To all who love the United Church of Christ:

I am delighted to share that the Search Committee’s recommendation and the United Church of Christ Board’s nominee for General Minister and President is Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson. The committee was impressed by Rev. Dr. Thompson’s pastoral presence and theological depth; bold vision for a decolonized Christianity and the United Church of Christ as a home for people with multiple religious belonging; dedication to collaborative leadership and bridge-building; and skill as a manager and administrator. Rev. Dr. Thompson is Jamaican and immigrated to the United States as a teenager with her parents. Her identities as Jamaican, an immigrant, and part of the African diaspora are central to her sense of self and approach to ministry.

The search committee for the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ was established by the UCC Board of Directors in March 2022. An executive search firm, Isaacson, Miller was retained to support the work of the search committee and facilitate a comprehensive search process. The IM team, along with members of the GMP search committee conducted **14** listening sessions in 1-on-1, small group, and town hall formats to receive insights and recommendations from a broad cross-section of church members and leaders. Informed by the listening sessions, the GMP search committee published a detailed position profile that outlined the key opportunities and challenges as well as qualities and characteristics for the next GMP. The position profile served as the primary framework for the screening and assessment of candidates at each stage of the interview and selection process.

During the course of the GMP search, the search committee and/or our search firm partners actively engaged with **34** individuals who were nominated, expressed interest, or formally applied to be considered as a candidate. From that larger pool, the GMP search committee identified **6** individuals who were most qualified and aligned with the key opportunities and challenges, and qualifications and characteristics, outlined in the published position profile. While we are prevented by privacy considerations from releasing detailed demographic information about the pool of GMP candidates, we feel it is important to note that women and people of color were overwhelmingly represented in the field of qualified candidates. Following several stages of review of written candidate materials, video and in person interviews, presentations by the candidates, detailed referencing on the finalist candidates, and a sustained process of deliberation and discernment by GMP search committee, **Karen Georgia Thompson** emerged as the GMP search committee's recommendation to the UCCB for nomination as General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ.

Rev. Dr. Thompson currently serves as Associate General Minister for Wider Church Ministries and Co-Executive for Global Ministries. She has served in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ since 2009, previously as Minister for Racial Justice and Minister for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations. Prior to joining National Setting staff, Rev. Dr. Thompson served on staff of the Florida Conference, as a church planter in Florida, and in family ministries in New York. Rev. Dr. Thompson is a highly-skilled leader with experience in multiple settings of the United Church of Christ and ecumenically. She holds a Doctor of Ministry, with a dissertation in religious multiplicity among African Caribbean people, from Seattle University, a Master of

Divinity from Union Theological Seminary, and a Master of Public Administration from North Carolina Central University.

In February, the Search Committee recommended Rev. Dr. Thompson, who then met with the United Church of Christ Board during their March meeting. The UCCB’s affirmative vote nominated her to General Synod, the third and final body to discern and vote on her call to serve as General Minister & President.

The role of General Minister & President is considerable in its breadth, and the Search Committee is confident in Rev. Dr. Thompson’s capacity to serve. We found that she particularly shines in the following areas, and I invite you to read more about her experience:

Pastoral Presence & Theological Depth

The Search Committee invited the finalist candidates to lead us in a time of worship, and Rev. Dr. Thompson shared a homily on Mark 9:24, *Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!* She interpreted this for us as, “God, you’re possible, but this situation feels impossible,” illuminating the paradoxes found in much of what we as a church, nation, and world face right now. Throughout our time together, Rev. Dr. Thompson’s pastoral and non-anxious presence was a blessing.

In our conversations about local church life, Rev. Dr. Thompson addressed the paradox of human shortcomings and God’s possibility by pointing to clergy exhaustion, the strain of the Covid pandemic, and the need for care, resources, and education for all church leaders. She described a desire to explore what is possible through relational work between the national setting and conferences. She is grounded in care for church leaders and the communities they serve, and this drives her to think imaginatively about what it means to develop financial resources to support and advance church life.

Rev. Dr. Thompson comes by attunement to the paradox of possibility and impossibility honestly. During her first interview with us, she shared about her upbringing in a conservative Christian tradition that did not serve her well as an adult, and which initially made it challenging for her to hear a call to ministry. She described an experience of hearing God’s call repeatedly and in multiple forms – including through grappling with the spiritual dimensions of injustice and through experiences in nature, including on the Eno River in North Carolina. Her faith journey reflected experiences that members of the committee and others have in finding their way to the United Church of Christ after time spent in other traditions – and then seeking ways to integrate those spiritualities, theologies, and practices.

