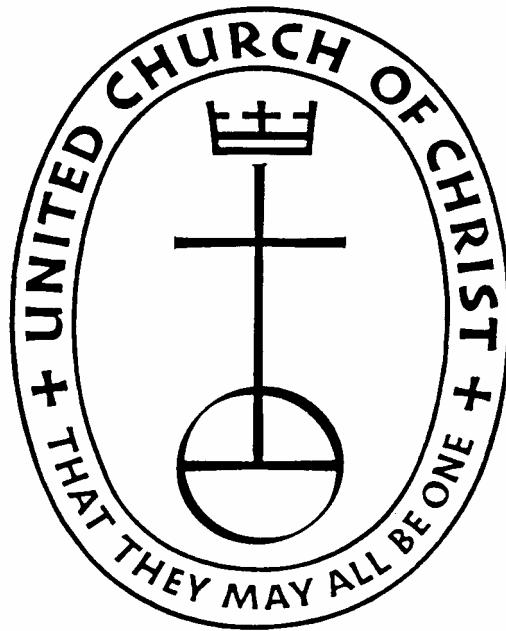


United Church of Christ  
**Manual on Church**



Volume I  
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January 1, 2005

*Perspectives and Procedures*  
*For Association and Local Church*  
*Covenantal Partners*

1 **United Church of Christ Manual on Church:**  
2 **Perspectives and Procedures for Covenantal Partners**  
3

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27 **Preface**

28

29 Can there be a *Manual on Church* in the United Church of Christ? Can this  
30 denomination, which has honored with tolerance the traditions and polities of its various  
31 predecessor bodies, come to agreement on one set of guidelines or expectations for the  
32 characteristics of faithful churches of the United Church of Christ? Can Associations and  
33 Conferences, as concerned about their own practice of autonomy as are local churches,  
34 choose to forge a common path of exemplary practices by which to live out covenantal  
35 unity? Can Local Church Ministries channel the Spirit-filled diversity of interactive  
36 partnership among local, Association, Conference, and national settings of the Church so  
37 that each may feel the bonds of covenant that strengthen nurture and support, and offer  
38 responsibility and accountability?

39

40 We shall see. This is a beginning toward shaping the discernment of the covenantal  
41 partners of the United Church of Christ concerning what it means to be expressions of  
42 church within the Church.

43

44 While a *Manual on Church* should rightfully delineate the expectations all covenantal  
45 partners have of one another, we focus in this first volume on the key relationship  
46 between local churches and their corresponding Association, or Conference acting as an  
47 Association. The issues that surface among and between local and wider settings of the  
48 United Church of Christ will be taken up in later editions of this manual.

49

50 Again, this is a beginning. For some that is less than hoped. But in the United Church of  
51 Christ decisions are made “by consultation and collaboration” among the various partners  
52 as we “seek to walk together in all God’s ways” (*Constitution*, Article 3).

53

54 The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team has purposefully chosen in this document  
55 to address matters for which there is either clear United Church of Christ constitutional  
56 support, or broad consensus among Associations and Conferences. Thus, at the head of  
57 each chapter, you will find references to the formative documents of the Church. Where  
58 there is yet no commonly discerned United Church of Christ procedure or practice, this  
59 manual presents options, not solutions. For example, we hear the lament; “there must be  
60 some way to hold churches accountable for inappropriate activity or behavior.” We  
61 concur. But the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team does not and should not  
62 unilaterally prescribe church discipline.

63

64 We are encouraged as we recall the history of the development of the *Manual on*  
65 *Ministry*. Today this burgeoning binder is the trusted guide adopted by most  
66 Associations and Conferences of the United Church of Christ for their work in the  
67 authorization of ministers. In its first draft, penned in 1962, the *Manual on Ministry* was  
68 a slim pamphlet that set few expectations but pointed out the need for more uniform  
69 practices.

70

71 It is time to begin again. The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team hears concerns  
72 and requests from some Associations and Conferences acting as Associations that are  
73 asking tough questions about how to discipline or remove standing from local churches  
74 whose witness is non-responsive to the covenant. Meanwhile, some local churches and  
75 their leaders express frustration that they have little ability to hold their Association or  
76 Conference accountable for offering sufficient nurture and support to congregational life.  
77 Each is asking for guidelines that will “flesh out” what being in covenantal partnership  
78 really looks like.

79  
80 Cutting across this discussion are the cross currents of autonomy and accountability. The  
81 1957 merger that created the United Church of Christ was forged in a context that  
82 necessitated a strong constitutional assurance of local church autonomy. A generation  
83 later the United Church of Christ amended its constitution to make explicit the covenantal  
84 nature of its polity. With the restructure of the national setting of the United Church of  
85 Christ in 2000, the various covenantal partners have a new opportunity to examine how  
86 autonomy is shaped by covenant and how covenantal polity differs from congregational  
87 or connectional polity.

88  
89 We make in these pages a clear beginning, and we echo the writers of the initial *Manual*  
90 *on Ministry* who prayed,

91 “...it is our hope that the ways of doing things outlined in the pages that  
92 follow will so commend themselves to our Associations and Conferences  
93 that in whole or in part they will become customary throughout the United  
94 Church.”<sup>1</sup>

95  
96 May the God of all beginnings bless the dialogue and discernment that will follow from  
97 this manual. We look forward to discussion with our diverse covenant partners that will  
98 improve the insufficient and silent places in this new publication. Please share with the  
99 Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team the ways your Association, Conference or  
100 local church has worked on the issues of covenantal partnership, accountability and  
101 oversight so that we might learn from your experience.

102  
103 Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team  
104 Local Church Ministries  
105 January, 2005

## 106 **The Church Shaped by Covenant**

107

108 *We Covenant with the Lord and with one another and doe bynd our selves in*  
109 *the presence of God, to walk together in all his waies, according as he is*  
110 *pleased to reveal himself unto us in his blessed Word of truth. Salem, 1629*

111

112 *Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church*  
113 *relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the*  
114 *church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end*  
115 *that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's*  
116 *mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the*  
117 *various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each*  
118 *expression of the church is called to honor and respect the work and*  
119 *ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears,*  
120 *and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this*  
121 *covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to*  
122 *walk together in all God's ways. UCC Constitution, Article III, paragraph*  
123 *6.*

124

125 *God bestows upon us the Holy Spirit, creating and renewing the church of*  
126 *Jesus Christ, binding in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and*  
127 *racess. God calls us into the church to accept the cost and joy of*  
128 *discipleship, to be servants in the service of the whole human family, to*  
129 *proclaim the gospel to all the world and resist the powers of evil, to share*  
130 *in Christ's baptism and eat at his table, to join him in his passion and*  
131 *victory. From the UCC Statement of Faith, adapted by Robert Moss*

132

133 How we organize our lives tells something important about what we believe.  
134 Likewise, the way the United Church of Christ is designed shows what it believes.  
135 How we view the church and its purpose is called our ecclesiology. Birthed amid  
136 mergers and ecumenical concerns, the United Church of Christ emphasized the  
137 centrality of Christ as sole Head of the Church in its ecclesiology.

138

139 The United Church of Christ has affirmed the Reformation tradition of lifting up  
140 the marks of the church. When do we see the church being faithful? When the  
141 Word is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, the church and its  
142 ministry are appropriately ordered or organized, and the mission of God is its  
143 reason for being. Still, finer points about the nature and purpose of the church  
144 were not insisted on in creedal form in the United Church of Christ, in part so the  
145 hard-won unity of our predecessor traditions would be upheld.

146 As the United Church of Christ lived into its formative years, it revised its *Constitution*  
147 *and Bylaws*, and created *The Statement of Faith* and the 1987 *Statement of Mission*. At  
148 each point of reflection, the theology of what it means to be Church was more clearly

149 defined and owned; leading one scholar to explain, the United Church of Christ has an  
150 “ecclesiology in progress.”<sup>2</sup>

151

## 152 ***God’s Purpose for the Church***

153 Notice how the *Statement of Faith* outlines what it means to be the Church. To  
154 understand the nature of the church in the United Church of Christ we must first  
155 understand that the church exists because God’s Holy Spirit has called us together and  
156 bound us in covenant for the purpose of a particular mission. God calls the Church into  
157 covenant for particular purposes. Bound together in this covenant, as disciples, serving  
158 the whole human family, proclaiming the gospel, resisting the powers of evil, and sharing  
159 baptism and table, passion and victory, with Christ we form what many call the beloved  
160 community. We covenant together as a beloved community to carry out the mission God  
161 would have us fulfill together.

162

## 163 ***Beloved community, seeking justice, engaged in God’s mission***

164 We see the idea of the church as beloved community in the United Church of Christ’s  
165 engagement with the ideal of becoming a multi-cultural, multi-racial church, open and  
166 affirming of lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and trans-gendered persons, accessible to and  
167 inclusive of all people regardless of ability. As our General Minister and President, John  
168 Thomas, has reminded – we are a church of extravagant welcome, early truth telling and  
169 radical reconciliation. The foundation for this work is the gracious gift of love, freedom  
170 and justice given to us by God.

171

172 In covenant with one another, we are called to seek a deeper beloved community resting  
173 in the mutual struggle for justice, reconciliation, and liberation. In this way we  
174 participate in the mission of God. By inviting others to share in the reconciling work of  
175 God in the world we invite them into discipleship with Christ, and to share the full  
176 spiritual riches of communion at Christ’s table. Lest our community become too focused  
177 on itself, God calls the church to engage the powers of evil in the world in order to  
178 participate with Christ in reconciling the world to God. We enter into covenant with one  
179 another to support this discipleship; to celebrate its joys and to share its costs.

180

181 Let’s take a closer look at what we mean by the word “covenant.” The idea of covenant  
182 is firmly rooted in the Bible. The Hebrew Scriptures tells of God’s desire to find a  
183 covenant partner. Initiated by God’s action, the covenant at Mt. Sinai, “I will be your  
184 God and you will be my people,” became an “ever-present yardstick”<sup>3</sup> by which the  
185 events of Israel’s history were judged.

186

187 Jeremiah, writing after the Exile, prophesies about a New Covenant that God will  
188 establish with Israel. A day will come when external law will no longer be the means of  
189 enforcing covenant. Instead, each believer will know God in such a way that the law will  
190 be written on their hearts.

