

O Holy One, as we become an expression of your presence in our midst, we ask for your Spirit to be present in our discernment of your call in our lives. As your Church gathers, guide and strengthen us in the ways we serve your name with our gifts and passions. Throughout history, you have emboldened leaders in your effort to energize people to serve creation. May we sense your Spirit moving within our efforts to raise up and support leaders for your Church's ongoing work in the world. In your holy name, we pray. Amen.

1 Theological Grounding

COVENANTAL POLITY

As members of the United Church of Christ, we testify to the deeds of God, saying together in the words of the Statement of Faith:

You bestow upon us your Holy Spirit,
creating and renewing the church of Jesus Christ
binding in covenant faithful people of all ages,
tongues, and races.

You call us into your church
to accept the cost and joy of discipleship,
to be your servants in the service of others,
to proclaim the gospel to all the world and
resist the powers of evil,
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,
to join him in his passion and victory.¹

God “calls the worlds into being,” giving life and purpose to creation, to persons, and to communities. Throughout the biblical stories and across generations, God calls us to belong to God and to respond to God's grace by belonging to one another. Such

¹ United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, doxological version.

Section 1 Theological Grounding

The work of ministry and of the Church begins and ends in community. Our shared love of Christ and our response to God's grace compel us to work for and beside one another for the sake of God's mission. In the United Church of Christ, these relationships of working together for God's sake are called covenants. We speak highly of covenantal relationships though at times we prefer individualism, in effect saying to other members of the Body, "I have no need of you" (I Corinthians 12). Our covenantal relationships are rarely perfect, but we believe that—when we govern our common life as the United Church of Christ with commitment to one another and Christ—then we demonstrate Christ's love and the Spirit's wisdom at work through us in life-giving ways.

belonging together (being in covenant² with one another) relies on the initiative and grace of God, the One who gives and renews life. In Jesus Christ, the covenant is made new. By the Holy Spirit, the covenant is widened and strengthened. With the sacraments of baptism and communion, the Church celebrates God's renewing power and knows again the new life and identity given to God's people. As God gives God's self to humanity for the sake of all, so Christians are called into covenant for the sake of one another rather than for one's self.

Covenant—the commitment of God to God's people, of the people to God, of the people to one another as the Body of Christ—is foundational to UCC identity and is at the heart of our governance. God's covenant with creation and humankind inspires deep and binding commitment in relationships within and beyond the Church, "that they may all be one" (John 17:21). The Church is called together by God; all members and settings of the Church are interrelated, sharing a common identity as the Body of Christ. The covenantal relationships between parts of the Body of Christ are characterized by mutuality, transparency, accountability, and a desire to represent Christ together for the glory of God.

In the United Church of Christ, the settings of the denomination are separate in governance and individual in conscience yet belong to one another in Christ's name for the mission of God. They honor one another's integrity, listen carefully to each other, and "seek to walk together in all God's ways."³

As a covenanted body, the United Church of Christ authorizes ministers to serve on its behalf. To do so faithfully requires accountability of all members and settings to one another and to God for the ministry of the Church. Clear communication is essential. The covenantal partners in UCC ministerial authorization include:

² Covenant: Sacred commitments to relationship.

³ Article III, Paragraph 6, of the UCC Constitution and Bylaws.

- the individual;
- the Local Church where the individual is a member;
- the Association through its Committee on Ministry;
- the ministry setting to which the individual is called.

THEOLOGY OF MINISTRY AND ORDINATION

The United Church of Christ believes that God calls every Christian to be a servant of God, a minister⁴, living and serving in Christ's name. This call is celebrated sacramentally in baptism as persons are claimed for Christ by the Holy Spirit and the Church; all who are baptized spend the rest of their lives responding to God's call and claim. The particulars of each person's call and ministry vary with time, place, talents, experience, personal situation and responsibilities, and, importantly, the needs of the world. Ministry is lived in every aspect of one's life as God's love is shown in word and deed.

The particular ministry of reconciling all God's children with one another, with creation, and with God, was given to God's people in scripture: "All this is from God, who reconciled us...through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us" (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). This ministry is claimed daily by the United Church of Christ as it is called to love God, neighbor, and self, and to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Matthew 22:36-50 and Micah 6:8).

