

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