191

192 The New Testament expanded this concept of New Covenant, especially as it relates to  
193 God's actions in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. At the Last Supper Jesus  
194 explained the cup of wine as a symbol of his sacrifice, "a new covenant in my blood."  
195 He initiated this covenant once for all, binding each Christian in obedience to Christ. The  
196 new covenant does not do away with previous covenants God has made; instead, as 2  
197 Corinthians 3:6 asserts, Christians are heirs to the covenants of the past. "God never  
198 betrays the call, gifts, and promises given to God's people."<sup>4</sup>

199

200 From the earliest roots of the congregational covenant made at Salem, Massachusetts in  
201 1629 to the extensive restructure of the national setting of the United Church of Christ in  
202 2000, the discernment of God's will for our Church has been covenantal in nature. To  
203 invoke covenant involves the following key factors.<sup>5</sup>

### 204 **God initiates Covenant**

205 The foundation of the church is God's gracious invitation, God's call to us. In biblical  
206 terms, the covenant is always formed at God's initiative.<sup>6</sup> Covenant is serious; not to be  
207 entered into lightly, but diligently and prayerfully.

### 208 **Covenants differ from contracts**

209 A covenant is descriptive rather than prescriptive. Unlike a legal agreement, covenants  
210 do not operate under a contractual *quid pro quo*, i.e. "you paint my house, and I'll pay  
211 you." Rather, covenant is a broader promise: "we will walk together in all God's ways"  
212 rather than a restrictive list of the specific things each partner must fulfill. In covenant,  
213 the partners must keep trying to discern what those ways are.

214

215 Covenant promises are to be taken very seriously. Covenant does not dissolve  
216 automatically at the point that the parties disagree or experience discomfort, or when  
217 change occurs. Relying on the guidance of the Holy Spirit to maintain and strengthen  
218 their mutual covenant, partners will work intentionally and diligently.

### 219 **Covenant knits us together**

220 Regrettably, covenantal partners sometimes see differences as difficulties. Bound by  
221 covenant, all settings of Church agree to walk even with people whom we experience as  
222 difficult. As John Winthrop declared, we are "knit together as one" despite all our  
223 diversities. Covenant demands mutual respect, regardless of the status, behavior, or  
224 achievements of our covenantal partners.

225 In summary, covenant requires great spiritual maturity. Humility and patience,  
226 compassion and justice hold us to the mission of being "united and uniting." We may  
227 wish for more concrete assertions in our covenant promises. Still, the United Church of  
228 Christ affirms the open-ended faithfulness of God who has established covenant with us.  
229 "Constituted by divine grace, what holds the United Church of Christ together from the  
230 human side are two things: a common faith in Jesus Christ as sole Head of the church,  
231 and sets of covenant promises exchanged by the covenantal partners."<sup>7</sup>

232

233 The United Church of Christ has been characterized as “a covenanted relationship  
234 of autonomous units of church life—a relationship delineated but not regulated by  
235 a constitution and bylaws.”<sup>8</sup> Clearly, that dynamic tension between autonomy  
236 and covenant are at the heart of what it means to be the United Church of Christ.  
237 We have chosen, repeatedly, not to be solely separate churches, each acting alone.  
238 We have chosen, repeatedly, not to exercise apostolic hierarchy that insists on  
239 top-down regulation. We have insisted, always, on the importance of “walking  
240 together in all of God’s ways.”



## 241 **Autonomy and Oversight in Covenantal Partnership**

242  
243 *The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ,*  
244 *Son of God and Savior. It acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who*  
245 *share in this confession. Constitution, Preamble, paragraph 2.*  
246

247 *Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church*  
248 *relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the*  
249 *church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end*  
250 *that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's*  
251 *mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the*  
252 *various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each*  
253 *expression of the church is called to honor and respect the work and*  
254 *ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears,*  
255 *and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this*  
256 *covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to*  
257 *walk together in all God's ways. Constitution, Article III.*  
258

259 *The Local Churches of the United Church of Christ have, in fellowship, a*  
260 *God-given responsibility for that Church, its labors and its extension, even*  
261 *as the United Church of Christ has, in fellowship, a God-given*  
262 *responsibility for the well-being and needs and aspirations of its Local*  
263 *Churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ,*  
264 *the Head of the Church, the one and the many share in common Christian*  
265 *experience and responsibility. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 17.*  
266

267 *The autonomy of the Local Church is inherent and modifiable only by its*  
268 *own action. Nothing in this Constitution and the Bylaws of the United*  
269 *Church of Christ shall destroy or limit the right of each Local Church to*  
270 *continue to operate in the way customary to it, nor shall be construed as*  
271 *giving to the General Synod, or to any Conference or Association now, or*  
272 *at any future time, the power to abridge or impair the autonomy of any*  
273 *Local Church in the management of its own affairs, which affairs include,*  
274 *but are not limited to, the right to retain or adopt its own methods of*  
275 *organization, worship and education; to retain or secure its own charter*  
276 *and name; to adopt its own constitution and bylaws; to formulate its own*  
277 *covenants and confessions of faith; to admit members in its own way and*  
278 *to provide for their discipline or dismissal, to call or dismiss its pastor or*  
279 *pastors by such procedure as it shall determine; to acquire, own, manage*  
280 *and dispose of property and funds; to control its own benevolences; and to*  
281 *withdraw by its own decision from the United Church of Christ at any time*  
282 *without forfeiture of ownership or control of any real or personal property*  
283 *owned by it. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 18.*  
284

285 *Actions by, or decisions or advice emanating from, the General Synod, a*  
286 *Conference or an Association, should be held in the highest regard by*  
287 *every Local Church. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 19.*  
288

289 Some churches prize the concept of local church autonomy as their most important core  
290 value. We say they have congregational polity. In other churches, supervisory oversight  
291 by judicatories takes precedent over local ways for churches. These churches have a  
292 connectional polity. United Church of Christ polity upholds both autonomy and  
293 oversight. Both autonomy and oversight are essential, but they stand in tension and are  
294 interpreted within the mutual regard of covenantal relationship. Covenant means that  
295 each setting of the Church agrees to be held accountable by the others, and each agrees to  
296 allow its individual identity to be shaped, in part, by its relationship to the other settings  
297 of the United Church of Christ.

### 298 ***Autonomy in a Covenantal partnership***

299 Every unit of the church, while in covenant with the other units, has a non-transferable  
300 responsibility to discern and respond to the call of God to it—God’s will and way for it—  
301 in its time and place.<sup>9</sup>

### 302 **Autonomy as self-definition and self-governance**

303 The word *autonomy* comes from classical Greek (*autos*, self; and *nomos*, portion, custom,  
304 pattern, law, from *nemein*, to allot) and means, fundamentally, self-governance. It evokes  
305 personal responsibility to define and manage oneself, rather than governance by or  
306 dependence on others.

307  
308 Paragraph 18 of the *United Church of Christ Constitution* can be read as a list of rights  
309 that establish a local church’s freedom from outside governance and dependence, but it  
310 can also be read as a list of responsibilities that the local church must assume for itself.  
311 The fundamental responsibility of the Church in every setting is to discern the call of God  
312 to it—God’s will and way for it—its mission—in its place and time.

### 313 **Autonomy as capacity to covenant**

314 In such a discernment process, it is wise to turn to others for counsel, critique, and  
315 support. That is what “associating” (Association) and “conferring” (Conference) are  
316 about. “Walking together in all of God’s ways” is a practice of autonomous settings of  
317 Church that value input from and community with their covenant partners. Those who  
318 have a clear sense of themselves, who have autonomy, have the capacity to make  
319 covenant promises and to live in mutual regard.

320  
321 Autonomy is fundamentally freedom for, not merely freedom from. It entails a kind of  
322 freedom from the rule of others, but this is not a freedom to ignore what others require or  
323 have to say; it is freedom to listen, evaluate, decide, and act for oneself through the  
324 highest exercise of reason and discernment. Viewing autonomy only as freedom from  
325 outside governance or dependence holds the danger of foolish pride, which is itself an  
326 expression of irresponsibility. Viewing autonomy as freedom for growing together in

327 discernment of God’s will and way is a highly responsible way of living out the promises  
328 of covenant.

### 329 **Autonomy and ministries of scale and timeliness**

330 Each expression of church has its own primary sphere of responsibility and influence, but  
331 in different settings the scope of that responsibility and influence has its own magnitude  
332 or scale. Thus the local church has the local social unit in which it is situated: a town,  
333 township, neighborhood or section of a city. Associations have their own more-or-less  
334 corresponding social units, such as counties or regions. Conferences have theirs,  
335 typically states or regions. The General Synod and Covenanted Ministries carry out  
336 God’s mission in the nation and the world.

337

338 The concept of autonomy underscores the specific, non-transferable responsibility each  
339 setting of Church has for its own primary sphere of ministry on its own scale. This  
340 authority of each body, within its scope--local, regional, and national—to discern the  
341 moment and minister accordingly is a strength of the United Church of Christ polity.  
342 Each unit of the church is able to respond or to take initiative when the time is ripe or  
343 when the need cries out, because it is not necessary to work through other channels for  
344 authorization. There is risk in this virtue: covenantal partners may regret their own or  
345 another partner’s hasty or ill-advised actions.

346

347 United Church of Christ covenantal partners make a distinction between *authorization*  
348 and *consultation*. It is not necessary for all affected covenantal partners to “sign off on”  
349 or authorize an action. Nevertheless, consultation among the partners, before the  
350 decision of one affects all, is expected. Counsel from and collaboration with others is  
351 always desirable and to be sought. One of the difficult demands of living in covenantal  
352 partnership involves planning enough time for such communication with other settings of  
353 the church.

### 354 **Autonomy, authority, and accountability**

355 The authority of an autonomous setting of church in a covenantal polity is neither  
356 absolute nor self-generated. Its accountability is not merely to itself. Authority flows  
357 from its relationship with the sole Head of the church, Jesus Christ. Similarly, its  
358 accountability is to Christ. This has several implications.

