

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST POLITY FOR LAY LEADERS

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## INTRODUCTION

The word *polity* refers to the way in which a group of people organize or govern themselves. There was a time when each denomination argued that their polity was Biblical and right and everyone else was wrong. We no longer make that claim. We have all been blessed by the work of the Spirit in churches with different polities. You may have found nourishment in a congregation with another polity.

Nonetheless, the polity of the United Church of Christ is shaped by our experience of God and our understanding of Scripture. Here are three key points:

- We believe that God can speak to/ inspire/ lead anyone. We must listen to God and honor that leading in each other. We therefore resist *authority* that would try to tell us how to believe and what to do.
- The church is a community. The Apostle Paul tells us that the church is like a body. To be effective all parts of that body must work together, each using their gifts, in cooperation with each other, to the glory of God.
- The church does have a head. It is Jesus Christ. It is Christ who calls us to witness to the love of God in the world. The church therefore organizes for the purpose of witnessing to that love in the world.

These principles shape our understanding of how we do polity.

Each part of this workbook consists of three parts:

1. An excerpt from the Constitution, by-laws, or other official document of the United Church of Christ, which defines the topic at hand. The constitution and by-laws are divided into paragraphs, which are numbered. Paragraphs with one or two digits are from the Constitution, those with three digits are from the by-laws.
2. A description in plain language of this aspect of polity.
3. A check list with questions for you to complete.

As you go through this workbook, it will be helpful if you gain access to two resources published annually by the United Church of Christ:

- *Yearbook and Directory*
- *Desk Calendar and Plan Book*

You will also find abundant information at [ucc.org](http://ucc.org) and your Conference website.

## PART 1: HISTORY

How did we come up with United Church of Christ polity? The church is an organism that slowly evolves through time. How we organize ourselves has evolved from roots in the past. In the United Church of Christ this is a complex process because we are a union of several groups, each with its own past.

In 1957 the Congregational Christian churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church united to form the United Church of Christ. However each of these denominations was a recent union. The Reformed Church in the United States and the Evangelical Synod of North America united in 1934 to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Congregational and Christian churches came together in 1931. This "U.C.C. final four" does not adequately describe the diversity of our denomination. The Christian group contained an independent and vigorous Afro-Christian Convention. The Reformed Church included an autonomous Magyar [Hungarian] Synod. Congregationalism included a network of German Congregational Conferences, a Dakota [American Indian] Association, and an African-American Convention. In addition, the United Church of Christ includes numerous congregations with distinct racial-ethnic identities, both of indigenous and immigrant groups. And other congregations have joined the U.C.C. both before and after 1957.

Our diversity goes further than this. We are rich and poor; we are conservative and liberal (both in theology and politics); we are rural and urban; we are tiny and large congregations.

With this beautiful, colorful diversity, what holds us together? We all seek to love and serve Jesus Christ. The founders of the United Church of Christ believed that the more closely we approach Jesus Christ, the closer we will come to each other. Christ does not command us to all be the same; he prays that we love one another. In the story of Pentecost (Acts 2) the early church found a unity in the Spirit that transcended, but did not annul, our differences of culture.

United Church of Christ polity has evolved from this past, as a way to celebrate our diversity and our oneness in Christ. Our polity seeks to promote our deepening of faith and our service to Christ in the world.

Of the many polity issues with which we have struggled for centuries, a few stand out.

- How do we cultivate unity without uniformity, diversity without division?
- How do we provide competent ministerial leadership to our churches?
- How do we organize for service to Christ in our world?



## PART 2: COVENANT POLITY

6. Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the Church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end that the whole Church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each expression of the Church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the Church listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.

Put quite simply, we cannot *tell* each other what to do. But we are required to *listen* to each other. The Divine may speak to and through any of us. We may hear God speaking when we listen and respond to one another. Together we come nearer to the Spirit of Christ than any of us alone.

The word covenant has a different meaning in church from what it might mean in a law court or elsewhere. Some congregations have a covenant which may be something like a creed, and expresses the responsibility of each member to walk with one another and with God. Some covenants are not even written down. The key to covenant is that we have a responsibility to each other and accountability to each other.

The parties to this covenant include local congregations, regional bodies, the national church, and the myriad of other institutions and agencies established to carry out the work of God. Jesus said we are not to "Lord it over" one another. We seek together to serve Christ.

