

The following resolution was sent directly to implementing bodies by the delegates of the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ, held in Indianapolis June 30-July 4, 2023.

**Affirming Licensed and Commissioned Ministers  
as Authorized Ministers in the United Church of Christ**

**A Prudential Resolution**

**SUMMARY**

This resolution seeks to affirm both Licensed Ministry and Commissioned Ministry as Authorized Ministries of the United Church of Christ in accordance with the current Constitution and Bylaws of the UCC<sup>1</sup> and to direct the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization of Local Church Ministries (a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ) to amend the *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018 to include recommended processes and procedures for authorizing these forms of ministry.

**BIBICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND ETHICAL RATIONAL**

In the letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle writes: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the Apostle writes to the church in Rome: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body, we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.”<sup>3</sup>

Under the heading “Theology of Ministry and Ordination” in *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018, we read:

“the United Church of Christ believes that God calls every Christian to be a servant of

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

46  
47 The particular ministry of reconciling all God's children with one another, with creation,  
48 and with God, was given to God's people in scripture: 'All this is from God, who  
49 reconciled us...through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in  
50 Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself, not counting their trespasses against  
51 them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us' (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). This  
52 ministry is claimed daily by the United Church of Christ as it is called to love God,  
53 neighbor, and self, and to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God  
54 (Matthew 22:36-50 and Micah 6:8). Christians are members of the Body of Christ, the  
55 Church, under the sole headship of Jesus Christ. This is a living body (1 Corinthians 12),  
56 called, formed and sent into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. Loving and  
57 serving God, the Church has multiple purposes:

- 58 • embodying and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to all;
- 59 • nurturing and empowering the gathered Church through worship and  
60 sacraments, fellowship and mutual care, education and spiritual  
61 formation;
- 62 • acting in the world through deeds of justice and loving kindness."<sup>4</sup>

63  
64 In defining ordination, the *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United*  
65 *Church of Christ* © 2018 states:

66  
67 "the Church acknowledges that its members have many diverse ministries in the world  
68 and in the Church. It also recognizes a specific need for representative servant leaders  
69 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ'  
70 (Ephesians 4:12). The United Church of Christ, along with the Church Universal  
71 through the ages and throughout the world, affirms God's call to some individuals to be  
72 such leaders who help the Church to be what God intends it to be. These persons are set  
73 apart through prayer and the laying on of hands in the rite of ordination.

74  
75 In ordination, the individual makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to  
76 the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic  
77 ministry, they continue the witness of Christ's followers from New Testament times.  
78 They receive authority from the Triune God to serve in Jesus' name. Ordained Ministers  
79 have particular responsibilities for the proclamation and practice of the Christian faith  
80 and for the life of the Church itself."<sup>5</sup>

81  
82 God calls some to serve for a season in a particular ministry to address the needs of the church.  
83 In those cases, the United Church of Christ has authorized individuals to serve as Licensed  
84 Ministers and Commissioned Ministers without requiring ordination.<sup>6</sup> Those faithful ministers

85 have often served small congregations and offered specialized ministry in various settings. Those  
86 Licensed and Commissioned Ministers have shared their gifts and proclaimed the gospel through  
87 faithful and loving service. Some have pursued ordination. Associations' and Conferences'  
88 Licensed and Commissioned Ministers have been authorized to serve for a 'season' as  
89 Ecclesiastes states: 'For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven'  
90 (Ecclesiastes 31 NRSV). Affirming those ministries, gifts, and seasons with authorization is  
91 consistent with the belief that all ministry flows from the gift of the Spirit in Baptism."<sup>7</sup>  
92