359

360 **Christ is sole Head.** Jesus challenged the disciples to forego cultural patterns whereby  
361 leaders lorded over others. He instructed his followers to engage in mutual servanthood  
362 (Mark 10:35-45 and parallels). Autonomy is a way of saying that no church body in any  
363 setting of the United Church of Christ has authority over any other expression of church:  
364 before Christ, all are on equal footing.

365

366 Each church body, however, does have authority. Covenantal polity means that each is to  
367 be taken seriously, particularly as it embodies, gives voice to, and lives out, what it  
368 discerns to be God’s will and way. This is the assertion of paragraphs 17 and 19 in the  
369 *Constitution*.

370

371 **Each body is accountable to all the others.** Accountability calls for gracious  
372 confrontation—the grace of rejoicing in, bearing with, and forgiving one another—  
373 together with the courage to speak in love the truth which needs to be said (Ephesians  
374 4:25), especially if covenantal ties appear to have been breached.

### 375 **Communication among partners and the public**

376 Each expression of the United Church of Christ has the responsibility, freedom, and  
377 authority to speak its own mind—speak for itself—in and from its particular place and  
378 time. Because of this uniqueness of each expression of church, no other church body can  
379 speak for it. But each can—and has the responsibility to—speak and listen to the others.  
380 It is appropriate for autonomous bodies in covenantal relations to suggest, request,  
381 recommend, urge, and hold accountable; to question, grieve, regret; but not to command,  
382 require, or condemn.

383  
384 No setting of church can ever presume to speak for every expression of the United  
385 Church of Christ. But it can often be said: “We may not all be of one mind about this,  
386 but the prevailing mind of the United Church of Christ is...” It may sometimes need to be  
387 added, “A sizable minority, however...”

388  
389 A designated leader in this church—by election, ordination, installation or other  
390 authorization—has a representative responsibility to describe to the church and to the  
391 public the convictions, positions, and actions of the various bodies in the various settings  
392 of the church, and most particularly the body one is called and installed to serve. Insofar  
393 as one is accurate in such descriptions, one can be said to speak for the bodies whose  
394 actions are described. This is particularly true when the speaker has discerned a  
395 widespread consensus in the church.

396  
397 But secular media, the general public, and, regrettably, many UCC members are not  
398 disciplined to make these distinctions. In order to honor and uphold the variety of  
399 convictions which exist throughout the Church, leaders need to value, communicate and  
400 exercise this representative responsibility with courage and care.

### 401 **The Oversight of Local Churches in Covenantal Partnership**

402 The covenant promise to “walk together in all God’s ways” can be pulled apart if  
403 autonomy is abused as separatist power. The mutuality of covenant can also be abused if  
404 a imposition of authority is used to force compliance from covenantal partners. The  
405 language of the *Constitution and Bylaws* reflects attention to these potential abuses.  
406 Local churches are not held accountable to their covenantal partners in regulatory  
407 fashion. Instead, the Church in all its settings is called upon to support and equip local  
408 churches while remaining faithful to the high standards and integrity of a ministry which  
409 is not ours, but God’s.

410  
411 This role of nurture and accountability from Associations and Conferences acting as  
412 Associations toward local churches in their geographic areas is known as the ministry of  
413 oversight. The term *oversight* is used because it conveys the commitment of the United  
414 Church of Christ to nurture local churches in covenantal partnership, while at the same

415 time we hold one another accountable for the gospel of Jesus Christ and the ministry of  
416 the whole people of God.<sup>10</sup>

417  
418 Oversight expresses much in the English language that is conveyed by the Greek word  
419 *episcopos*—a word that comes to us from deep within the Christian scriptures, our  
420 ecclesiology, and our faith traditions. In fact, the root meanings of these two words  
421 convey the same essential thought.<sup>11</sup>

422  
423 Many persons associate the word *episcopos* with the exercise of authority or power by one  
424 person over another. However, this is not the primary or most frequent use of the word in  
425 the Christian scriptures. Rather, the word is most often used to describe activities that  
426 nurture and strengthen those most in need. Throughout Christian scripture, oversight  
427 embodies this sense of visitation and care. Oversight is tending the flock from a  
428 perspective of service, nurture and support. Power and authority—even supervisory  
429 power and authority—must always be tempered with love, mercy, compassion, and  
430 justice.

431  
432 The United Church of Christ values and affirms such an understanding of *episcopos*.  
433 Associations utilize *episcopos* or oversight to strengthen and equip local churches in  
434 covenantal relationship with the United Church of Christ so that they continue to be  
435 effective and embody the integrity God requires. Oversight of local churches utilizes  
436 care and nurture that focus on what is most important and essential for the fulfillment of  
437 God’s mission. Such supervision is a sacred responsibility to be carried out in a context  
438 of prayerfulness and candor as the Association, or Conference acting as an Association<sup>12</sup>,  
439 seeks to discern the Holy Spirit’s leading in each instance.

440  
441 Accountability and supervision are inseparable from the roles of nurture and support of  
442 local churches. While the Association or Conference acting as an Association must show  
443 regularity of visitation and pastoral concern for churches within its care it may also  
444 develop policies concerning the fitness or discipline of local churches. Policy making  
445 that includes wide representation from the congregations and authorized ministers within  
446 the Association helps to build fair and well developed methods of supervision and  
447 discipline.

448 **Expectations of Associations in Covenantal Partnership**  
449 **with Local Churches**

450

451 *An Association is that body within a Conference of the United Church of*  
452 *Christ which is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area,*  
453 *all Ordained Ministers holding standing or ordained ministerial partner*  
454 *standing therein, all Commissioned Ministers of the Association, and*  
455 *those Licensed Ministers who have been granted voting membership in the*  
456 *Association. Constitution, Article VIII, paragraph 38.*

457

458 *Actions by, or decisions or advice emanating from... an Association,*  
459 *should be held in the highest regard by every Local Church. Constitution,*  
460 *Article V, paragraph 19.*

461

462 *The Local Churches of the United Church of Christ have, in fellowship, a*  
463 *God-given responsibility for that Church, its labors and its extension, even*  
464 *as the United Church of Christ has, in fellowship, a God-given*  
465 *responsibility for the well-being and needs and aspirations of its Local*  
466 *Churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ,*  
467 *the Head of the Church, the one and the many share in common Christian*  
468 *experience and responsibility. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 17.*

469

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

481 **Covenantal Expectations of Associations**

482 As a covenantal partner seeking to “walk together in all God’s ways”, the Association  
483 will conduct all of its ministries with integrity and dedication, so that the whole body of  
484 Christ may be enriched.

485 **Ministry of Oversight**

486 We recognize that not all Associations have the size, staff and/or resources to fulfill the  
487 responsibilities and expectations which are listed below. In these instances, churches can  
488 look to their Conference.

489 The Association is expected to:

- 490 • Plan and conduct meaningful, regular meetings of the Association, receiving and  
491 acting upon business referred to it by its local churches, its Conference, the  
492 General Synod and other bodies<sup>13</sup>
- 493 • Elect officers and convene standing committees, task forces, working groups and  
494 ministry teams as may be necessary for the correlation of its work with that of the  
495 Conference and the General Synod
- 496 • Support, encourage and resource the mission and ministry of local churches
- 497 • Oversee the nurture and accountability of authorized ministers
- 498 • Offer encouragement, guidance and assistance in the organization of new local  
499 churches
- 500 • Collect and interpret statistics, data, annual reports and other information that will  
501 help the Association in carrying out its work
- 502 • When necessary, petition and overture its Conference or the General Synod.

503

504 The Association is charged with the oversight of its local churches. The Association will  
505 conduct its ministries in a manner that will strengthen and enhance the life of all of the  
506 local churches. Toward that end the Association will offer encouragement, guidance, and  
507 accountability.

508

509 Local churches can look to their Association or Conference for resources including, but  
510 not limited to:

- 511 • Christian Education, youth ministry, resource centers, leadership development
- 512 • Stewardship, mission, justice
- 513 • Organizational life: Constitution and bylaws, Pastor Parish relations, suggested  
514 processes and structures, fiscal management
- 515 • Conflict resolution and management
- 516 • Planning, visioning, mission statements.

517

518 The Association or Conference acting as an Association is charged with the oversight of  
519 authorized ministers of the Association. This work includes, but is not limited to:

- 520 • Preparing and approving candidates for ordination, commissioning or licensing
- 521 • Authorizing and granting the standing of authorized ministers. Providing pastoral  
522 support for authorized ministers and local churches with standing in the  
523 Association
- 524 • Providing support for those involved in the Search and Call process
- 525 • Providing opportunities for continuing education, training and spiritual growth
- 526 • Investigating and adjudicating allegations of misconduct by clergy, staff, or local  
527 churches.

528 **Mutual Accountability**

529 The Association or Conference provides ministries and structures in covenantal support  
530 of the organizational life of local churches. Decisions by the Association will be made in  
531 consultation and collaboration with its various covenantal partners. As members of the  
532 Body of Christ, the Association will honor and respect the work and ministry of each  
533 expression of Church. The Association will listen, hear, and carefully consider the  
534 advice, counsel, and requests of local, Conference, and national settings of the United  
535 Church of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

536  
537 The Association offers faithful stewardship of its financial resources. The Association  
538 determines its own method for securing financial support. In partnership with the  
539 Conference, the Association is empowered to use the available resources, in ethical and  
540 legal ways, to provide adequate staffing, ministries, resources, and mission support to  
541 strengthen the life and work of the local church and Our Churches Wider Mission.

542  
543 As a representative body of the United Church of Christ, the Association will faithfully  
544 fulfill its constitutionally mandated responsibilities, and shall ensure that the Constitution  
545 and Bylaws of the Association are consistent with the *Constitution and Bylaws of the*  
546 *United Church of Christ*, and of the Conference of which the Association is a part.

547 **Serve as a faithful steward**

548 The Association, when applicable, will serve as an ethical and caring steward of its paid  
549 staff members and volunteers. As covenantal partners, the Association will utilize the  
550 United Church of Christ Search and Call process when seeking new pastoral leadership.

551 The Association will abide by applicable human resources policies and procedures  
552 concerning calling or hiring, supervision, accountability, ongoing employee support,  
553 leave of absence, separation and dismissal or termination of employment. The  
554 Association will adhere to the legal standards of employment (e.g., minimum wage  
555 standards, workers' compensation, federal and state employment taxes, background  
556 checks for those who work with children, etc.).