### PART 3: THE LOCAL CHURCH

18 The autonomy of the Local Church is inherent and modifiable only by its own action. Nothing in this Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ shall destroy or limit the right of each Local Church to continue to operate in the way customary to it; nor shall be construed as giving to the General Synod, or to any Conference or Association now, or at any future time, the power to abridge or impair the autonomy of any Local Church in the management of its own affairs, which affairs include, but are not limited to, the right to retain or adopt its own methods of organization, worship and education; to retain or secure its own charter and name; to adopt its own constitution and bylaws; to formulate its own covenants and confessions of faith; to admit members in its own way and to provide for their discipline or dismissal; to call or dismiss its pastor or pastors by such procedure as it shall determine; to acquire, own, manage and dispose of property and funds; to control its own benevolences; and to withdraw by its own decision from the United Church of Christ at any time without forfeiture of ownership or control of any real or personal property owned by it.

17 The Local Churches of the United Church of Christ have, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for that Church, its labors and its extension, even as the United Church of Christ has, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for the wellbeing and needs and aspirations of its Local Churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, the one and the many share in common Christian experience and responsibility.

Paragraph 18 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ is emphatic! The local congregation is autonomous! Paragraph 17 states we have a *responsibility* to the larger church. We are still part of something bigger, even if we are autonomous.

What is your local congregation's polity? It is outlined in the Constitution and by-laws of your congregation. It is helpful to be familiar with these and to refer to them from time to time. Problems arise when persons who are more

familiar with another polity- in another congregation or organization - do not stop to appreciate the differences.

Three types of local church polity - from which there are many variations - include the following. You need to consult your congregation's Constitution and by-laws, which apply to your particular situation. These three types are (1) strong governing board (2) strong committees, and (3) strong congregation.

*Strong governing board.* The congregation usually meets once a year to review the past year and make plans for the coming year. The congregation may adopt a budget and will elect officers. The congregation elects persons to a *governing board*. In Reformed-background churches this is called a *consistory* which is composed of Elders and Deacons. In some congregations of the Reformed tradition these persons are ordained with the laying on of hands, and are considered Elders or Deacons for life, although they are only *active deacons* or *active elders* for the term of years for which they were elected. The governing board may appoint whatever committees or task forces it deems necessary. Often a governing board member is assigned to each committee or organization in the church to facilitate communications. However, the board members represent and are accountable to the whole congregation, not just the committee to which they have been assigned. The governing board commonly meets monthly, and handles the affairs of the congregation between annual meetings.

*Strong committees.* The congregation usually meets once a year to review the past year and make plans for the coming year. The congregation may adopt a budget and will elect officers and committees. In Congregational-Christian churches these committees often include a Board of Deacons, responsible for the spiritual life of the congregation, and a Board of Trustees, responsible for property and finance. These boards and committees carry out the work of the church. There may be a Church Council or Cabinet, consisting of representatives from the various boards, committees, and fellowship groups in the church. But this body's function is for communication and coordination, not for governance.

*Strong congregation.* This pattern is followed by some smaller congregations (generally under 30 members). The congregation holds an annual meeting to review the past year and make plans for the coming year. The congregation may adopt a

budget and will elect a few officers. However, decisions are made at frequent congregational meetings. Some congregations meet quarterly, others monthly. In many the process is easy for calling a meeting after church any Sunday. Or informal meetings to inform or discuss can be held any Sunday after worship.

#### *Some other variations*

In some congregations the *Moderator* is an important position. Besides presiding over congregational meetings, this person is looked upon as the lay leader of the church. In other congregations the President of Consistory/Church Board is the key lay leader.

In many congregations the *Clerk* is responsible for keeping church records - baptisms, weddings, funerals, church membership, etc. In other congregations the Pastor is expected to do this.

In some congregations the Pastor is a voting member of the governing board, in others that person has voice but no vote, in yet others, the Pastor chairs the governing board.

#### CHECK LIST:

1. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each of these three types?

2. Which of these three types most closely corresponds to your congregation?

3. How does your congregation diverge from that type?

## PART 4: THE ASSOCIATION

44. An Association is that body within a Conference of the United Church of Christ which is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area, all Ordained Ministers holding Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing therein, all Commissioned Ministers and Licensed Ministers in that Association.

46. An Association is that body which determines, confers, and certifies to the standing of the Local Churches of the United Church of Christ within its area.

47. An Association is that body which grants authorization that is required for various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the Church. Such authorization is granted through the rite of ordination, through commissioning, licensing, granting either Ordained Ministerial Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing and other acts of authorization. Such authorization may be terminated by the Association.

