



BECOMING AN AFFILIATED CONGREGATION OF THE UCC

We are thrilled that you and your congregation are curious about becoming a part of the United Church of Christ! The purpose of this document is to introduce you to the process that will guide you, your local church and the members and friends of the UCC Association in your area and the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference in deciding if our coming together will be a blessing to God and to everyone involved. One hope and expectation of this process is the formulation of a “mutual affirmation of covenant” (don’t worry, we’ll help with that!). Our UCC is grounded in the Biblical covenants and covenantal theology that gives shape to the relationships we have with all people, the earth and with God. So, this process includes a time for *Exploring, Developing, and Affirming Covenant*.

This might seem a bit intimidating and overwhelming but fear not! There are several process steps but all of them are designed to create and deepen new friendships. We also want to name as many hopes, dreams, and expectations for our coming together so that the only thing that surprises us is the movement of the Holy Spirit. You will soon meet some of those new friends who will explore with you what joining the UCC entails.

We recommend that you start with the small step of checking out the United Church of Christ via the National Church website (www.ucc.org), and our Pennsylvania Southeast Conference website (www.psec.org). Then continue reading through the next pages.

Steps Toward Affiliation

Part 1: Exploration:

1. The Pastor of a local church contacts the Conference Minister for an appointment, the purpose of which is to be introduced to the process of affiliation, and to determine whether to take next steps, and what those steps might be.
2. An informal meeting is held with the Pastor, the Association Moderator, members of the Committee on Ministry, and appropriate leaders of the congregation to begin framing the questions that might arise from the congregation and the Conference and then determine a mutual process by which those questions can be addressed. This conversation must include expectations for the Minister(s) to obtain ministerial standing (Ordination, Dual Standing, Lay Ministerial Standing) in the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference.
3. An Exploration Committee of 3-5 leaders is organized by the church.
4. The COM selects an active, association church with high regard for covenantal connections to partner with the church seeking affiliation as it explores a covenant with the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, UCC.
 - a. The Sponsoring Church will create events for connections between members of both churches, so that the church seeking affiliation can better understand some of the spiritual and cultural ethos of Association, Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, and the United Church of Christ.
 - b. These events can include times of mutual service to the community, and/or times of fellowship between the congregations. Invitations to worship together are encouraged. A minimum of 4 events must take place.

- c. The Pastor of the Sponsoring Church shall be available as a practical resource for the leadership of the church seeking affiliation.
 - d. Both the Sponsoring Church Governing Board and the Pastor shall send a letter a recommendation, with details of the engagements between the two churches. This document is to be included in the documents noted in the “Affirming Covenant” portion of the process.
5. The Minister is encouraged to be in regular conversation with the COM to be in discussion and discernment about the process to be used for being granted ministerial standing.
 6. If the congregation is currently affiliated with another denomination, the Conference Minister, the Association Moderator, and leadership of the congregation determine how and when the denomination should be informed about the conversation.
 7. Elements of the exploration, with the COM may include but are not limited to:
 - a. Meetings of the COM with leaders and members of the congregation in both formal and informal settings, including involvement in worship.
 - b. Presentation to the congregation of an overview of the UCC and the resources available through the denomination
 - c. A UCC History and Polity Class appropriate to the needs of the congregation.
 - d. Visits by Conference staff to worship, including possible invitation to preach.
 - e. Attendance by leaders of the church to meetings of the Association, the Conference, and the national church.
 - f. Setting a date to evaluate the process to this point and determine whether or not to proceed to the next step. If the decision is not to proceed, the congregation may remain in ecumenical relationship with the United Church of Christ.

Part 2: Developing Covenant:

1. The COM recommends to the Association Executive Committee that the church be accepted as a “Church in Covenant Development”, and that they be given *voice without vote* in the life of the Association.
2. Establish a Covenant Development Committee, comprised of representation from the church seeking affiliation, the sponsoring congregation, the COM and possible other representation from the Conference. The purpose of the Committee will be to review the process to this point and determine next steps to assure open and widespread conversations about the affiliation, full knowledge of and familiarity with the UCC in all of its settings.
3. Begin drafting a Covenant between the congregation, the Association, and the Conference, in which each names responsibilities and rights in relation to each other; each is called upon to honor and respect the other; and each offers to listen and carefully consider the advice, counsel and requests of the other (a sample Covenant will be provided).
4. The Local Church in consultation with the Covenant Development Committee, determines its readiness to enter into covenant with the Association, and when ready, makes a formal request for standing as a congregation of the UCC. If the church does not wish to proceed, they may remain in ecumenical relationship with the United Church of Christ.
5. The Local Church drafts changes in their Bylaws to reflect the relationship with the Association and the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference UCC to be reviewed by the Covenant Development Committee.

Part 3: Affirming Covenant:

1. The Church in Covenant Development submits a formal request to the Association Executive Committee to be received as a congregation with standing in the Association of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference. The documents to be attached to this request are to include the following (the items can be modified by COM. Items will be placed in the Local Church file with the Conference):

- a. The Constitution and Bylaws of the church revised to reflect membership in the Association of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference and United Church of Christ
 - b. Articles of Incorporation
 - c. List of Officers
 - d. Minutes of the Congregational Meeting at which the congregation voted to join the United Church of Christ
 - e. Statistics of membership
 - f. The most recent two Annual Reports of the congregation (this may vary based on the local church context)
 - g. The most recent Treasurer's Report
 - h. A letter requesting membership in the Association of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, UCC
 - i. Section 2 (Who is God Calling us to Become?) and Second 3a (Congregational Reflection) of the UCC Local Church Profile
 - j. Bio(s) of the pastoral leadership
 - k. A letter stating the intention of the minister(s) to seek ministerial standing in the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, UCC
 - l. Overview of the program and ministries of the congregation
 - m. The Covenant with the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, UCC
 - n. Other information that presents a picture of the church (i.e. news clippings, website, photographs, etc.)
 - o. A completed OCWM pledge card
 - p. Letter from the Pastor of the sponsoring church, recommending standing in the United Church of Christ and detailing the events the churches shared
2. The Association Executive Committee reviews the material and meets with church leaders at the next available meeting and determines that all appropriate documents are received.
 3. At the next meeting of the Association body, the Association Executive Committee recommends that the local church be considered for local church standing within the Association.
 - a. The Executive Committee introduces the local church and its rationale for recommending standing.
 - b. The local church introduces itself to help Association members become familiar with their members.
 - c. Time for questions and words of acclimation.
 - d. Followed by a vote.
 4. A worship service is held with the Local Church, Conference staff and representatives present.
 5. The Church is introduced and celebrated at a Pennsylvania Southeast Conference Meeting and at the General Synod of the United Church of Christ.