557  
558 The Association is expected to set high standards of practice for providing nurture,  
559 training, recognition and support for those who serve in the United Church of Christ.  
560 When appropriate, the Association will insure that paid staff members and unpaid  
561 volunteers:

- 562 • Are carefully screened and interviewed before calling, hiring, or volunteer  
563 assignment
- 564 • Have written clear terms of call and/or contracts with specific job descriptions;  
565 Clergy shall have written clear terms of call, as indicated in Call Agreements  
566 and/or contracts with specific job descriptions based on the Manual on Ministry's  
567 Code of Ethics for the local church
- 568 • Receive fair compensation, leave time, training opportunities and benefits;
- 569 • Receive regular, fair and helpful evaluations
- 570 • Clergy on staff shall have current and active Authorized Ministerial Standing in  
571 the United Church of Christ



- 572       • The Association will operate with integrity and fidelity, and within legal and  
573       ethical norms. The Association is expected to be honorable in its public and  
574       private conduct, to obey the laws of its State and Nation, to conduct its business in  
575       an ethical and legal manner, and to protect itself from legal actions. This is  
576       especially important in the following areas:
- 577       • Management of funds and resources
  - 578       • Oversight of authorized ministries
  - 579       • Human Resource policies and practices
  - 580       • Honesty in information reporting and public statements.
- 581
- 582   There may be occasions where justice demands that the Association raise a voice contrary  
583   to prevailing social norms, and perhaps even engage in civil disobedience.

584 **Expectations of Local Churches in Covenantal**  
585 **Partnership with Associations**

586  
587 *Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church*  
588 *relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the*  
589 *church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end*  
590 *that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's*  
591 *mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the*  
592 *various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each*  
593 *expression of the church is called to honor and respect the work and*  
594 *ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears,*  
595 *and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this*  
596 *covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to*  
597 *walk together in all God's ways. Constitution, Article III.*

598  
599 *The Local Churches of the United Church of Christ have, in fellowship, a*  
600 *God-given responsibility for that Church, its labors and its extension, even*  
601 *as the United Church of Christ has, in fellowship, a God-given*  
602 *responsibility for the well-being and needs and aspirations of its Local*  
603 *Churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ,*  
604 *the Head of the Church, the one and the many share in common Christian*  
605 *experience and responsibility. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 17.*

606  
607 *The autonomy of the Local Church is inherent and modifiable only by its*  
608 *own action. Nothing in this Constitution and the Bylaws of the United*  
609 *Church of Christ shall destroy or limit the right of each Local Church to*  
610 *continue to operate in the way customary to it, nor shall be construed as*  
611 *giving to the General Synod, or to any Conference or Association now, or*  
612 *at any future time, the power to abridge or impair the autonomy of any*  
613 *Local Church in the management of its own affairs, which affairs include,*  
614 *but are not limited to, the right to retain or adopt its own methods of*  
615 *organization, worship and education; to retain or secure its own charter*  
616 *and name; to adopt its own constitution and bylaws; to formulate its own*  
617 *covenants and confessions of faith; to admit members in its own way and*  
618 *to provide for their discipline or dismissal, to call or dismiss its pastor or*  
619 *pastors by such procedure as it shall determine; to acquire, own, manage*  
620 *and dispose of property and funds; to control its own benevolences; and to*  
621 *withdraw by its own decision from the United Church of Christ at any time*  
622 *without forfeiture of ownership or control of any real or personal property*  
623 *owned by it. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 18.*

624  
625 *Actions by, or decisions or advice emanating from the General Synod, a*  
626 *Conference or an Association, should be held in the highest regard by*  
627 *every Local Church. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 19.*

628 **Covenantal Expectations of the Local Church**

629 As a covenantal partner seeking to walk together in all God’s ways, the local church will  
630 conduct all of its ministries with integrity and dedication, so that the whole body of Christ  
631 may be enriched.

632 **Self-governance of its own ministries**

633 Following Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church, the local church will take responsibility  
634 for the operation of its own ministries including, but not limited to:

- 635 • The right to retain or adopt its own methods of organization, worship and  
636 education
- 637 • Adopt its own constitution and bylaws
- 638 • Formulate its own covenants and confessions of faith;
- 639 • Admit, disciplining and dismissing members
- 640 • Call or dismissing its pastor or pastors
- 641 • Own and managing its property and funds
- 642 • Allocate its own benevolences.

643 **Mutual Accountability**

644 The local church provides covenantal support for the organizational life of the  
645 Association, the Conference, and the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of  
646 Christ. Decisions by the local church will be made in consultation and collaboration with  
647 its various covenantal partners. As members of the Body of Christ, the local church will  
648 honor and respect the work and ministry of each expression of Church. The local church  
649 will listen, hear, and carefully consider the advice, counsel, and requests of Association,  
650 Conference, and national settings of the United Church of Christ.

651  
652 As a representative body of the United Church of Christ, the local church will faithfully  
653 fulfill its constitutionally mandated responsibilities, and shall ensure that the Constitution  
654 and Bylaws of the local church are consistent with the *Constitution and Bylaws of the*  
655 *United Church of Christ*, and of the Conference and Association of which the local  
656 church is a part.

657  
658 Local churches choose to work with the Covenanted Ministries in a variety of ways. The  
659 following expectations are outlined in Article IV of the *Bylaws of the United Church of*  
660 *Christ*:

661  
662 Working in partnership with the Office of General Ministries in ways and means  
663 appropriate to its time and place, the local church will strive for theological reflection,  
664 ecumenical and interfaith partnership and dialogue, and financial support of Our  
665 Church’s Wider Mission. It shall strive to reflect the diversity of society in its leadership,  
666 keeping in mind the United Church of Christ commitment to becoming a multi-cultural,  
667 multi-racial church, open and affirming, accessible to all.

668  
669 Working in partnership with Local Church Ministries in ways and means appropriate to  
670 its time and place, local churches will strive for vitality as inclusive and accessible

671 communities of mission, evangelism, church development, unity, and justice so that the  
672 good news of Jesus Christ will be proclaimed in word and deed.

673

674 Working in partnership with Justice and Witness Ministries in ways and means  
675 appropriate to its time and place, the local church will engage in God's mission by direct  
676 action for the integrity of creation, justice, and peace. Such mission includes, but is not  
677 limited to:

- 678 • Speaking prophetically on matters of justice, power, and public policy
- 679 • Confronting racism, sexism, ageism, classism, and other expressions of injustice  
680 and alienation in the Church and in society
- 681 • Providing support for the Church's ministry of service with and on behalf of those  
682 who are poor, the forgotten and the oppressed, and for those marginalized by  
683 stigma and discrimination because of their sexual orientation or their disabilities,  
684 including mental illness.

685

686 Working in partnership Wider Church Ministries, in ways and means appropriate for its  
687 time and place, the local church will support and participate in the global church. Such  
688 mission includes, but is not limited to:

- 689 • Interfaith dialogue
- 690 • Volunteer ministries
- 691 • Health care, education, disaster relief, social services
- 692 • Education and advocacy on national and global issues
- 693 • Sharing in the sending and receiving of missionaries.

## 694 **Participation in the Association and Conference**

695 As covenantal partners local churches will "walk together," serving the ministry and  
696 mission of Christ through the Association and Conference. Such participation will  
697 include, but not be limited to:

- 698 • Providing delegates to the Association and Conference meetings, where wider  
699 church policies and positions are determined and national representatives are  
700 selected.
- 701 • Participating in Ecclesiastical Councils, Ordinations, Installations and other  
702 celebrations in the life of the wider setting
- 703 • Nominating representatives from among its members for election or  
704 appointment to the standing committees, task forces and working groups of  
705 the Association, and Conference
- 706 • Providing statistics, data, annual reports, and other information that helps the  
707 Association in carrying out its work.

## 708 **Serve as a faithful steward**

709 The local church is expected to prayerfully consider its ability to give, and will provide  
710 reasonable and consistent support for the ministry of Christ through the work of the wider  
711 church by:

- 712 • Where applicable, making timely *per capita* payments to the Association and  
713 Conference

- 714 • Contributing generously to Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) through a  
715 designated gift that is approved by the local church
- 716 • Providing support for United Church of Christ related seminaries, agencies, and  
717 special offerings
- 718 • Where applicable, encouraging the appropriate use of endowed funds to provide  
719 support for the ministry and mission of the United Church of Christ.

720

721 The local church is expected to use its available financial resources, in ethical and legal  
722 ways, to provide adequate staffing, resources and mission support to strengthen its life  
723 and work.

724

725 Local churches will serve as ethical and caring stewards of its paid staff and volunteers.  
726 As covenantal partners, the local church will utilize the United Church of Christ Search  
727 and Call process when seeking new pastoral leadership. The local church is expected to  
728 abide by reasonable and just human resource policies and procedures on calling or hiring,  
729 supervision, accountability, ongoing support, leave of absence, separation, and dismissal  
730 or termination of employment. The local church is expected to adhere to the legal  
731 standards of employment practice (e.g., minimum wage standards, workers’  
732 compensation, federal and state employment taxes, background checks for those who  
733 work with children, etc.).

734

735 The local church is expected to set high standards of practice for providing nurture,  
736 training, recognition and support for those who serve. When appropriate, the local  
737 church will insure that its paid staff members and unpaid volunteers:

- 738 • Are carefully screened and interviewed before calling, hiring or volunteer  
739 assignment
- 740 • Have written clear terms of call and/or contracts with specific job descriptions.  
741 Clergy shall have written clear terms of call, as indicated in Call Agreements  
742 and/or contracts with specific job descriptions based on the Manual on Ministry’s  
743 Code of Ethics for the local church
- 744 • Receive fair compensation, leave time, training opportunities and benefits.
- 745 • Receive regular, fair and helpful evaluations
- 746 • If clergy, have current and active Authorized Ministerial Standing in the United  
747 Church of Christ.