[Note: The phrase “Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing” refers to ministers of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) or United Church of Canada who are serving in the United Church of Christ.]

An Association is a group of churches. Membership at Association meetings consists of lay representatives from each congregation, and any clergy serving those churches or otherwise having standing in the Association..

There is no set size for an Association. Some Associations in the United Church of Christ consist of fewer than ten congregations, others have over a hundred. Some conferences are not divided into Associations, but the Conference functions as the Association.

In Associations local congregations may cooperate for ministry and fellowship in many ways. There are two things an Association must do:

- 1) The Association is the body that receives new congregations into the U.C.C.
- 2) The Association authorizes all forms of ministry, and maintains the standing of those ministers. For this reason every Association must have a

Committee on Ministry. This committee is composed of both clergy and lay persons. Anyone wishing to become a minister (ordained, licensed, commissioned, etc.) must apply to this committee. The committee reviews their qualifications and may act to approve. The responsibilities of this committee are diverse.

All branches of the U.C.C., from earliest times, have been concerned to provide the congregations with competent ministerial leadership. It is the job of the Committee on Ministry of the Association to support ministers and to protect congregations from those who might do them harm. There have always been well-intentioned volunteers lacking in education willing to serve our churches. Others have had a shallow spirituality. Yet others have had their own agendas of taking a congregation away from the fellowship of our denomination. This Committee can limit or remove a person's ministerial standing. This can often require a careful study of any accusations of ministerial misconduct.

While some Associations may be little more than a Committee on Ministry, other Associations may have other committees that undertake various programs for the churches, and other Associations may give financial support to various programs or agencies carrying out ministries to, or on behalf, of the congregations.

How are Associations funded? Their budgets in most cases are small. Some assess each congregation per capita dues, others simply ask each congregation for the same amount. The Association may also receive offerings at ordination and installation services.

CHECK LIST:

1. Name of Your Association:
2. Website and/or Contact Information for the Association
3. Contact Information for the Committee on Ministry
4. Does your Association do anything more than what is required in the denomination's by-laws? Describe
5. Is your Association served by a minister or ministers? Who? How can you contact them?
6. How has your church participated in your Association?
7. How is your association funded?
8. What are your Association's Expenses?

## PART 5: THE CONFERENCE

52. A Conference is that body of the United Church of Christ which is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area, all Ordained Ministers holding Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing in its Associations or in the Conference itself when acting as an Association, all Commissioned Ministers and Licensed Ministers in its Associations.

177 A Conference employs such salaried personnel as its program may require. . . .

182 A Conference receives from the Local Churches contributions for denominational support and keeps detailed records of the same.

184 Upon the basis of the agreed upon percentage, or dollar amount, the Conference each month retains the amount necessary for its own support and forwards the balance to the treasury office of the National Setting.

185 A Conference, in the interest of the Local Churches, discharges those duties and provides those services which will strengthen the witness of the United Church of Christ . . .

186 A Conference maintains ecumenical and interfaith relations within its boundaries with other fellowships to the end that mutual understanding and cooperation may be advanced.

*A Conference is intended to be a regional grouping of churches large enough to support staff. Having staff and funding, the Conference can carry out ministries to the congregations and on behalf of the congregations. Generally, someone on the Conference staff assists congregations in securing ministerial leadership. Conferences may also administer grants, conduct workshops or other learning events for the churches, facilitate fellowship and cooperative missions between churches, etc.*

*A Conference meets at least once a year, consisting of all clergy recognized by its Associations, and representatives of every congregation.*

*Conferences receive funds from the congregations and individual donors. This is called Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM). A certain percentage is retained for Conference expenses, and the rest is forwarded to the national church. Some Conferences also have invested funds. Some conferences own*



property, such as a conference office, retreat center, or church camp.

The Conference is a link. It connects to the local churches and the national church, sharing concerns in both directions. It may also connect Associations to it and to each other. In addition, the Conference engages in ecumenical relations with the comparable bodies of other denominations in its area. The Conference may also have some relationship to U.C.C. Health and Human Service agencies and educational institutions in its geographic area.

#### CHECK LIST

1. Name of your Conference
  
2. Conference website and Contact Information
  
3. Conference Staff and responsibilities of each
  
  
4. Committees, Task forces etc of Conference and contact information
  
  
5. Camps and Conference Centers of Conference
  
  
6. Sources of funding
  
  
7. Expenditures
  
  
8. How has your church participated in your Conference?

## PART 6: THE NATIONAL CHURCH

The national church consists of (a) *General Synod*, (b) the *United Church Board*, (c) a *General Minister and President and Associate General Ministers* (d) *three covenanted ministries*, and (e) *financial agencies*. There are also other groups, formally recognized or otherwise, that function on the national setting of the church.