-2-

Bold Vision

Continuing with her exploration of the possibility of God and the impossibility of the situation, Rev. Dr. Thompson reminded us of the membership decline of the UCC and other mainline denominations, affirming that “it doesn’t mean revival is impossible, it just means it’s not demographically based.” The hope she holds for revival is rooted in her experience as Minister for Racial Justice, where she led the rollout and expansion of the Sacred Conversations on

Race, her doctoral work focused on multiple-religious belonging, and her experience leading Wider Church Ministries, which does global work on a local scale.

Rev. Dr. Thompson inspired the Search Committee when she paired the apparent hopelessness of declining church membership with the possibility of people who are seeking places to form community, to make meaning of life’s challenges, and to serve their neighbors. She suggests that among people who might be seeking such a home are the “spiritual-but-not-religious,” families who are connected to multiple religious traditions, and people who follow teachings and practices of Christianity alongside another tradition. She affirmed that many UCC congregations are already a place of sanctuary for these kinds of people, and proclaimed the possibility of continuing to foster this type of ministry without letting go of the Christianity that makes us who we are.

Rev. Dr. Thompson also touched the committee deeply in her proclamation that we need to decolonize the church and its structures. She spoke with pastoral and prophetic truthfulness in naming that the U.S. is currently the largest colonizer globally and that the Church has been remiss in not yet owning our role and repenting. She affirmed the role of the General Minister & President in leading the church through conversations about what our institutions look like and how our histories and experiences perpetuate the injustices we long to eradicate from the life of the church.

Collaborative Leadership & Bridge-Building

In a time of national discord and when the potential for competition between settings of the church occasionally gets the best of us, the Search Committee sought a candidate who centers collaboration and bridge-building, and found such a leader in Rev. Dr. Thompson. From her role as Minister for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, Rev. Dr. Thompson has strong experience building, mending, and formalizing relationships with church bodies with whom the UCC shares history and values, including the United Church of Canada and Iglesia Evangélica Unida de Puerto Rico.

In her role as Co-Executive for Global Ministries, alongside her counterpart from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Rev. Dr. Thompson has demonstrated her facility with relational and collaborative leadership in situations that require navigating numerous stakeholders and multiple decision-making structures. We believe this experience will serve her well in facilitating collaborations across multiple settings of the UCC for the good of the whole church.

Throughout our conversations with her, Rev. Dr. Thompson consistently uplifted the work of her colleagues in the national setting, saying again and again “none of this is work I do alone.”

-3-

Manager & Administrator

Rev. Dr. Thompson’s care for the staff she works with, supporting them both as people and as leaders, emerged clearly in our conversations with her. She described a practice of leadership development that considers the big picture of the whole church, not only those who are currently

working for her, to help ensure that new and emerging leaders are prepared when opportunities

to serve arise.

In addition to her aptitude as a manager, Rev. Dr. Thompson has demonstrated her savvy of the behind-the-scenes aspects of administration. Her experience overseeing several multi-million dollar budgets for Wider Church Ministries, General Synod, Global Ministries, and One Great Hour of Sharing prepares her to secure the financial strength of the UCC through sustainable, wise, and responsible fiscal management. As General Synod Administrator, Rev. Dr. Thomson emerged as a key pastoral leader during the church’s early experience of the pandemic, adapting our Thirty-Third General Synod to a digital environment. Her long tenure with the national setting means she knows the inner workings of the UCC well, and she has put that knowledge to use in strategizing the realignment of the Common Global Ministries Board with the UCCB.

The church has repeatedly affirmed Karen Georgia Thompson’s ministry throughout her tenure in multiple roles of progressive responsibility in the National Setting. After a thorough review by the board, she was recently nominated for a second term as Associate General Minister, though she subsequently withdrew her name from the AGM nomination upon receiving the GMP nomination. With equal confidence in her capabilities as a minister, theologian, and spiritual leader for our church, the Search Committee and UCCB enthusiastically recommends her as our nominee for General Minister and President.

If she is elected at General Synod, Rev. Dr. Thompson will vacate her current role as Associate General Minister and assume her new responsibilities as General Minister and President on August 1, 2023. Following General Synod, the UCCB will work closely with the new GMP to oversee a process for appointing an Acting Associate General Minister to fill the vacant AGM position from 2023 to 2025, at which point the next General Synod would be prepared to elect an Associate General Minister.

Faithfully,

Rev. Noah Brewer-Wallin

Chair, General Minister & President Search Committee

-4-