748 The local church will operate with integrity and fidelity, and within legal and ethical  
749 norms. The local church is expected be honorable in its public and private conduct, to  
750 obey the laws of its State and Nation, to conduct its business in an ethical and legal  
751 manner, and to protect itself from legal actions. This is especially important in the  
752 following areas:

- 753 • Management of funds and resources.
- 754 • Human Resource policies and practices.
- 755 • Honesty in information reporting and public statements.

756 There may be occasions where justice demands that the local church raise a voice  
757 contrary to prevailing social norms, and perhaps even engage in civil disobedience.

## 758 **Entering into Covenant**

759

760 At some point in its history, each of the local churches that comprise the United Church  
761 of Christ entered into Covenant with the denomination. For many whose history  
762 precedes the 1957 merger, a congregational vote to become part of the United Church of  
763 Christ, or a vote to approve the *Constitution* signified their entry into covenantal  
764 relationship. For those from the Evangelical and Reformed Church, a vote of their Synod  
765 signified the beginning of covenantal relationship with the United Church of Christ.  
766 Local churches that came into being after 1957 entered into covenant with the United  
767 Church of Christ after careful study, discussion and a congregational vote that led to  
768 receiving standing from an Association or Conference of the United Church of Christ.

769

770 Some local churches from the Congregational Christian tradition (schedule 1 and 2  
771 churches) are not part of the United Church of Christ but have been admitted to or  
772 continue fellowship in a Conference or an Association. Those congregations do not hold  
773 covenantal relationship with the United Church of Christ. (*Constitution*, Article V,  
774 paragraph 16)

775

776 Local Church Ministries has outlined a common process to guide Associations and local  
777 churches wishing to establish covenant with the United Church of Christ. The following  
778 guidelines and chart of responsibilities are revised from *Considering a New Church*  
779 *Covenant in the United Church of Christ: A Process for Exploring, Developing, and*  
780 *Affirming New Relationships*.

781

782 New Church Starts, or Churches in Formation, come into being in a variety of ways:

783

- 784 • As a project of the Association/Conference
- 785 • As a project of ecumenical partnership
- 786 • As a satellite of an established United Church of Christ congregation
- 787 • As a self-starting group seeking affiliation with the United Church of Christ
- 788 • As an established congregation seeking affiliation with the United Church of  
789 Christ.

789

790 New Churches wishing to enter covenantal relationship with the United Church of Christ  
791 need to request and receive formal standing in an Association or Conference. The  
792 Association oversees this process of guiding Churches in Formation toward standing in  
793 the United Church of Christ.

794

795 In its formation, a New Church needs to organize its life with some official documents.  
796 These vary by state laws, but may include such items as: 501 c 3 non-profit status,  
797 a tax exempt number, Articles of Incorporation, a Constitution and Bylaws, and Officers.  
798 For guidance in securing such documents, and for collaboration in the discernment of  
799 God's mission for the local church, New Church Starts should work closely with  
800 the Association, or Conference acting as an Association.

801

802 Associations may find the following guidelines on establishing covenant with the United  
803 Church of Christ to have bearing on their processes for churches in formation. However,  
804 this section of the *Manual on Church* specifically outlines procedures to guide  
805 Associations as they work with established local churches that seek affiliation with and  
806 standing in the United Church of Christ.<sup>15</sup>

### 807 **Exploring and Establishing Covenant**

808 A local church becomes a part of the United Church of Christ by uniting with other local  
809 churches in a covenantal relationship (*Constitution*, Article V, par. 17). This relationship  
810 is one characterized by trust, mutual commitment, promises and the kind of shared  
811 experiences that are rooted in commitment to God. All settings of the Church—local,  
812 Association, Conference and wider church—participate in exploring and establishing this  
813 covenantal relationship, discerning God’s will together.

### 814 **Responsibility of the Local Church Exploring Covenant**

815 By the time a local church discerns its readiness to enter covenantal relationship its  
816 members should have widespread conversation, knowledge and familiarity of the  
817 identity, history, theology, and polity of the United Church of Christ. Preparation for this  
818 step will also include active participation in the life of the United Church of Christ, in as  
819 many settings as possible.

820  
821 Churches should form a Covenant Development Committee in the early stages of  
822 exploration to represent the church in its contacts with the United Church of Christ, and  
823 to ensure wide participation and knowledge throughout the congregation. This group  
824 should also plan ways to introduce their local church to the Association and make its  
825 culture, traditions, and commitments deeply known and understood.

### 826 **Responsibility of the Association and Conference**

827 In the United Church of Christ, the Association and Conference play the primary role in  
828 guiding the process whereby local churches may explore and develop covenantal  
829 relationship. The Association or Conference staff or representative committee will  
830 identify a Sponsoring Church, offer guidance in organizational matters, and network the  
831 local church with consultants from the national setting of the United Church of Christ.

### 832 **Responsibility of the Sponsoring Church**

833 The sponsoring church will provide fellowship and welcome to the local church  
834 exploring covenant. The sponsoring church will nurture shared experiences which will  
835 introduce the local church to the United Church of Christ and provide opportunities for  
836 the exploring congregation’s discernment of God’s will and its development of  
837 covenantal relationships.

### 838 **Representatives of the National Setting**

839 Representatives from the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ may play  
840 a role in this process of covenantal exploration, and may be invited to participate by the  
841 Association. In certain cases a staff member from the national setting may be involved

842 from the beginning of the exploration, working collaboratively with the Association  
843 throughout the process of exploring and entering covenant.

#### 844 ***Establishing Covenant: Guidelines for the Process***

845 The process of establishing covenantal relationship between a local church and an  
846 Association of the United Church of Christ has three main stages: exploring covenantal  
847 relationship, developing covenantal relationship, and affirming covenantal relationship.  
848

849 The first stage is a preliminary exploration, an introductory acquaintance that helps a  
850 local church and Association decide if there is likelihood for establishing a formal  
851 relationship. Questions to consider at this stage include: What are the affinities we sense  
852 with potential covenant partners? Why is there an interest in exploring covenant with the  
853 United Church of Christ?

854  
855 If both the local church exploring covenantal relationship and the Association discern  
856 there is likelihood of covenant, they enter a second stage, and agree to develop that  
857 covenant together. As with all relationships, it will take time and a wealth of shared  
858 experiences to help this covenant fully develop.  
859

860 Should the development stage conclude with a request for standing, in all likelihood the  
861 final stage will be an affirmation of covenant for both parties.

#### 862 **Stage One: Covenant Exploration**

863 At this stage, a local church that seeks standing in the United Church of Christ initiates  
864 contact with the Association or Conference in which it is located. Informal discussions  
865 focus on history, polity and practice, as well as the reasons for exploration and help  
866 determine whether a formal, intensive process will follow. Since a substantial initial  
867 knowledge is needed, this phase may take from six months to a year, depending on  
868 previous knowledge and the pace of the exploration. This initial acquaintance should be  
869 comprehensive enough to provide an answer to this central question: Is it likely that a  
870 covenantal relationship will result from further exploration?  
871

872 As deeply and sincerely as the United Church of Christ welcomes local churches, it also  
873 recognizes the importance of discernment between potential covenantal partners. Careful  
874 preliminary discussions should reveal God's will for a suitable relationship. Sometimes a  
875 local church and an Association of the United Church of Christ will decide to remain  
876 ecumenical colleagues but not to continue exploring covenant, at least for the present  
877 time. When this is the discernment of either partner in exploration, the United Church of  
878 Christ affirms its solidarity in Christ with all who believe, and celebrate ecumenical unity  
879 even though exploration of covenantal partnership ends at this stage.  
880

881 If the discussion reveals the likelihood of a covenantal commitment, the partners move on  
882 to further develop their relationship. The local church and Association then enter into a  
883 stage of "Covenant Development."  
884



885 **Stage Two: Covenant Development**

886 During this stage the local church and the Association enter into a formal relationship.  
887 Associations may vote to grant the local church a specific status as a “Church in  
888 Covenant Development.” This status recognizes the commitment that both the local  
889 church and the Association have made to deepen and broaden their knowledge of, and  
890 appreciation for, one another.

891  
892 A Church in Covenant Development is granted voice without vote at Association and  
893 Conference meetings for the duration of this stage of establishing covenantal relationship.  
894 The local church sends representatives to the meetings as an important way to develop  
895 the local church and the denomination. Typically a full meeting of an Association takes  
896 place once a year and a Conference conducts an annual meeting, so for that reason alone  
897 this phase of the process may last one to two years. Another factor that requires planning  
898 and ample time is the need to involve many members of the Church in Covenant  
899 Development, the Sponsoring Church and the Association in this stage of developing  
900 covenant. The Church in Covenant Development will want to provide means for the  
901 Association to become involved in its congregational life in ways that will assist the  
902 discernment process.

903  
904 The Church in Covenant Development and the Association will remain in this  
905 relationship until both are comfortable that ample time and effort have been devoted to  
906 discerning God’s will.

907  
908 Until these final decisions are made, standing remains an option, and discernment is not  
909 concluded. Throughout this stage, a positive attitude toward standing is paired with a  
910 concern to honor the time and space for a faithful discernment process.

911  
912 There are two possible outcomes of this formal period of developing covenant, each of  
913 which affirms the particular nature of the covenant developed by the local church and the  
914 Association:

915  
916 **Determination not to seek standing.** The Church in Covenant Development, the  
917 Association, or both, separately or mutually, may discern that it is not God’s will for the  
918 Church in Covenant Development to seek standing. If this determination is made, the  
919 United Church of Christ affirms its solidarity in Christ with all who believe, and  
920 celebrates ecumenical unity even though exploration of covenantal partnership ends at  
921 this stage.

922  
923 **Determination to make a formal request for standing.** Together the Church in  
924 Covenant Development and the Association affirm that it is God’s will for the local  
925 church to seek standing in the United Church of Christ.

926 **Stage Three: Covenant Affirmation**

927 During this stage the Association receives the formal request from the Church in  
928 Covenant Development and acts upon it. If the request is approved, the Association  
929 formally accepts the request and grants standing in the United Church of Christ to the

930 local church. The timing of this vote will usually be determined by the Association's  
931 meeting schedule, but will be taken within a year of the formal request.

932

933 The Sponsoring Church will be thanked for its ministry during the discernment process  
934 and may play a role in the celebration of the covenant affirmation.