## Part 6A. General Synod

59 The General Synod is the gathering of a faith community representative of the wider church to listen for and discern the call of God to the United Church of Christ. The General Synod deliberates, discerns, and identifies the mission of the wider church of the United Church of Christ in God's world and receives and offers suggestions, invitations, challenges, and assistance in covenant with Local Churches, Conferences, and other settings as they engage in mission together. The General Synod is the representative body of the United Church of Christ and is composed of voting delegates . . .

The *General Synod* is a representative body that governs the national church. Each Conference elects delegates to *General Synod*. The total number of delegates is about 700. The number of delegates from each Conference is proportional to the aggregate membership of the congregations of the Conference. *General Synod* meets once every three years. Delegates are assigned to committees to consider various resolutions and other actions and present them to the Synod. This is a lot of work for delegates, who usually serve for two consecutive Synods.

Resolutions are a significant way that U.C.C. members, churches, Conferences and other church settings express their faith and values. Most resolutions come to *General Synod* from a Conference or Association. Resolutions may call upon, urge, affirm, support, invite, recommend, request, ask, and encourage various settings of the U.C.C., but may not direct them or require them to agree or act. (The only settings a Synod resolution may direct are the UCC Board of Directors and the Covenanted Ministries of the National Setting.) Because of the U.C.C.'s polity, the *General Synod* speaks "to, but not for" the U.C.C.

That's the "official" part of *General Synod*. Visitors normally significantly outnumber delegates. A wide variety of agencies and interest groups will have booths or displays, information to share, and wares to sell. Many groups within the church will have lectures, workshops, or programs. Inspiring worship is offered. For some visitors, it is a reunion when they see old friends.

## CHECK LIST

1. When and where is the next General Synod?
2. Names of nearby delegates to recent General Synods with contact information.

## Part 6B. United Church Board

63 The members of the United Church of Christ Board shall serve as the directors of each of the Covenanted Ministries. The United Church of Christ Board shall be responsible for strategic planning and policymaking. The United Church of Christ Board shall be responsible, with the General Minister and President, for the ecumenical and interfaith relationships of the United Church of Christ in the national setting. In all its work, the United Church of Christ Board shall be guided by the policies established by the General Synod. . . .

The United Church Board carries out the leadership and management of the denomination between *General Synod* meetings. It consists of up to 52 persons. About two-thirds are elected by *General Synod*, using complex guidelines to insure representation from historically under-represented groups. The other members of the Board are officers of the national church, directors of various church agencies, and representatives of the *Council of Conference Ministers*. Names of Board members can be found in the *Yearbook and Directory*.

### CHECKLIST:

1. Identify a Board member near you or known to you.

Part 6C. General Ministers

217 The General Minister and President, who shall have Ordained Ministerial Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, is called to ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ upon election by the General Synod.

- a) Spiritual Leader of the Church . . .
- b) Theological Interpreter . . .
- c) Convener . . .
- d) Chief Executive Officer . . .

218. . . . Led by the General Minister and President, the Officers of the United Church of Christ are responsible for providing leadership for the mission programming of the United Church of Christ and for the proper implementation of General Synod actions. The Officers of the United Church of Christ coordinate research, long-range planning, program evaluation, and report on the ongoing programs of the United Church of Christ.

221 Each Associate General Minister will be responsible for the work of the Covenanted Ministries, as delegated and directed by the General Minister and President and affirmed by the United Church of Christ Board of Directors.

222 As led by the General Minister and President, each Associate General Minister will be involved in the overall functions of the National Setting, including visioning and planning, communications, development and management of budgets, development and leadership of staff, and implementation of policies adopted by the General Synod and the United Church of Christ Board.

The *General Minister and President*, elected by *General Synod*, is, in many ways, the spokesperson for the national setting of the United Church of Christ. This person may address the general public regarding the positions, policies and concerns of the United Church of Christ. This person also has a major role in maintaining the ecumenical relationships of the United Church of Christ. Although "*Chief Executive Officer*," the position has historically been seen as a pastoral office, providing spiritual leadership to the church, and trying to hold us all together.