93 Based on the covenantal polity of the United Church of Christ, local Associations have  
94 authorized Licensed Ministers and Commissioned Ministers. The Constitution and Bylaws of the  
95 United Church of Christ have not been amended, and the Ministerial Excellence, Support and  
96 Authorization Team of Local Church Ministries (a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of  
97 Christ) has set before the United Church of Christ the challenge of considering lay ministry as a  
98 process leading to ordained ministry. *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in  
99 the United Church of Christ* © 2018 includes no guidance or processes for those Associations  
100 wanting to continue Licensed Ministry and Commissioned Ministry as they have been practiced.  
101 Some Local Churches, Associations, and Conferences have found it necessary to affirm Licensed  
102 and Commissioned Ministers as valued "authorized" ministers while calling for amending  
103 *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018 to  
104 guide Associations in the process of authorizing Licensed and Commissioned Ministers. While  
105 this *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018  
106 is subtitled "A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ," it does not  
107 provide processes and procedures many Associations have relied on in previous editions of the  
108 Manual on Ministry.

109  
110 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

111  
112 **WHEREAS** the Constitution (Article VI) and Bylaws (Preamble and Article I) of the United  
113 Church of Christ recognize three forms of authorized ministers—licensed, commissioned, and  
114 ordained,<sup>8</sup>  
115

116 **AND WHEREAS** those forms of authorized ministry affirm the United Church of Christ's belief  
117 that all are called to minister,<sup>9</sup>  
118

119 **AND WHEREAS** Local Churches, Associations, and Conferences have been faithfully served  
120 by Licensed Ministers and Commissioned Ministers,  
121

122 **AND WHEREAS** many have affirmed the importance of maintaining both Licensed Ministry  
123 and Commissioned Ministry, as authorized ministries of the United Church of Christ,  
124

125 **AND WHEREAS** the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization Team of Local Church  
126 Ministries (a Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ) endeavored to set before the  
127 United Church of Christ a common understanding of ordination in the *Manual on Ministry: A  
128 Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018 and their common  
129 understanding requires the affirmation of Associations and Conferences whose practices  
130 regarding authorized ministry may differ in regards to licensed ministry and/or commission

131 ministry,

132

133 **AND WHEREAS** the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization Team of Local Church  
134 Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ in *Manual on Ministry: A*  
135 *Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018 set forth an understanding  
136 of ordination and provided a path to move through lay ministry to ordained ministry,

137

138 **AND WHEREAS** the *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United*  
139 *Church of Christ* © 2018 does not include processes and procedures for either licensed ministers  
140 or commissioned ministers to gain standing as authorized ministry,

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142 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of  
143 Christ directs Local Church Ministries to amend *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing*  
144 *Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018 so that it provides recommended processes and  
145 procedures for both licensed ministry and commission ministry as authorized ministries for those  
146 Associations that want to maintain and support those forms of authorized ministry; and

147

148 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the United Church of Christ Board communicate this  
149 action to all Conferences, Association, and Local Churches.

150

151 **FUNDING:** The funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance  
152 with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

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154 **IMPLEMENTATION:** The Officers of the Church, in consultation with appropriate ministries  
155 or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution and Bylaws of the UCC. Available at: [https://www.ucc.org/ucc\\_constitution\\_and\\_bylaws/](https://www.ucc.org/ucc_constitution_and_bylaws/)

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:7-31, NRSV. Available at:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+12%3A7-31&version=NRSVA>

<sup>3</sup> Romans 12:1–8 NRSV. Available at:

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+12%3A1%E2%80%938&version=NRSVA>

<sup>4</sup> “Theology of Ministry and Ordination” in *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018, pp. 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> Constitution of the UC, Article VI. Available at: [https://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC\\_Constitution.pdf](https://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC_Constitution.pdf)  
and Bylaws Preamble and Article I. Available at: [https://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC\\_Bylaws.pdf](https://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/UCC_Bylaws.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Constitution and Bylaws of the UCC. Available at: [https://www.ucc.org/ucc\\_constitution\\_and\\_bylaws/](https://www.ucc.org/ucc_constitution_and_bylaws/)

<sup>9</sup> *Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ* © 2018, p 7.