



# The Marks of Faithful Expression of a Healthy Local Church

## AN ASSESSMENT

The 2005 UCC Manual on Church asks this important question: “Can this denomination, which has honored with tolerance the traditions and polities of its various predecessor bodies, come to agreement on one set of guidelines or expectations for the characteristics of faithful churches of the United Church of Christ?” Based on the covenantal relationships among the settings within the UCC and the MARKS of Faithful and Effective Ministry (a document outlining competencies of authorized ministers in the UCC), this assessment was created to give UCC churches a guideline for meeting the expectations of being a healthy local church.

The assessment is a tool for conversation and discernment, created especially for use in local churches in partnership with their pastor, association and/or conference. This tool may be completed by members of the church, governing bodies, or the pastor with others at the association and/or conference settings. Completion of this assessment will provide insights to the church on MARKS they are currently demonstrating, MARKS which need more attention, and those MARKS which may be ripe for future development.

- 1 = This has not been a priority in our life together
- 2 = We do this some of the time
- 3 = We do this most the time
- 4 = We believe this is who we are

### EXHIBITING A SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION AND ONGOING SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

#### Affirming and Participating in Spiritual Practices

- \* We understand and support one another as disciples of Jesus and invite our friends and neighbors on this journey of discipleship.
- \*We practice a variety of spiritual practices which may include praying, tithing, fasting, meditation, etc.
- \*We affirm the ministry of all the baptized by identifying and nurturing gifts in ourselves and others.
- \*We practice spiritual formation and Christian education as disciples of Christ.
- \*We encourage and nurture others in spiritual formation and faith development over the lifespan.
- \*We provide educational resources to those who have had multiple or no religious affiliations.

#### Celebrating Spiritual Foundations and Development

- \*We celebrate worship that honors all people as created in the image of God.
- \*We work effectively with our pastor and others, including musicians and artists in preparing worship.
- \*We display an openness to God’s transforming action while we serve as ministers, sharing in the priesthood of all believers.

Self-Assessment score for Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation (2-8) \_\_\_\_\_

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## **NURTURING UCC IDENTITY**

### **Anchoring Our Faith Practice in the Traditions of the United Church of Christ**

- \*We order our lives and ministries in relation to Jesus Christ's role as sole head of the Church (as stated in the UCC Constitution).
- \*We welcome and affirm diverse voices within the UCC, including those with whom we disagree, and we encourage others to participate in ministries that cross boundaries of difference.
- \*We understand and practice the UCC values of inclusivity and witness to this value through loving God and our neighbor.
- \*We affirm the UCC Statement of Faith as part of our identity as a UCC congregation.
- \*We share educational resources to inform ourselves and others about the history and denominational structure of the UCC.

### **Fulfilling Our Covenant Partnership Within the United Church of Christ**

- \*We are served by a minister authorized by the UCC.
- \*We participate in the covenant of ministry with the wider church through participation in association, conference, national and ecumenical partnerships.
- \*We embrace the covenantal relationship of each setting of the United Church of Christ (local, association, conference, and national).
- \*We encourage participation in and financial support of the wider church through contributions to Our Churches' Wider Mission, and the four special offerings: Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, One Great Hour of Sharing and the Christmas Fund.
- \*We acknowledge and participate in the structure and decision-making processes of the United Church of Christ.
- \*We demonstrate an appreciation for the formal ecumenical relationships in which the UCC participates.

**Self-Assessment for Nurturing UCC Identity: (2-8) \_\_\_\_\_**

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## **BUILDING TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

### **Strategically Creating the Future of God’s Church**

- \*We have a constitution and bylaws document that is reviewed every 3-5 years so that it might live with and guide the life of the congregation.
- \*We recruit and train new lay leaders so that all are active and prepared to share ideas.
- \*We work together to frame a vision and accomplish yearly goals and objectives as we live into our purpose.
- \*We routinely assess needs, plan, implement, and evaluate ministries designed to meet identified needs; and continue to improve the future work of those ministries.

### **Performing Necessary Administrative Tasks Faithfully**

- \*We provide position descriptions for all staff and volunteers.
- \*We adequately compensate staff with salary and benefits, encouraging continuing education in their fields.
- \*We prepare and implement an annual spending plan based on our mission, vision, and goals.
- \*We implement fair and just financial practices.
- \*We appreciate the gifts of diverse persons, and work cooperatively across cultures and generations.
- \*We practice humility; we ask for and extend grace and forgiveness when mistakes are made.

### **Encouraging Leadership Development through Continuing Education**

- \*We commit to learn new skills as needed for implementation of our ministries. (e.g. technological, evangelism, stewardship)
- \*We seek out and use tools to understand our congregation in relationship to our community. (E.g. Mission Insite, community partnerships)
- \*We encourage commitment to lifelong biblical learning and theological reflection for our members.
- \*We commit to ongoing training for members of teams, boards and committees.

**Self-Assessment for Building Transformational Leadership (3-12): \_\_\_\_\_**

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## ENGAGING SACRED STORIES AND TRADITIONS

### Exhibiting Knowledge, Understanding, and Continuing Study of Scripture

- \*We participate in Bible studies.
- \*We affirm the Bible as being shaped by historical context and relevant for our daily lives.
- \*We recognize the need to relate the social, economic, and political contexts of biblical literature to current issues and contexts.
- \*We connect our own sacred stories with scriptural sacred stories and traditions.

### Engaging the History of the Christian Church

- \*We learn about the development of global Christianity, recognizing the ways the Church has been harmful as well as life-giving.
- \*We strive to understand our congregational history and heritage in relation to the broader scope of American and global Christianity.
- \*We recognize and understand the need for each generation to create worship space and practice that feeds their spirits.