The Office of *General Minister and President* also relates to the Center for Analytics, Research & Development and Data (CARDD), which gathers information

and issues reports, such as

- \* Ministerial Compensation Report
- \* Congregational Vitality and Ministerial Excellence Report
- \* Flourishing in Ministry Report
- ... and others.

Although the Associate General Ministers are understood to be "involved in the overall functions of the National Setting," each Associate General Minister is director of one or more of the three Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ. They are the administrators of the work of the church.

#### CHECK LIST

1. Name of General Minister and President and contact information

2. Names of the Associate General Ministers, with contact information and the Covenanted Ministries to which each is assigned.

3. What resources from the Office of General Counsel and CARDD might be helpful to your congregation?

## Part 6D. Covenanted Ministries

The work of the national church is organized into three Covenanted Ministries:

- Local Church Ministries
- Justice and Witness Ministries
- Wider Church Ministries

### Local Church Ministries

71 The purpose and mission of Local Church Ministries . . . shall be to encourage and support the Local Churches of the United Church of Christ in the fulfillment of God's mission. . . .

The functions of Local Church Ministries are numerous. They include Faith Formation (a.k.a. Christian Education), youth ministry, Publications (Pilgrim Press), loans for church buildings, promotion of high ministerial standards (Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization- MESA), encouragement of lay ministry, coordination of the ministry of women, promotion of financial stewardship, scholarships, grants, and assistance to rural churches and new church starts.

### Justice and Witness Ministries

72 The purpose and mission of Justice and Witness Ministries . . . shall be to enable and encourage Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, and the national expressions of the United Church of Christ to engage in God's mission globally by direct action for the integrity of creation, justice, and peace. . . .

Justice and Witness Ministries are the social action branch of the church. They not only speak out on issues, they also assist congregations and Conferences in meeting human needs in their locations. Their concerns include racial justice, economic justice, sexuality and faith, the rights of LGBTQ people and any other marginalized groups, disabilities and mental health, AIDS and HIV, harm reduction and overdose prevention, poverty, hunger, human rights, justice, and the environment. The Office of Public Policy and Advocacy on Capitol Hill is a resource



to the whole church. You can visit it in Washington, D.C. Learn more at:  
<https://www.ucc.org/office-of-public-policy-and-advocacy-in-washington-d-c/>

### Wider Church Ministries

73 The purpose and mission of Wider Church Ministries. . . shall be to encourage and support Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, and the national expressions of the United Church of Christ to participate in the global, multiracial, multicultural church, and to support United Church of Christ ministries around the world and the nation. . . .

Wider Church Ministries are global ministries. For the most part, this is conducted in cooperation with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through one office, called *Global Ministries* ([globalministries.org](http://globalministries.org)). This ministry is responsible for maintaining the relationships the United Church has with churches in other parts of the world. They oversee the recruitment, training and support of missionaries. They also provide assistance for disaster relief both overseas and in the United States.

#### CHECK LIST:

1. In what ways could the covenanted ministries be of help to your congregation?

## PART 6E FINANCIAL AGENCIES

76 The pension activities of the United Church of Christ are administered by a nonprofit membership corporation(s) known as The Pension Boards—United Church of Christ and designated as an Affiliated Ministry of the United Church of Christ. . . .

Each congregation served by a United Church of Christ pastor contributes to the Pension Board on behalf of that pastor. This amount is set as a percentage of the pastor's salary plus housing. Upon retirement the pastor will receive a pension based on how much has been contributed into the pastor's account. The Pension Board also handles a health insurance program for pastors, into which congregations may contribute.

The Pension Board also administers the Christmas Fund (a.k.a. Veterans of the Cross). Because a pension is determined by the pastor's salary through the years, and years of service, it is not equitable. Because of a small pension or other financial hardship, a pastor may end up with serious financial problems. The Christmas Fund is used to assist those pastors in need.

Other financial agencies of the denomination include:

- United Church Funds. Invests funds entrusted to it by the national church, conferences, local congregations, and other agencies of the church. Learn more at: [ucfunds.org](http://ucfunds.org)
- Cornerstone Fund. Provides loans and grants for building construction and repair to congregations and other benevolent agencies. Individuals and groups can invest money in the fund, and receive a reasonable interest, just as they might from a bank. Learn more at: [cornerstonefund.org](http://cornerstonefund.org)
- Insurance Board. Provides property and casualty insurance, which congregations, if they wish, may purchase. Learn more at: [insuranceboard.org](http://insuranceboard.org)

### CHECK LIST:

1. In which of these financial agencies does your congregation participate? In what ways?

## PART 7: HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICE MINISTRIES

296 The Council for Health and Human Services Ministries (CHHSM) [is] . . . composed of institutions and programs in health and welfare related to the United Church of Christ . . . The purposes and functions of the CHHSM shall include: . . . Cooperation with the Conferences and the United Church of Christ Board in the process of Conference recognition of health and human service ministries, monitoring the authorization to seek funds within Conferences, and approval of requests to conduct capital campaigns; . . .