935

936 The Association, with its newly received local church, will consecrate the establishment  
937 of covenantal partnership by the worship of God and in celebration of the Church's  
938 oneness in Christ. See the Supplemental Materials section of this manual for suggested  
939 worship materials for use in planning such a service of worship.

940

**Church Considering Covenant**

**Sponsoring Church**

**Association or Conference**

1. The leadership of a local church wishes to explore standing in the UCC will approach the Association in which it is located through a staff person or other member of the Association.

3. Undertake exploration of the UCC, including meeting with designated representatives of the Association.

4. Determine whether exploration has shown a **likelihood** that further development of relationship will result in a covenantal bond.

5a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues.

**OR:**

5b. If so: begin Developing Covenant stage: receive from Association designation as a Church in Covenant Development; name a working group to represent the local church; and to meet with leaders of the Sponsoring Church.

6. The Covenant Development Committee and other church leaders assure widespread conversation, knowledge, and familiarity with the UCC.

7. In consultation with the Association, determine readiness to enter into covenant with the United Church of Christ.

8a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues.

**OR:**

8b. Make a formal request for standing in the UCC.

9. Plan, celebrate and consecrate covenant with the Association.

5b. Accept invitation to sponsor the Church in Covenant Development and meet with leaders of the process from both the Association and the Church in Covenant Development.

6. Become familiar with the Church in Covenant Development, introduce that church's members to local church life in the UCC, and accompany its leaders to Association, Conference, and wider church events. Assure ample opportunity for developing and deepening a relationship.

7. Provide feedback to all other parties about the opportunities for relationship development that have been pursued.

8a. Agree to remain ecumenical colleagues.

**OR:**

8b. Affirm its relationship with the local church, as is appropriate in the Association's process.

9. May help plan and celebrate the covenant.

2. The Association, through an appropriate committee, will meet with and welcome representatives of the exploring church and provide initial information, and support to help the church in its discernment.

3. Designate a contact person or working group to assist local church in its exploration. Receives information about the church that is exploring.

4. Determine whether exploration has shown a **likelihood** that further development of relationship will result in a covenantal bond.

5a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues.

**OR:**

5b. If so: begin Developing Covenant stage: designate the local church as a Church in Covenant Development; name a working group to represent the Association; designate a Sponsoring Church and introduce its leaders to the Church in Covenant Development and to the Association contacts.

6. Assures widespread conversation, knowledge, and familiarity with the Church in Covenant Development. Invite consultation and collaboration, as appropriate, with Conference and wider church leaders.

7. In consultation with the local church working group, determine whether the leaders and membership of the Church in Covenant Development have adequate understanding and appreciation of the UCC to enter into covenant.

8a. If not: agree to remain ecumenical colleagues.

**OR:**

8b. Receive and vote on the formal request for standing. Thank the Sponsoring Church.

9. Plan, celebrate and consecrate covenant with the local church.

## 942 **Dissolution of Covenantal Partnership Standing**

943

944 If partners can choose to enter covenantal relationships then they can also choose to exit  
945 covenant. Just as careful planning and attentive ministry help to enhance a budding  
946 covenantal relationship, they also aid the process of dissolution.

## 947 ***If a Local Church Considers Dissolving Covenantal Partnership***

948 *The Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ* allows for the local church  
949 to voluntarily “withdraw by its own decision” its membership in the denomination.

950 *Constitution*, Article V, paragraph 18. At the outset, a local church that is contemplating  
951 the dissolution of covenant with the United Church of Christ should engage the  
952 Association Minister or Conference Minister in prayerful discernment.

953

## 954 **Covenantal Support Consultation**

955 Further, before exploring dissolution of the covenant every effort should be made by  
956 covenantal partners to see if differences can be resolved and the covenant preserved. To  
957 this end, the covenantal partners - representatives of the Association, the local church and  
958 the pastor – should engage in a concerted effort of deliberate conversation outlining  
959 issues, concerns and grievances of each of the parties and to explore ways to address  
960 those issues and seek reconciliation.

## 961 **Closure of a Local Church**

962 For some congregations this dissolution of covenant is an “end of life” decision made  
963 when the local church ceases its operations. Dialogue with Association or Conference  
964 staff is important for guidance and spiritual nurture as the local church contemplates its  
965 decision to close. It is appropriate to hold a service of gratitude to honor the church’s  
966 ministry.

## 967 **Withdrawal Because of Disagreement**

968 Occasionally a local church will contemplate withdrawal from the United Church of  
969 Christ because of perceived irreconcilable differences in belief or action. Before coming  
970 to such a determination, the local church should review its covenant vows. Dialogue with  
971 Association or Conference ministers or their representatives is imperative, and may  
972 ensure that unwarranted assumptions and misinformation are not the cause of rupture in  
973 the covenant. Dialogue is also needed with the appropriate covenantal partners to outline  
974 a common timetable for discussion, decision, and potential dissolution. If the promises of  
975 covenant partners come to an end, the local church will need to secure its own tax-exempt  
976 status. If there are outstanding loans or financial obligations, the church and its United  
977 Church of Christ partners will have to come to agreement concerning payment.

978

979 Unilateral breach of covenant ruptures the congregation’s relationship not only with the  
980 wider settings of Church, it ruptures the congregation’s relationship with its own  
981 forebears who established the covenantal ties, and ruptures the local church’s relationship  
982 with God who entered into the making and living out of covenant.

983  
984 Official notification of a local church’s decision to leave the United Church of Christ  
985 should be made promptly, by certified letter, to the Chair of the Committee on the  
986 Ministry.  
987 Because it is the Association, or Conference acting as an Association, which confers  
988 standing, it is the right and responsibility of the Association to decide to dissolve the  
989 bonds of covenantal partnership. As the *Constitution* makes clear, the Association  
990 “determines, confers, and certifies to the standing of the Local Churches of the United  
991 Church of Christ within its area.” *Constitution*, Article VIII, paragraph 40. That means a  
992 decision to dissolve covenant takes two partners: the local church may vote to leave, but  
993 only the Association may remove standing. Even at this terminal juncture in a covenant  
994 journey the partners are called upon to “walk together.”  
995  
996 It is appropriate to hold a joint Service of Dissolution of Covenant to honor the past  
997 relationship between the local church and other settings of the United Church of Christ.  
998 Forgiveness, release from responsibilities and promises to display Christian maturity and  
999 respect toward past covenantal partners are each important aspects of such a worship  
1000 event. See the Supplemental Materials section of this manual for suggested worship  
1001 materials for use in planning such a service of worship.

## 1002 ***If an Association or Conference Considers Dissolving*** 1003 ***Covenantal Partnership with a Local Church***

1004 *The Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ* give no clear indication as to  
1005 whether an Association or Conference might initiate the dissolution of standing of a local  
1006 church because of perceived irreconcilable differences in belief or action. There is no  
1007 consensus of practice among Associations and Conferences at present. Most discern  
1008 appropriate action on a case-by-case basis. Others have set policies for adjudicating the  
1009 removal of local church standing. Clearly this is an arena of covenantal partnership that  
1010 needs dialogue across the Church.

1011  
1012 As Associations and Conferences explore the possibility of taking the initiative to  
1013 dissolve covenantal partnership with a local church, they must weigh many matters,  
1014 including the following factors.

### 1015 **Theological Understandings of Covenant**

1016 How does the Association model its beliefs? Does it view God’s will in to hold partners  
1017 to diligent mutual responsibilities or covenant to offer unending grace? There is a  
1018 spectrum of interpretation concerning the tension of judgment and mercy with regard to  
1019 covenant. Where do you put the greatest emphasis, on the prerogative of God to require  
1020 righteous behavior or to offer the widest welcome?

### 1021 **Legal implications**

1022 Associations need to have sound policy in place concerning the potential for dissolving  
1023 covenantal partnership. Fair procedures with clear paths of appeal must be worked out  
1024 and communicated broadly across the Association. Legal counsel should be sought  
1025 before writing such policy, and current practice should be reviewed as well.

1026

1027 Because the United Church of Christ is not a hierarchical polity, courts may take into  
1028 consideration the policy and practices of any one Association or Conference when  
1029 making adjudications concerning another Association or Conference. That is, the policy  
1030 and decisions of an Association in one region of the nation may have unforeseen  
1031 implications for all Associations or for the whole United Church of Christ. Since there is  
1032 no current common practice among Conferences or Associations, and indeed, scant  
1033 clarity from the *Constitution and Bylaws* concerning an Association seeking to dissolve  
1034 covenant with a local church, covenantal partners across the United Church of Christ are  
1035 called on to engage in dialogue and action on this matter.

### 1036 **Unlike a Fitness Review**

1037 The Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team cautions against approaches that seek to  
1038 dissolve covenant with local churches by disciplinary means parallel to the Fitness  
1039 Review process used with authorized ministers. Local churches are complex systems that  
1040 do not lend themselves to such an investigative procedure. Often one leader or a small  
1041 group of leaders turns a local church away from covenantal relations through neglect or  
1042 disagreement. Calling the entire local church body into question is not germane under  
1043 such circumstances.

### 1044 **Covenantal integrity**

1045 Confession is important in covenantal relationships. Often it is easier to see the “speck”  
1046 in the eye of a local church than admit to the “log” in the eye of a Conference or  
1047 Association. An Association should not consider dissolving covenantal relationship with  
1048 a local church unless or until all avenues of nurture and support have been utilized.  
1049 Policies concerning the growth and development of covenantal relations should be in  
1050 place and enforced. Otherwise, any effort to discipline or dissolve covenant with a local  
1051 church is premature.

### 1052 **Process which honors covenant**

1053 As with policies for timely and appropriate nurture and support of local churches,  
1054 Associations should offer opportunities for mediation of conflict, growth plans, and the  
1055 ability to reconsider or appeal a decision to dissolve covenantal partnership. These  
1056 efforts should all precede any terminal decision.

### 1057 **Honoring all covenant partners**

1058 An Association’s decisions concerning expectations, discipline and dissolution of  
1059 covenant involve all covenant partners. Therefore it is important to consider with  
1060 sensitivity how other local and wider settings of Church perceive a decision to dissolve  
1061 covenantal partnership between an Association and local church.