Christians are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, under the sole headship of Jesus Christ. This is a living body (1 Corinthians 12), called, formed and sent into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. Loving and serving God, the Church has multiple purposes:

⁴ Minister: Any Christian, regardless of employment or title, created by God, called by Christ and gifted by the Spirit; all Christians are in ministry when serving the needs of the world in God's love and grace.

- embodying and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to all;
- nurturing and empowering the gathered Church through worship and sacraments, fellowship and mutual care, education and spiritual formation;
- acting in the world through deeds of justice and lovingkindness.

The Church is a covenantal community; members belong to God in Jesus Christ and therefore to one another in Jesus' name.

The Church acknowledges that its members have many diverse ministries in the world and in the Church. It also recognizes a specific need for representative servant leaders "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). The United Church of Christ, along with the Church Universal through the ages and throughout the world, affirms God's call to some individuals to be such leaders who help the Church to be what God intends it to be. These persons are set apart through prayer and the laying on of hands in the rite of ordination.

In ordination, the individual makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic ministry,⁵ they continue the witness of Christ's followers from New Testament times. They receive authority from the Triune God to serve in Jesus' name. Ordained Ministers have particular responsibilities for the proclamation and practice of the Christian faith and for the life of the Church itself.

Ordained Ministers are authorized to serve and to lead on behalf of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal, a ministry

⁵ Apostolic ministry: The United Church of Christ "claims as its own the faith of the historic church" and joins the witness of Jesus' apostles, at the same time challenging each generation "to make this faith its own." Ordained Ministers witness to this faith as they engage in the ministries of Word and Sacrament within the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal.

that encompasses the fullest range of leadership ministries: priestly and prophetic, representative and servant. They are called to embody the love of God for the world and to proclaim the good news on behalf of the Church, personally and publicly pointing the Church to its dependence on Jesus Christ, the source of its faith, mission, and unity.

Ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ is in accord with the Church Universal as this ministry serves the unity of the Church and continues to witness to the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus of Nazareth and his followers across generations. As did prophets and priests of the Hebrew Scriptures and disciples and apostles of Jesus in the New Testament, Ordained Ministers stand with the people before God and carry the Word of God to the people. Ordained Ministers belong to both God and the people. They are nurtured and sustained by both; they are responsible to both. In the United Church of Christ, this relationship and responsibility is called Ordained Ministerial Standing.⁶ It is embodied in a covenant under God among the Association, the Ordained Minister, the Local Church of membership, and the ministry setting.

Because both the demands upon Ordained Ministers and the needs of the Church are multiple, no person will have all the needed gifts to offer to all people in all situations. Nevertheless, all Ordained Ministers are servants of God in their ministry on behalf of the Church of Jesus Christ. Ordained ministry is ministry of the Church entrusted to individuals; it is not the ministry of individuals acting independently. Ordained Ministers are persons of faith, claimed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ and committed to the Church and its ministry. They seek to serve God and the world in humility, able and willing to offer and receive wisdom. The Church looks to them to be learned persons and to have a deep knowledge of the Scriptures and of the Church historically and ecumenically.

For a variety of reasons, there are instances when an Ordained Minister is not available to represent and serve the Church. In

The “needs of the Church”—a phrase often used when considering the authorization of a person for representative and sacramental ministry—should be understood as a question of the Church Universal’s needs, not only or primarily of a particular Local Church or individual member. Many needs of the Church are met well and faithfully by laypersons and their ministries.

⁶ Ordained Ministerial Standing: Formal relationship between an Ordained Minister and the United Church of Christ through an Association.

such circumstances, an Association of the United Church of Christ may identify one of its lay members as having gifts and graces appropriate for that ministry setting, as well as a call from God, and grant them Lay Ministerial Standing. Lay Ministerial Standing is a temporary, accountable covenantal relationship among the Association, the individual member, and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ. Lay Ministers are, for a season, charged with particular roles and tasks in which they are in service to or on behalf of a particular congregation as representative servants of the United Church of Christ. During a Lay Minister's service, the Local Church, the Lay Minister, and the Association Committee on Ministry should be in discernment together as to whether the Lay Minister's call by the Holy Spirit is to a life of ministerial leadership as an Ordained Minister of the United Church of Christ.