Through the years the United Church of Christ and its predecessor churches have established numerous agencies to provide health and human service. These include; residential facilities for the elderly, homes and services for children and youth, hospitals, public health programs, services for persons with special needs, etc. Generally, these agencies have some kind of relationship with the Conference in which they are located, and receive authorization to solicit funds from those Conferences. A list of these agencies can be found in the *Yearbook and Directory*. Learn more at: [chhsm.org](http://chhsm.org)

### CHECK LIST:

1. What health and human service agencies of the United Church of Christ are located in your Conference?

Name	Address	Service provided
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2. How have the churches of the Conference participated in these agencies?

3. Has your church participated in any way with these agencies?

## PART 8: HIGHER EDUCATION

290 The Council for Higher Education (CHE) shall be composed of the academies, colleges, and theological schools that indicate their desire to be recognized as related to the United Church of Christ . . . . The Council shall be organized in two sub-sections: College and Academy Section, and Seminary Section. The Council for Higher Education shall advance and interpret higher education in the United Church of Christ, including the cultivation of closer relationships between the educational institutions and the Church, the expression of the connection between faith and knowledge in those institutions, and . . . the promotion of education as an integral part of the Church's mission.

The United Church of Christ and its antecedents have always been concerned to promote higher education to provide educated ministerial leadership for our churches, and an educated public for leadership in our churches and in the community. These educational institutions are self-governing, and vary greatly in the degree to which they continue to identify with the United Church of Christ. A list can be found in the *Yearbook and Directory*. The United Church of Christ recognizes six theological seminaries, which work together in a Council for Theological Education to maintain common standards for education for ministry, and provide theological counsel to the church.

### CHECK LIST:

1. What United Church of Christ Institutions of Higher Education are located in your Conference?

Name	Address
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2. What is the nearest United Church of Christ theological seminary to your Conference?

3. Do any United Church of Christ educational institutions provide scholarship assistance to United Church of Christ members?

## PART 9: RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINISTRIES

### Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries

291 . . . the Council for Racial and Ethnic Ministries (COREM) provides a place where racial and ethnic groups can develop their common agenda, collaborate with appropriate program and mission bodies of the United Church of Christ so that resources for racial and ethnic ministries will be effective and relevant, discern appropriate ways by which the many and varied gifts of racial and ethnic groups may be made available to the Church, and advocate for racial and ethnic concerns within the United Church of Christ. It is composed of two representatives each from the **Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministry (PAAM)**, **The Colectivo de UCC Latinx Ministries**, the **Council for American Indian Ministry (CAIM)**, **United Black Christians (UBC)**, **Ministers for Racial, Social and Economic Justice (MRSEJ)**, and **United Samoan Ministries (USM)** who are accountable to the groups that send them. COREM is accountable to the United Church of Christ Board.

Congregations that are predominantly composed of a particular minority racial or ethnic group have organized themselves to meet the needs of their particular group, and to advocate for their needs in the larger church. They are also concerned with the interests of persons from their group who are members of congregations that do not share that racial or ethnic identity.

### CHECK LIST:

1. What Racial or Ethnic congregations are found in your Conference? This may include congregations not in the above mentioned groups.

## PART 10: FUNDING THE NATIONAL CHURCH

Denominational people often speak of “five for five” churches, referring to congregations that participate in all five ways of supporting the national church.

