

1 Prudential Resolution

2 Title: Manual on Ministry, Re-Visioned

3 Date of Submission:

4 Supporting Conferences:

5 **Summary**

6 The United Church of Christ's *Manual on Ministry* has shaped the formation, authorization and
7 oversight of ministers since the denomination's inception and in its predecessor traditions.
8 Recently re-visioned, the newest iteration of the *Manual on Ministry* has been developed through
9 prayerful discernment and conversation with all settings of the denomination. This revised
10 *Manual* reflects the latest understandings of ministerial formation, authorization and oversight
11 not currently reflected in the UCC's Constitution and Bylaws. This prudential resolution calls for
12 a period of engagement and reflection with the revised *Manual* prior to presenting
13 Constitution and Bylaws recommendations at General Synod MMXIX.

14 **Biblical, Theological, and Historical Grounding**

15 From the start, the United Church of Christ's *Manual on Ministry* has served as a touch point of
16 covenantal relations within the denomination. Through periodic revisions, the *Manual* has
17 continued to reflect the ecclesiastical needs of the church regarding formation, authorization and
18 oversight of ministers.

19 *"The LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner
20 may read it."* Habakkuk 2:2

21 In 2013 an invitation was extended to all members of the United Church of Christ via letters to
22 every local congregation to participate in the re-visioning of the *Manual on Ministry*, last
23 updated in the 1980's and printed in 2002. Out of an applicant pool of one hundred fifty persons
24 a diverse working group of seventeen members was called together under the name Habakkuk
25 Group, derived from the prophetic call to "capture the vision and make it plain."

26 *"I will stand at my watch-post, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what
27 he will say to me."* Habakkuk 2:1

28 The Habakkuk Group engaged with all settings of the denomination to take seriously the
29 prophet's declaration to stand at the watch-post and be stationed on the ramparts, that is, to
30 observe the church's and world's landscape and prayerfully discern God's movement. During
31 this work of prayer and observation, the Habakkuk group noted significant changes in the life of
32 the church including:

- 33 • a decade of implementation of the Ministry Issues Pronouncement from General Synod
34 MMV, most notably the Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers;
- 35 • counter to the work of Ministry Issues, an understanding and use of licensed ministry in
36 some contexts to underpay local church pastors with non-seminary formation;
- 37 • the failure of "authorized" to achieve equal regard for and among licensed, commissioned
38 and ordained ministers;
- 39 • the multiplication of ministry settings beyond local churches and familiar institutions
40 such as hospitals and military service and universities.

41 *"For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it*
42 *seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay."* Habakkuk 2:3

43 Taking in these observations the Habakkuk Group engaged with partners across the United
44 Church of Christ to build and test a vision for ministerial formation, authorization and oversight
45 reflective of the current needs of the church. The materials were tested and honed with diverse
46 readers, conference staff, committees on ministry, seminaries and regional theological education
47 programs, and ecumenical partners.

48 *"Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines."* Habakkuk 3:17

49 Recognizing that there is always a period of growth between planting and harvesting, the re-
50 visioned *Manual on Ministry* bears within it theological grounding, practices of covenantal
51 relationships, and numerous resources for Committees on Ministry in the United Church of
52 Christ, all of which will take time and intentionality for the church to explore.

53 The *Manual on Ministry* is the consistent resource used to shape the common work of
54 Committees on Ministry. Committees on Ministry are the central locus of covenant in the United
55 Church of Christ, binding together local churches, individual authorized ministers, associations,

56 conferences, and the national church. Service on a Committee on Ministry is a ministry in and of
57 itself. The United Church of Christ depends on COMs to make decisions for the whole church,
58 thus it is imperative that COMs are well trained and maintain consistent practices across diverse
59 settings.

60 **Text of the Motion**

61 Whereas the United Church of Christ *Manual on Ministry* has been re-visioned in order to
62 continue serving as a touch point of covenantal relations within the denomination.

63 Whereas the *Manual on Ministry* reflects theological foundations, covenantal relationships, and
64 best practices in response to current needs of the church regarding formation, authorization and
65 oversight of ministers.

66 Whereas Committees on Ministry are a locus of covenant, needing regular training and shared
67 understanding working from a common denominational resource.

68 Whereas changes to the *Manual* need to be explored and experienced by the wider church before
69 changes can be recommended to the United Church of Christ Constitution and Bylaws.

70 Whereas a transition plan to move from the existing *Manual on Ministry* to the re-visioned
71 edition has been presented to conferences and associations.

72 Therefore we call for a time of exploration and transition using the re-visioned *Manual on*
73 *Ministry* in our Committees on Ministry prior to the consideration of consequent changes to the
74 UCC Constitution and Bylaws at General Synod MMXIX.

75 *The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall*
76 *mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.*

77 *The collegium of officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the*
78 *United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.*

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