MARKS OF FAITHFUL AND EFFECTIVE AUTHORIZED MINISTERS

Those who hold ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ are entrusted with and accountable for the faithfulness and effectiveness of their lives and ministries on its behalf. The development and demonstration of such faithfulness and effectiveness are guided by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ (the Marks), a tool created to meet the aims of the 2005 Ministry Issues Pronouncement of General Synod. The Ministry Issues Pronouncement sought to expand UCC definitions of learnedness and leadership in authorized ministry and to emphasize excellence in ministerial formation. Therefore, the Marks strive to highlight the complex combination of talents, understandings, and skills needed for ministerial leadership in the United Church of Christ. Committees on Ministry are guided in their work of authorizing and overseeing Ordained Ministers by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

The Marks also have usefulness to Local Churches, ministry settings, Associations, and individuals as a discernment tool. The

Marks are to be interpreted carefully within the many and varied contexts of particular UCC communities and ministries.

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers,⁷ arranged in eight categories, are:

Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practices

- Loving God, following Jesus Christ, and being guided by the Holy Spirit; living a life of discipleship.
- Praying actively and nurturing spiritual practices.
- Being called to ordained ministry by God and the Church.
- Continuing discernment of one's call in community.
- Understanding the power of the Holy Spirit at work through the elements of Christian worship to nurture faith.
- Exhibiting a commitment to lifelong spiritual development and faithful personal stewardship.

Nurturing UCC Identity

- Acknowledging Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the Church.
- Communicating passion for the oneness of the Body of Christ (John 17:21).
- Holding active membership in a Local Church of the United Church of Christ.
- Participating in the various settings of the United Church of Christ, including Local Churches, Associations, Conferences, General Synod, and global ministries.
- Knowing and appreciating UCC history, polity, and theology.
- Exhibiting a commitment to the core values of the United Church of Christ: continuing testament, extravagant welcome, and changing lives.

⁷ See Section 3 for tools to use with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers.

The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers affirm that the 21st century Church needs wise, knowledgeable, and ever-curious ministers. Consistent with the 2005 Ministry Issues Pronouncement of General Synod, the Marks convey that such learnedness is shaped through diverse educational experiences, lessons of life's journeys, personal character, and the Spirit's inspiration.

Building Transformational Leadership Skills

- Empowering the Church to be faithful to God's call, reflective of Christ's mission, and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit.
- Strategically creating the future of God's Church.
- Witnessing in the public square to God's redeeming power.
- Performing necessary and appropriate administrative tasks.
- Working collaboratively with intercultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Encouraging leadership development of self and others through continuing education and lifelong learning.

Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions

- Exhibiting knowledge, understanding, and continuing study of the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament.
- Maturing in effective proclamation and preaching.
- Understanding the history of the Christian Church, from biblical times forward.
- Bringing life to sacred stories and traditions in worship, proclamation, and witness.
- Leading faith formation effectively across generations.
- Holding the Holy with integrity, especially as represented in the sacraments.

Caring for All Creation

- Nurturing care and compassion for God's creation.
- Maintaining a basic understanding of mental health and wellness.
- Practicing self-care and life balance.

- Providing hope and healing to a hurting world.
- Attending to one's own spiritual and pastoral care, including engagement in supervision as appropriate.
- Stewarding the resources of the Church.

Participating in Theological Praxis

- Practicing theological reflection and engagement as part of one's sense of ministerial identity.
- Integrating theological reflection in teaching, preaching, and ecclesial and community leadership.
- Articulating a theology and practice of ministry consistent with the UCC Manual on Ministry.
- Demonstrating an appreciation for and participation in the ecumenical and interfaith partnerships of the United Church of Christ.
- Experiencing and appreciating a variety of theological perspectives.
- Embodying the UCC Ministerial Code.

Working Together for Justice and Mercy

- Drawing on the ministry of Jesus Christ to confront injustice and oppression.
- Practicing the radical hospitality of God.
- Identifying and working to overcome explicit and implicit bias in the life of the Church.
- Understanding community context and navigating change with a community.
- Engaging in mission and outreach.
- Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence.

Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets

- Developing and maintaining a healthy sense of self as shaped by God, community, and life experiences.
- Living in relationships of covenantal accountability with God and the Church.
- Exhibiting strong moral character and personal integrity.
- Respecting the dignity of all God's people.
- Understanding and ministering to stages of human development across the life span.
- Demonstrating excellent communication skills.

