



**Wisconsin Conference
United Church of Christ**

Our Members In Discernment

By Rev. Rob MacDougall

Over the past few years, there have been dramatic shifts regarding the oversight and support for people in our midst who are hearing the call to ordained ministry. In the United Church of Christ, persons on the path toward ordination are called Members In Discernment (MIDs). It is the responsibility of Association Committees/Divisions on Ministry to guide, nurture, oversee and finally call ecclesiastical councils when a vote takes place to approve candidates for ordination pending a call. In the past, much of the preparation for ministry took place through accredited seminaries, but the 2018 General Synod's approval of the new Manual On Ministry established Multiple Paths to Ordained Ministry, which shifted greater preparation and oversight to Association Committees/Divisions on Ministry (COMs).

The Wisconsin Conference Commission on Church and Ministry, which is comprised of COM members from the four Associations of the Wisconsin Conference, has been working diligently with Association COMs over the past few years to understand the expanded responsibilities of Associations regarding MIDs. Along with the COMs, the Commission has developed tools and training to assess the competencies of MIDs based on the UCC Marks of Ministry and then to create learning/formation covenants for each MID. The Commission is currently working on re-writing the Wisconsin Conference's MID Manual and is looking toward greater training for MID advisors. The Damascus Project is also creating courses focusing specifically on education for MID formation.

In addition to the development of tools and advisement training, the Commission and Conference have recognized that MIDs do not have an ongoing seminarian cohort and could benefit from being in relationship and

conversation with other Wisconsin Conference MIDs. This past year, two online MID Communities of Practice were created and have fostered helpful relationships and opportunities for reflection among MIDs. The Commission and Conference are also developing an annual retreat for MIDs that will include an annual check-in on learning covenant progress, information and resources regarding MID processes, networking and socializing with other MIDs, and spiritual care. Because of the pandemic, a shortened version of the annual retreat will take place online March 21; all Wisconsin Conference MIDs have received an invitation to participate in the retreat.

The Wisconsin Conference and four Associations are deeply committed to the support, care and guidance of all who have heard the call to ordained ministry. Our churches and all places of ministry need mature, faithful, creative, equipped, thoughtful and compassionate spiritual leaders. Individuals called to ministry and the Wisconsin Conference journey together to serve God. When we care for and support Members In Discernment we are supporting and caring for our churches, their members, communities, and all creation. The United Church of Christ is in a new moment of ministry; perhaps you, or someone you know, are feeling called to ordained ministry in this new moment. If this is true for you please contact Wisconsin Conference staff and/or the leadership of your Association Committee on Ministry and know that you will have a community of faith to journey with you.

Rev. Rob MacDougall, Associate Conference Minister