## 1062 **Characteristics of Faithful Covenantal Relationships**

1063

1064

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

1066

1067

1068

1069

*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 to resist the powers of evil,  
to share in Christ's baptism and eat at his table,  
to join him in his passion and victory.*

1070

1071

1072

1073

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1075

1076

*UCC Statement of Faith in the Form of a Doxology, paragraphs 2-3.*

1077

1078

1079

*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. Constitution, Article V, paragraph 17.*

1080

1081

1082

1083

Where do we go from here? We gain important perspective and organizational framework from the chapters of this manual. Still, covenants, by their nature, are open ended. How will we know if we are faithfully “walking together in all of God’s ways? What should we look for as the characteristics of faithful covenant relationships? The following touchstones point the way.

1084

1085

1086

1087

### 1088 ***Celebrate the Journey***

1089

Partners in a living covenant experience the joy of freedom to express their unique spiritual gifts and offerings. Some may read these pages looking to see if local churches or Associations “measure up” to their respective responsibilities. However, that is only one side of the coin. The other is to celebrate with joy the benefits of covenantal relationships. Without reliance on one another, partners in covenant would be weaker expressions of the good news of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit we are blessed with abundance as we share in common Christian experience.

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1097

The journey of “walking together in all of God’s ways” is not unlike the Easter journey of the two disciples walking along the road to Emmaus. Along the way, as they worried, reasoned and learned together they knew the power of the risen Christ in their midst. Covenantal partners build rich Christian community by means of shared experiences.

1098

1099

1100

### 1101 ***The Witness of Integrity***

1102

As partners get to know one another, they become aware of their own, and each other’s flaws. When we enter and live within covenant, we commit to God our intention to be our best. We witness to the Church and the world to the extent that we exercise personal and

1103

1104

1105 corporate integrity and spiritual maturity. When we fail to exercise sound self-control,  
1106 we weaken the Church in all its settings.

### 1107 ***God's Mission in the World***

1108 Every setting of Church faces strong and present temptation to prioritize institutional  
1109 concerns above the furtherance of God's mission. Covenant partners show faithfulness  
1110 when they "keep the main thing the main thing." United Church of Christ covenant  
1111 partners find ample opportunities to "walk together" in mission to the world through  
1112 advocacy, networking and hands-on experience.

1113  
1114 As representative expressions of the United Church of Christ, covenantal partners share  
1115 in the responsibility to inform and be informed about General Synod. As covenantal  
1116 relationships deepen and communication among partners gains depth and transparency,  
1117 covenantal partners strengthen their ability to engage each other as interpreters of General  
1118 Synod actions. This dynamic exchange of ideas leads to prophetic witness in mission.

### 1119 ***Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ***

1120 Both the local and wider settings of Church have a covenantal responsibility to support  
1121 and care for authorized ministers and those "In Care," that is in the process of exploring  
1122 ministerial vocation. The specific responsibilities of each covenantal partner with regard  
1123 to authorization of ministers are detailed in the *Manual on Ministry*.

1124  
1125 Clergy are ordained, and lay ministers are commissioned or licensed into the United  
1126 Church of Christ. Thus, they have obligations to share their skills and spiritual gifts with  
1127 the wider church as well as with the local setting where they serve. All settings of the  
1128 United Church of Christ should honor with gratitude and sensitivity the service its  
1129 authorized ministers offer to the wider church.

### 1130 ***Nurture and Accountability***

1131 Good covenantal relationships grow from shared experiences and sound communication.  
1132 Covenant partners see respectful dialogue and the sharing of needs and concerns in a  
1133 timely manner as necessities for mutual nurture and accountability within the United  
1134 Church of Christ.

1135  
1136 Some Associations and Conferences are exploring what it means to "walk together" by  
1137 initiating pro-active, regular visits to each local churches in their territory. These  
1138 visitations by laity active in the life of the Association connect local church members  
1139 with resources of the United Church of Christ and foster celebration and support.

1140  
1141 Some Associations and Conferences are exploring what it means to "walk together" by  
1142 forging policies that spell out discipline for local churches that repeatedly, and with  
1143 deliberate forethought, ignore, neglect, or rupture covenant. These Associations call  
1144 congregations to serious consideration and commitment to God and one another within  
1145 the bounds of covenant.

1146



1147 Some within the United Church of Christ favor an emphasis on a program of certification  
1148 or self-evaluation by covenantal partners in a vein similar to the accreditation of colleges.  
1149 Aided by the evaluation of peers, local churches or wider church expressions of the  
1150 United Church of Christ could embark on a self-study to clarify how to improve their  
1151 vitality and Christian witness as a representative body of the United Church of Christ in  
1152 their community.

1153

1154 While there is currently no common practice among Associations and Conferences  
1155 regarding nurture and accountability with local churches, hopefully this manual will  
1156 spark ideas, discussion, and the sharing of exemplary practices concerning nurture and  
1157 accountability of covenantal partners.

### 1158 ***Transformative Change***

1159 Does it all seem overwhelming? How can we ever accomplish a more faithful journey as  
1160 covenantal partners? If we institute discipline reviews or covenantal visitation, how  
1161 would we plan for the training and organization needed? Our staff and committees are  
1162 overwhelmed as it is.

1163

1164 As in every age, the Church faces needs that beg for transformative change. Structures  
1165 and relationships will shift and align themselves as we come to honor the particularities  
1166 of our covenant expectations. Perhaps it is the last and best characteristic of faithful  
1167 covenantal partners to become vision casters. Let us do so in response to the great  
1168 challenge that the United Church of Christ

1169 *looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power*  
1170 *of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the*  
1171 *world....It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to*  
1172 *make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and*  
1173 *expression and in purity of heart before God. Constitution, Preamble,*  
1174 *paragraph 2.*

1175 **Supplemental Materials**

1176

1177 ***Worship Resources***

1178

1179 **Service of Entering Covenantal Relationship**

1180 The Order for Reception of a Local Church into the United Church of Christ beginning  
1181 on page 439 in the *Book of Worship* is the common starting point for Associations and  
1182 Conferences as they develop services of worship to publicly grant standing and establish  
1183 covenant ties with newly developed congregations or established congregations that  
1184 desire to affiliate with the United Church of Christ. As the *Book of Worship* states, this  
1185 order of service may be adapted for use in particular situations. In this vein, the Parish  
1186 Life and Leadership Team advises amending the covenant vows on page 443 so that the  
1187 promises local church members make are in parity with those that association members  
1188 promise. Underscore our common covenant by including the United Church of Christ  
1189 Statement of Faith, where indicated in the order of service.

1190

1191 In addition to that additional wording, a more detailed listing of the expectations of  
1192 covenantal partners may be included--as a bulletin insert to be viewed but not spoken, as  
1193 a document to be formally signed during the Order of Reception of a Local Church, or as  
1194 a portion of the verbal promises made between the church and the association.

1195

1196 In keeping with the mutual responsibility of covenantal partners, the closing Declaration  
1197 should also include a brief statement concerning how the promises affect the relationship  
1198 between the Association/Conference and the congregations, such as: "Today we declare  
1199 before God that \_\_\_\_\_ (congregation) and \_\_\_\_\_ (Association /Conference)  
1200 hold one another to mutual accountability as covenantal partners in the United Church of  
1201 Christ."

1202

1203 **Service of Dissolution of Covenantal Relationship**

1204 Congregations and Associations/Conferences may choose to mark the end of their  
1205 covenantal partnership in a public service of worship when a church closes, when a  
1206 congregation chooses to leave the denomination, or when the Association dissolves the  
1207 standing of a congregation. Depending on context, the style and content of an order for  
1208 the dissolution of covenantal relationship might appropriately take on aspects of a  
1209 funeral, a celebration of life, a divorce, an act of reconciliation, or a healing service.  
1210 Representatives of the congregation and the Association should jointly plan such services  
1211 of worship. A neutral third party may be asked to preside over the planning and carrying  
1212 out of the service of worship.

1213

1214 In most cases, the Order for Corporate Reconciliation (*Book of Worship*, p. 275) will  
1215 serve well as a foundation upon which to shape a service of worship for the dissolution of  
1216 covenantal relationship. In that order of service, Examination of Conscience choice A is  
1217 preferable, Call to Confession choices B or C are helpful. The Benediction found at B  
1218 page 295 rings an appropriate tone.

1219 **Closure of a Congregation:** A scripted recap of the church's history, mission and  
1220 legacy may take the place of a sermon. People may be invited to share in scripted or  
1221 spontaneous dialogue, and all present may be given an opportunity to offer mutual  
1222 consolation.  
1223  
1224 Prayers that have been shaped for memorial services may be appropriate in this time of  
1225 corporate grief, such as those in the *Book of Worship*, choice A on page 376, and choice  
1226 C on page 377. Words of Commendation may be said, as in the *Book of Worship*, choice  
1227 A on page 381.  
1228  
1229 Include a statement of release from the promises made as covenantal partners.  
1230  
1231 **Dissolution of Standing:** Appropriate ministry of oversight can include marking the end  
1232 of failed covenantal relationship with a public service of worship. Accountability and  
1233 nurture are both served by the important grief work of planning and carrying out a service  
1234 of dissolution.  
1235  
1236 Associations/Conferences may desire to have a public service that removes  
1237 congregational standing and allows for a respectful parting of the ways. The  
1238 congregation that is exiting the United Church of Christ may not desire such a formality.  
1239 There may not be sufficient goodwill between the former covenant partners to join  
1240 together in worship. In such circumstances, representatives of the congregation and  
1241 Association/Conference may pray together privately and release one another from the  
1242 promises made as covenantal partners.  
1243  
1244 If a public service is planned, the Order for Corporate Reconciliation may be abbreviated  
1245 to omit a sermon or informal dialogue, and to forego an affirmation of faith and Holy  
1246 Communion. The service of worship should be planned jointly and scripted in full with  
1247 all parties agreeing to be respectful of one another. It is appropriate to remember the joy  
1248 and mutual ministry of the partners as they lived in covenantal relationship. Where  
1249 possible, acknowledge respect in disagreement and Christian maturity as the covenant is  
1250 ended. The tone and order of the service may borrow from the Book of Worship's  
1251 Recognition of the End of a Marriage service (*Book of Worship*, p. 291)  
1252

### 1253 **Other Resources**

1254 Those seeking to grow as covenantal partners may find these resources related to ministry  
1255 in the United Church of Christ to be helpful. Call for current pricing. Order all resources  
1256 from United Church of Christ Resources, Inc. at 1-800-537-3394.  
1257  
1258 *A Local Church Seeks a Pastor.* A notebook of material to help a church from the time a  
1259 pastor resigns to the installation of the next pastor.  
1260  
1261 *Book of Worship.* A book of services and resources for the United Church of Christ.  
1262 This inclusive-language *Book of Worship* includes an Order for Reception of a Local  
1263 Church into the United Church of Christ.