In the United Church of Christ, Associations⁸ have the authority to ordain ministers on behalf of the whole Church and to grant ministerial standing for the United Church of Christ. Associations, through their Committees on Ministry, work to discern God's call on a person's life for ordained ministry, both initially with a Member in Discernment and throughout an Ordained Minister's journey. While ordination itself is understood to be for a lifetime, ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ is a covenant that may be concluded by the person or the Association for a variety of reasons.

Associations determine, usually through the work of Committees on Ministry and Ecclesiastical Councils, whether and when a person is to be ordained and/or received into Ordained Ministerial Standing. Associations are responsible, too, for oversight of all those with ministerial standing. Oversight includes the continuing support and accountability of those with standing, so that the United Church of Christ, in all its settings, may be led by faithful and effective servants.

COMMITTEES ON MINISTRY

While all covenant participants across the United Church of Christ willfully and prayerfully join together in ministry, the work of accountability requires a particular body

⁸ Associations or Conferences acting as Associations.

to hold authority in relationship to those participants. The need for authority and accountability reflects our human failings as well as our human graces; we are blessed to be encouraged and challenged by one another to grow in faith and in relationship.

The United Church of Christ locates the authority for overseeing ministerial leaders with our Associations through Committees on Ministry, believing that the gifts of the Spirit and the call of Christ to ministry are best discerned by a designated group of persons who are deeply faithful, perceptive of the Spirit and of persons, committed to the United Church of Christ, and collectively wise with varied experiences of the Church in the world. In this work of authorization as in all work of the Church, we are grateful to Jesus Christ who is our Authority as the Head of the Body of Christ.

In both practice and polity, Committees on Ministry are a vital embodiment of our covenantal relationships across the United Church of Christ. On behalf of and through their respective Associations and Conferences, Committees have a relationship with Local Churches, Members in Discernment, all those who seek or hold ministerial standing, every other Committee on Ministry, the United Church of Christ, and the Church Universal. In this role, the overarching ministry of Committees on Ministry is the mindfulness of the Church's well-being and the discernment of the movement of the Holy Spirit in authorizing ministers on behalf of the United Church of Christ.⁹

The Committee on Ministry has the role of support and accountability for those seeking or holding standing. On a regular basis, the Committee attends to the operative covenantal relationships among those with standing, the Association, the Local Church, and the ministry setting, in order to nurture faithfulness and to ensure ongoing growth in ministry according to the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers. A ministry setting—whether a UCC institution, an ecumenical

⁹ For guidance in developing practices of discernment as a Committee, see the Discernment Travelogue in Section 3.

ministry, or a secular setting—is drawn into the covenantal relationship when it calls a minister into servant leadership on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

Serving on a Committee on Ministry is a ministry in itself. For this reason, the Committee’s membership should be intentionally diverse, include lay and ordained persons, and be trained and resourced to work for the empowerment of excellent authorized ministry. The core competencies and essential functions of a Committee on Ministry and its members¹⁰ can be outlined to correlate with the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers:

Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice

- Practicing discernment and prayerfulness.
- Modeling discernment to the wider Church.

Nurturing UCC Identity

- Understanding and practicing UCC polity in relationship and accountability.
- Articulating an ongoing commitment to the ministry of the Committee on Ministry and to the core values of the United Church of Christ.

Building Transformational Leadership Skills

- Demonstrating integrity and trustworthiness.
- Willing to make difficult decisions through collaboration; saying “yes” as well as “no” for the sake of a healthy United Church of Christ.

Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions

- Engaging important moments of storytelling during seasons of ministry, such as incoming/exiting interviews, installations, etc.

¹⁰ See the Committee on Ministry Orientation Booklet in Section 3 for best practices.

- Holding confidentiality as appropriate, including the secure maintenance of ministerial files.

Caring for All Creation

- Empowering and safeguarding ministries that nurture God's mission throughout creation.
- Practicing support of Members in Discernment, Ordained Ministers, Lay Ministers, and Local Churches.

Participating in Theological Praxis

- Engaging questions of authority, covenant, and accountability with care and wisdom.
- Participating regularly in Committee on Ministry training with receptivity to best practices.

Working Together for Justice and Mercy

- Practicing hospitality to all persons.
- Demonstrating and encouraging accountability from all who seek and all who hold ministerial standing.

Strengthening Inter- and Intra-Personal Assets

- Communicating in a timely and clear manner.
- Holding a healthy sense of self as members and as a Committee, and crafting space in which those meeting with the Committee can do the same.