is a minister with standing in the Northern California Nevada Conference as an authorized minister in the United Church of Christ.

The Advisor has a deeper and more personal relationship with the Member In Discernment than does the COM-A Liaison. COM-A requests that the Advisor and candidate meet a minimum of quarterly for mentoring, advice, and encouragement. The Advisor walks with the Member In Discernment as they prepare for ministry, and they also communicate with COM-A about the person's gifts and fitness for ministry. This feedback to COM-A may be shared through written correspondence and/or personal interviews. Ultimately, the COM-A Advisor is called both to speak words of encouragement, and to "speak the truth in love," to advocate when necessary and appropriate, and to model effective ministerial leadership.

The Advisor is assigned by COM-A after the initial interview recognizing a Member In Discernment, and after careful reflection on the strengths and growing edges of that person. However, if the assigned Advisor is not a good match, the Advisor and/or candidate should contact the COM-A Liaison as soon as this becomes apparent. Furthermore, we encourage the Member In Discernment to meet with, and receive support from, a variety of leaders and ministers in the UCC. For this reason, COM-A does not permit an individual's pastor(s) to also serve in the role of Advisor.

It is the responsibility of the Member In Discernment to make the initial contact with the Advisor who has been assigned to them by COM-A.

COM-A takes the relationship between the Member In Discernment and the Advisor very seriously in the process toward authorization for ministry. Both individuals are encouraged to engage fully in, and reap the rewards of, that special relationship. An Advisor is assigned only one candidate at a time. In very rare circumstances, and only with their full agreement as to the appropriateness and practicality of the arrangement, an Advisor might have two persons assigned for some period of time. The role of the Advisor is defined specifically in the UCC Manual on Ministry (pp. 28-46) and in the MOMSA (II:1-4). These sources provide further information about the relationship between the Member In Discernment, the Advisor, and COM-A.

GUIDELINES FOR ADVISORS¹

¹ Following material adapted from the Committee on the Ministry Toolkit: Supplementary Forms, prepared by the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team, Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ.

It should be understood by the Member In Discernment, the Local Church, the Conference, and Advisors that to be recognized as a Member In Discernment with our Conference does not commit either the candidate or an Association to ordination or commissioning. “In Discernment” is a time of investigation, study, and prayer when the many possibilities of ministry – lay or ordained – can be explored.

The Role of the Advisor

Acceptance of the invitation to serve as an Advisor is an acknowledgement of the importance of this relationship to one exploring authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ. Generally, the term “Advisor” means just that: advising someone on a faith journey. This is more difficult than it appears. Realizing this and knowing that the Committee on Ministry has a large responsibility in this matter, some guidelines have been developed for Advisors.

Relationship to the Committee on Ministry

The Committee on Ministry, Section A has responsibility to guide and assist the Member In Discernment through his/her journey to authorized ministry. This responsibility and the attendant processes are outlined in the *Manual on Ministry*. But by its very nature, a committee would find it difficult to fulfill these all duties properly – too many people, too much turnover of members, etc. The appointment of an Advisor to each Member In Discernment is the *extension of the Committee, through an individual*, to fulfill this responsibility.

Establishing Regular and Consistent Communication

The most important factor in any relationship is communication. The relationship will be of little value if Advisor and candidate are unavailable to one another. After the match is made, Advisor and candidate should meet as soon as possible set future dates for getting together. **It is the responsibility of the Member In Discernment to contact the Advisor to initiate this meeting, and further meetings.** Such meetings should occur a minimum of four times a year.

The COM-A Liaison should be advised if Advisor-candidate meetings are failing to occur due to distance, incorrect contact information, or incompatibility, and adjustments will be made. It is better to “opt out” of a non-productive situation than to try to carry on under too many obstacles.

The Advisor is the main source of guidance and assistance that COM-A provides to a Member In Discernment. Therefore, the Advisor is asked to report to COM-A at least once a year in the form of a letter (and personal presence, if at all possible) at the person’s meetings for renewal of In Discernment status.

Guidelines for Reporting to the Committee on Ministry

Goals represent intentions in life and give direction to our activities. It is essential that the Member In Discernment regarding authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ

regularly evaluate both short and long range goals. Keeping a candidate's goals in mind, the following specific items might be addressed in the Advisor's annual letter:

1. **Candidate progress.** Is the Member In Discernment making positive progress to obtain a thorough knowledge of United Church of Christ history, theological roots, and polity? How is this being done? If the person is currently engaged in study, is s/he struggling academically, or thriving?
2. **Progress toward authorized ministry.** Is the Member In Discernment on a reflective and clarifying path to ordination or commissioning? Is s/he positively engaged and responsible for the process?
3. **Growth.** What evidence has the Member In Discernment shown of spiritual, intellectual and emotional growth? In what ways has s/he not grown?
4. **Strengths.** What are the candidate's strong points?
5. **Growing edges.** In what areas does s/he need to grow?
6. **Committee responsibilities.** What more could COM-A do to support the candidate and the Advisor?
7. **Seminary responsibilities.** If the Member In Discernment is currently in seminary, what more could the seminary be doing to aid his/her preparation for authorized ministry?
8. **Local Church responsibilities.** Is the Local Church which recommended the candidate be recognized as a Member In Discernment continuing to relate to the candidate in meaningful and supportive ways?
9. **Potential.** Based on the candidate's goals, commitment, and effort, how does the Advisor assess his/her potential for service to the wider United Church of Christ?
10. **Conclusions.** Any other factors that the Advisor considers important for the growth of the Member In Discernment.

The Northern California Nevada Conference, represented by the Committee on Ministry, Section A, is concerned for the welfare of all of our Members In Discernment. In any way possible, we wish to stand beside each one in love and truth, and encourage progress toward the fulfillment of his/her decision to answer the call to ministry.