These are:

- *Our Church' Wider Mission (OCWM)*. This is the major way congregations support the larger church. It may be a line item in the local congregation's budget. Or members may be able to designate for OCWM a portion of their contribution to the church on their offering envelope. These funds are forwarded to the Conference, which retains a certain proportion for its use, and forwards the other portion to the national church. This is the MAJOR source of revenue for most Conferences.
- *One Great Hour of Sharing (OGHS)* This special offering, taken by most congregations on the fourth Sunday in Lent, supports the disaster, refugee, and development ministries of the United Church of Christ. It is administered by Wider Church Ministries.
- *Neighbors in Need (NiN)* - This special offering, taken by many congregations on the first Sunday in October, supports ministries of justice and compassion in the United States. One third of the offering provides support for our American Indian congregations through the Council for American Indian Ministries (CAIM). The other two-thirds is administered by Justice and Witness Ministries, which issues grants to local congregations for ministries of justice and compassion.
- *Strengthen the Church* - This special offering, taken by most congregations at Pentecost, supports new church starts, renewal of existing churches, and leadership development. It is administered by Local Church Ministries.
- *Christmas Fund (a.k.a. Veterans of the Cross)* - This special offering, taken by many congregations on Christmas Eve, provides assistance to clergy with particular financial needs. It is administered by the Pension Board (see part 5E).

CHECK LIST:

1. In which of these five forms of support does your congregation participate?

2. Is OCM a line item in your budget or do you support it in another way?

3. On what dates do you take the special offerings?

## PART 11: MINISTRY

20 The United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls the whole Church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the Gospel in church and society. The United Church of Christ seeks to undergird the ministry of its members by nurturing faith, calling forth gifts, and equipping members for Christian service.

21 The United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls certain of its members to various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the church for which ecclesiastical authorization is required.

Recognizing God's call, the ecclesiastical authorization is granted by an Association through the rite of ordination, through commissioning, licensing, granting either Ordained Ministerial Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing and other acts of authorization

### A. ORDAINED MINISTER

22 Ordination is the rite whereby the United Church of Christ through an Association, in cooperation with the person and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ, recognizes and authorizes that member whom God has called to ordained ministry, and sets that person apart by prayer and the laying on of hands. . . .

23 An Ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ is one of its members who has been called by God and ordained to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership. . . .

### B. LICENSED MINISTER

28 Licensing is the act whereby the United Church of Christ through an Association, in cooperation with a person and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ, recognizes and authorizes that member whom God has called to perform specified duties in a designated Local Church or within that Association, mainly preaching and conducting services of worship, for a designated time within a covenant of mutual accountability that includes appropriate supervision and guidance of that Association.



### C. COMMISSIONED MINISTER

26 Commissioning is the act whereby the United Church of Christ through an Association, in cooperation with a person and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ, recognizes and authorizes that member whom God has called to a specific church-related ministry which is recognized by that Association, but not requiring ordination or licensing.

### D. MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT

A Member in Discernment is a member of the United Church of Christ who has been called by God and who is, in covenant with that member's Local Church and Association, engaging in a time of discernment of that call and preparation for the potential of authorized ministry in response to that call.

In the United Church of Christ, all are called to ministry. We have certain processes by which persons may be set apart for a special ministry. The United Church of Christ recognizes three categories of authorized ministry: ordained, licensed, and commissioned.

A revision of the *Manual on Ministry* in 2018 recommended the use of only one of these categories, ordained; and recommended using a new authorization called *Lay Ministerial Standing* for temporary calls. Your local association and its Committee on Ministry had to determine how they would incorporate this guidance, as the other two categories are still part of our by-laws.

The *ordained minister*, is who we usually think of when we think of a minister. This person has received theological education, has been called to serve a congregation or congregations or other religious agency, and after examination by the Association Committee on Ministry, has been set apart by ordination. Such a person is considered a minister for life.

A *licensed minister* is one called and set apart for ministry in a **specific place for a limited period of time**. Historically licensed ministers received regional alternative theological training approved by the Conference instead of a seminary

degree and often served smaller congregations. While a license was not transferable it was often renewed annually. *Lay Ministerial Standing (LMS)* is meant to be supervised ministry while a Member in Discernment is working toward ordination. It is also limited by time and place. The Manual on Ministry suggests a 7-year limit for LMS and applies only to one setting of the Church. Both License and LMS typically include authorization to administer the sacraments.

*A commissioned minister is carrying out a non-sacramental ministry in a congregation or church agency. This might include: pastoral counselor, spiritual director, administrator of a health and human service agency, college professor, Christian Education director, music director, etc. This category of ministry continues to be an important link with a variety of ministries.*

How does a person become a minister? (1) It begins when a person senses a call to be a minister. (2) The person then informs the appropriate body of his or her congregation, which may recommend the person to the Association's Committee on Ministry. (3) The Association Committee on Ministry may receive the person as a Member in Discernment (MiD). This person will then receive counsel from a person appointed by the committee to work with the MiD. The person will then be pursuing academic studies, and the status as a MiD may make the person eligible for certain financial assistance. (4) Following the completion of academic studies, the MiD will submit evidence of preparation and be examined by the Committee on Ministry, which may recommend ordination. (5) Upon receiving a call to serve, the person may be ordained, licensed or commissioned by the Association in cooperation with the local church and the calling ministry. There is a meaningful celebration!