1264 *Considering a New Church Covenant in the United Church of Christ.* A booklet for use  
1265 by established congregations that inquire about exploring standing with the United  
1266 Church of Christ. Developed by Local Church Ministries.  
1267

1268 *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.* Includes the preamble to the  
1269 Constitution of the United Church of Christ and Constitutional and Bylaw provisions  
1270 guiding the life of the Church. Available online at [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org). Booklet available  
1271 through United Church of Christ Resources.  
1272

1273 *Freedom with Order: The Doctrine of the Church in the United Church of Christ.*  
1274 Robert S. Paul. This book encourages a discussion of the doctrines of the United Church  
1275 of Christ that will faithfully express both the historical traditions and the ecumenical  
1276 imperatives that formed the denomination.  
1277

1278 *The Leaders Box.* More than 150 topics vital to the life of the local church. Topics are  
1279 divided into four sections: leadership perspectives; position descriptions for officers and  
1280 organizations; task and skill development; and spiritual growth. Available for download  
1281 only.  
1282

1283 *The Living Theological Heritage of the United Church of Christ*, Barbara Brown  
1284 Zikmund, series editor. See especially Volume 7.  
1285

1286 *Manual on Ministry: Perspectives and Procedures for Ecclesiastical Authorization of*  
1287 *Ministry.* Outlines procedures for the authorization, review and discipline of ordained,  
1288 commissioned and licensed ministers and ordained ministerial partners.  
1289

1290 *United and Uniting: The Meaning of an Ecclesial Journey.* Louis H. Gunnemann. This  
1291 book provides historical perspective and a call to recover the original vision for a greater  
1292 understanding of the denomination.  
1293

1294 *United Church of Christ History and Program.* A booklet describing the origins,  
1295 development, and style of life of the United Church of Christ. Includes a statement of  
1296 Faith for use in the United Church of Christ.  
1297

1298 *United Church of Christ Yearbook.* Includes a directory of officers, national setting staff,  
1299 directors, and corporate boards; a directory of personnel related to the United Church of  
1300 Christ; and a directory of United Church of Christ ordained ministers in full standing,  
1301 commissioned ministers, and other lay leaders.  
1302

1303 [www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)  
1304  
1305 [www.stillspeaking.org](http://www.stillspeaking.org)

1306 **Glossary**

1307

1308 ASSOCIATION. An Association or Conference acting as an Association is that body  
1309 within a Conference of the United Church of Christ that is composed of all local churches  
1310 in a geographical area, as well as all ordained ministers with standing or ministerial  
1311 partnership standing, commissioned ministers with standing, and those licensed ministers  
1312 who have been granted voting membership in the Association. An Association  
1313 determines, confers, and certifies to the standing of the local churches of the United  
1314 Church of Christ within its area. An Association grants, certifies to, transfers and  
1315 terminates ordained ministerial standing or ordained ministerial partner standing in the  
1316 United Church of Christ.

1317

1318 COMMITTEE ON THE MINISTRY. The Committee on the Ministry is the body in an  
1319 Association or Conference that is delegated responsibilities for church and ministry  
1320 concerns.

1321

1322 CHURCH AND MINISTRY COMMITTEE. A name some Associations use in place of  
1323 the Committee on the Ministry.

1324

1325 CHURCH IN COVENANT DEVELOPMENT. A designation given by an Association  
1326 to an established church from another denomination that is exploring covenantal standing  
1327 with the United Church of Christ.

1328

1329 CONFERENCE. A Conference is that body of the United Church of Christ which is  
1330 composed of all local churches in a geographical area (except the Calvin Synod), as well  
1331 as all ordained ministers with standing or ministerial partnership standing in its  
1332 Associations or in the Conference itself when acting as an Association, all commissioned  
1333 ministers in its Associations, and those licensed ministers who have been granted voting  
1334 membership in its Associations.

1335

1336 COVENANTAL PARTNER. Any expression of the United Church of Christ (see  
1337 *Constitution*, Article III). Generally, covenantal partners are considered to be the church  
1338 in local, Association, Conference, and national settings. Authorized ministers may also  
1339 be referred to as covenantal partners.

1340

1341 COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIP. A covenantal relationship is the state of being  
1342 bound together through commitments to and expectations of one another in faithfulness  
1343 to God's will and reliance upon God's grace.

1344

1345 COVENANTED MINISTRY. A term used when speaking of one or more of the national  
1346 setting entities: Office of the General Ministries, Local Church Ministries, Wider Church  
1347 Ministries, and Justice and Witness Ministries. Their counterparts before Restructure  
1348 were known as "instrumentalities".

1349

1350 GENERAL SYNOD. General Synod is the biennial meeting of the United Church of  
 1351 Christ. Representatives of congregations, Conferences and a broad range of interest  
 1352 groups meet every two years to consider the business of the church and its relationship  
 1353 with the wider world. Because every UCC congregation is self-governing, the General  
 1354 Synods' resolutions speak "to" but not "for" the local church.  
 1355

1356 LOCAL CHURCH. A local church is a body of Christians who, believing in God, and  
 1357 accepting of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and depending on the guidance of the Holy  
 1358 Spirit, are organized for Christian worship, for the furtherance of Christian fellowship,  
 1359 and for the ongoing work of Christian witness.  
 1360

1361 PARISH LIFE AND LEADERSHIP MINISTRY TEAM. Parish Life and Leadership is  
 1362 the ministry team of Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ that, among  
 1363 its responsibilities, provides leadership and resources related to church and ministry  
 1364 concerns.  
 1365

1366 SCHEDULE 1 AND 2 CHURCHES. These churches are not members of the United  
 1367 Church of Christ but maintain an historic relationship with the Association in which they  
 1368 are located. At the time of merger, Schedule 1 churches did not vote to join the United  
 1369 Church of Christ but asked for and were granted continued relationship with their  
 1370 Associations. Schedule 2 Local Churches voted not to join the United Church of Christ  
 1371 but requested and were granted continuation with their respective Associations.  
 1372

1373 SEARCH AND CALL PROCESS. The means whereby United Church of Christ local  
 1374 churches may conduct a nationwide search for pastoral leadership among authorized  
 1375 ministers of the United Church of Christ, and whereby authorized ministers of the United  
 1376 Church of Christ can conduct a search for United Church of Christ local churches in need  
 1377 of pastoral leadership.  
 1378

1379 STANDING OF A LOCAL CHURCH. Standing of a local church in an Association is a  
 1380 designation conferred by the Association that recognizes the local church is a covenantal  
 1381 partner in the United Church of Christ.  
 1382

1383 YEARBOOK. The Yearbook is the official directory of the United Church of Christ. It  
 1384 is updated and published annually by the Office of General Ministries. It contains such  
 1385 data as statistics on local churches and Conferences, listings of ordained ministers in full  
 1386 standing, commissioned ministers, persons serving on national agencies, and institutions  
 1387 related to the United Church of Christ.  
 1388  
 1389

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<sup>1</sup> *The Minister's Quarterly*, Vol. XVIII, No. 4, 1963. St. Louis, Eden Publishing House, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Walker, Randi. This and the following comments on ecclesiology in the *Statement of Faith* are excerpts from *The Evolution of a UCC Style*, forthcoming in 2005, Pilgrim Press, are used with the author's permission.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, Alexander. *The Covenant Story of the Bible*. New York: Pilgrim Press, 1963, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Kalp, Larry E., editor. *Confirming Our Faith*, United Church Press, 1980, p. 172.

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<sup>5</sup> The key factors noted below are summarized from a lecture by Elizabeth Nordbeck to a UCC History and Polity course given at Andover Newton Theological Seminary beginning in 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Walker, Randi. *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Donald D. Freeman, "Autonomy in a Covenant Polity", first published in *Prism: A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ*.

<sup>8</sup> Louis H. Gunnemann, "Order and Identity in the United Church of Christ," *New Conversations* v.4 no.2 (Fall 1979), 15. Reuben A. Sheares elaborated on this in a manner very similar to this essay in "A Covenant Polity," chap. 7 in *Theology and Identity: Traditions, Movements, and Polity in the United Church of Christ*, ed. Daniel L. Johnson and Charles Hambrick-Stowe (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1990), 67-78.

<sup>9</sup> This statement is the stated theme of Donald D. Freeman's article, "Autonomy in a Covenant Polity", first published in *Prism: A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ*. The following section of the *Manual on Church* abridges and edits Freeman's article, with the author's permission.

<sup>10</sup> This section of the *Manual on Church* is an abridged form of the *United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry, Section 8*.

<sup>11</sup> See the *United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry, Section 8*, for a detailed linguistic explanation of *episcopate*.

<sup>12</sup> Parts of an Association's responsibilities may be carried out by a Conference. Hereafter when this manual uses the term Association, it shall be read as intending "Association, or Conference acting as Association."

<sup>13</sup> Much of the next two sections of this manual was first shaped by the Church and Ministry Committee of the Chicago Metropolitan Association and is used with permission.

<sup>14</sup> Article IV of the *Bylaws of the United Church of Christ* delineates specific responsibilities of Associations as they work in partnership with each of the four covenanted ministries of the national church.

<sup>15</sup> This section is condensed from its foundational document, *Considering a New Church Covenant in the United Church of Christ*, PLL603, prepared by the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team and the Evangelism Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ, 2003.

**Written by The Rev. Jayne Ryan Kuroiwa**  
Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team  
United Church of Christ  
700 Prospect Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44115

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Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team  
700 Prospect Ave E - Cleveland, OH 44115  
866-822.8224



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