### Leading Faith Formation Effectively

- \*We use current resources in faith formation and implement them in our particular contexts.
- \*We incorporate a variety of faith formation practices which support learning across generational differences.
- \*We empower faith leaders of and for all generations.

### Bringing Life to Sacred Stories and Traditions

- \*We affirm diverse practices in worship, proclamation and witness, and incorporate them into worship.
- \*We celebrate the two Sacraments (baptism and holy communion) of the church regularly and educate ourselves on their meaning and practice.
- \*We understand the difference between sacraments and other rites of the church (such as funerals, weddings, confirmation, installations and ordinations).

**Self-Assessment for Engaging Sacred Stories (4 - 16)** \_\_\_\_\_

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## CARING FOR ALL CREATION

### **Nurturing Care and Compassion for God’s Creation**

- \*We work to preserve natural resources. (e.g. recycling, green technology, alternative energy, etc.)
- \*We incorporate creation themes in our worship life through prayer, special services, etc.
- \*We strive to understand the multi-generational needs of the congregation and community.

### **Maintaining a Basic Understanding of Mental Health and Well Being**

- \*We identify and use community resources for our personal wellness.
- \*We walk as spiritual companions with individuals, families, and communities as they journey through life milestones, joy, grief, and healing.

### **Providing Hope and Healing to a Hurting World**

- \*We pray with and for those in need.
- \*We support the planning of and participation in services of lament, healing and hope.
- \*We advocate for a just world for all by giving voice to the voiceless and support to the least among us. (Matt 25)

### **Caring for our Pastor**

- \*We encourage our pastor to participate in spiritual direction, communities of practice, counseling, continuing education, sabbaticals, and other practices of growth and accountability.
- \*We respect the need of our clergy to have regular personal space and time away from congregational administration.

**Self-Assessment for Caring for Others (4 - 16)** \_\_\_\_\_

## PARTICIPATING IN THEOLOGICAL PRACTICE

### **Practicing Theological Reflection Including Appreciation of a Variety of Theological Perspectives**

- \*We draw on our faith as we make personal and congregational decisions and in conversations.
- \*We respect and engage new and differing interpretations of scripture.
- \*We reflect on living out our understanding of God in the world and invite others to join us in our exploration.
- \*We demonstrate an appreciation of a wide variety of theological perspectives, listening to diverse reflections, and thoughts about the application of scripture to our daily lives.

### **Participation in Ecumenical and Interfaith Partnerships for our Community and the UCC**

- \*We examine contemporary issues as a United Church of Christ congregation and encourage dialogue with other religious and civic bodies.
- \*We engage and discuss with others the faith implications of social issues, public policy, and community witness.

**Self-Assessment for Participating in Theological Practice (2-8)** \_\_\_\_\_

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## ENCOUNTERING THE OTHER WITH JUSTICE AND MERCY

### Confronting Injustice and Oppression in all settings

- \*We speak truthfully to and about systems of oppression and interpersonal behaviors of bias, including the issues of bullying within the congregation and the community.
- \*We faithfully engage the Gospel of Jesus Christ as it relates to social, economic, and environmental justice.
- \*We work for justice with ecumenical and interfaith partners and with people of no faith.
- \*We act for systemic change when addressing issues of injustice and oppression.

### Practicing the Radical Hospitality of God in our Worship and Community Life

- \*We offer grace, and seek to practice forgiveness and reconciliation as we work toward restorative justice, both within the congregation and in the wider community.
- \*We learn and practice cultural sensitivity.
- \*We engage in sacred conversations on contemporary issues using UCC resources such as:
  - Accessible to All (A2A)
  - WISE (Welcoming, Inclusive, Support, Engaged) for Mental Health
  - Open and Affirming (ONA)
  - Just Peace
  - Multi-Cultural and Multi-Racial, etc.

### Engaging in Mission and Outreach Locally and Abroad

- \*We encourage support of and participate in the wider church, including global and domestic ministry partnerships.
- \*We connect our mission activities to the identified needs of the community, reviewing them annually to align with our mission and vision statements.
- \*We participate in Disaster Response Ministries in response to local, domestic or global disasters.

**Self-Assessment total for Encountering the Other with Justice and Mercy (3-12) \_\_\_\_\_**

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## STRENGTHENING INTER- AND INTRA- PERSONAL ASSETS

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Living in Relationships of Covenantal Accountability within our church**

- \*We understand and incorporate the document “The Local Church in Relation to its Pastor” (found in “A Sure Foundation”).
- \*We use a pastoral relations committee to strengthen the relationship between pastor and congregation.
- \*We encourage good boundaries for our congregational life including self-care for our pastoral staff.

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Demonstrating Dignity for All God’s people**

- \*We provide a place of refuge and care as needed for all God’s people, regardless of creed, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities, life experiences, class, or differences in faith traditions.
- \*We assure each person is treated with respect and dignity, compassion and love.
- \*We support the moral and ethical development of individuals and our congregation through study, discussion and engagement with the world, informed by Christian scriptures and traditions.

### \_\_\_\_\_ **Exhibiting Healthy Communication Skills**

- \*We communicate respectfully and effectively in multiple settings within the congregation’s life (e.g. meetings, worship, study, etc.) in a variety of ways (e.g. written, oral, website, etc.).
- \*We use social media effectively within the established policies of our congregation.
- \*We engage in “holy listening and speaking”, discernment, and keep appropriate confidences as described in our congregation’s behavioral covenant.

**Self-Assessment total for Strengthening Inter- and Intra- Personal Assets (3-12) \_\_\_\_\_**