## CHECK LIST

1. Identify a person known to you or near you who is:  
an ordained minister

a licensed minister

a commissioned minister

a member in discernment

a lay ministry standing

2. Can you identify anyone in your congregation who you believe has the qualities needed as a minister, whom you could encourage to consider a call to ministry?

Name

3. How does (or how would) your church engage and support a member responding to a call to ministry?

## PART 12: JUST WORLD COVENANTS

General Synod often passes resolution on social issues. Following these actions, local congregations may study the issue, after which they may claim to be a congregation committed to that principal. These Just World Covenants include:

Just Peace  
Open and Affirming  
Accessible to All  
Global Mission  
Creation Justice  
Economic Justice  
Immigrants Welcoming  
Mental Health Network

For information on these covenants, what it entails, and how a congregation joins, go to [ucc.org/just\\_world\\_covenants](http://ucc.org/just_world_covenants)

### CHECK LIST:

1. Has your church adopted any of these designations? What does that mean to your church?
2. Are there one or two designations that might be good fits for your church that you have interest in exploring?
3. Identify other congregations in your area that have adopted any of these designations.
4. What did they do?
5. What value did they find in doing this process?

## PART 13: THE LARGER CHURCH

The United Church of Christ is just one member of the world Christian family. As a *united* and *uniting* church we seek closer relations with other denominations. Some relationships that we have include:

- *Ecumenical Partnership* with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) through which we join in our work of global ministry and have procedures for mutual recognition of ministers.
- *Formula of Agreement* with the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Reformed Church of America, through which we recognize each other's ministries and seek to work together in our communities.
- *Kirchengemeinschaft* with Evangelical Church of the Union in Germany, by which we have special ties and exchanges with the German church.
- *special relationships* with numerous churches in other countries by which we can exchange pastors and conduct mission work together.
- *World Communion of Reformed Churches*, a world fellowship of denominations that are entirely or in part the product of the Reformed branch of the Reformation. They often have in their name words like Reformed, Presbyterian, or Congregational. For more information go to [wrc.ch](http://wrc.ch)
- *National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.*, a fellowship of Protestant and Orthodox denominations that work together for a common witness. For more information go to [nationalcouncilofchurches.us](http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us)
- *World Council of Churches*, a global fellowship of Protestant and Orthodox denominations that work together for a common witness. For more information go to [oikoumene.org](http://oikoumene.org)

There may be ways in which you work very closely with other denominations in your local settings. These may include:

- *Federated Church*: Two or more congregations of different denominations unite. They work as one in maintaining their building and securing a pastor. However each member is recorded as a member of one of the denominations for purposes of financial support of the denomination and representation at denominational meetings.
- *Dual or multiple alignment*: Two or more congregations unite. They have one membership roll. So all members are considered members of both/all denominations. Financial support of the denominations is shared by the congregation as a whole.
- *Union Church*: Two or more congregations share a church building, which is not owned exclusively by either of them. Each congregation may have its own pastor, its own worship service, and conduct its own affairs.
- *Multi-denominational multiple point charge*: Two or more congregations, of various denominations, work together to call a pastor or pastors. Each congregation maintains its own life in its own location. The term *larger parish* used to be used for these arrangements when the congregations together called more than one pastor, who had specialized responsibilities.
- *Comity agreements*: Two or more denominations agree to each maintain churches in a different community, so that each community will have only one congregation of the participating denominations.

CHECK LIST:

1. Is your congregation situated in one of the patterns of local church union described above? Or do you know of any such churches? What are the advantages or disadvantages?

2. How does your congregation cooperate with congregations of other denominations? How else might you?

3. What congregations of the Ecumenical Partnership or Formula of Agreement are found in your community?

The liturgy for Reception of Members: Affirmation of Baptism in the Book of Worship, United Church of Christ says: "Today we rejoice in your pilgrimage of faith which has brought you to this time and place. We give thanks for every community of faith that has been your spiritual home ..." It is likely that there are members of your church who have histories in other denominations -- perhaps even yourself. How have you been blessed by participation in these other denominations? What, in your experience, is valuable, special or challenging about being in the U.C.C.?





