

## UCCB Report regarding the Manual on Local Church

In October 2024, the United Church of Christ Board of Directors received a report from its Ministry Committee about the Manual on Local Church, and desires to share that report with the General Synod to help circulate the faithful work conducted by the Manual on Local Church Working Group. The UCCB commends the Manual on Local Church Working Group for their diligent and thorough work in response to the 2019 Resolution.

In 2019, the Prudential Resolution, *Discerning, Articulating, and Resourcing the Nature, Purpose, Composition, Covenantal Autonomy, and Definition of 'the basic unit of life and organization of the United Church of Christ' for the Twenty-first Century*, implored the UCC to form a Manual on Local Church Working Group. The purpose was to create a Manual on Local Church and recommend changes to Articles III and V of the UCC Constitution. That resolution can be found here: <https://uccresolutions.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/19-GS-26.pdf>

The Manual on Local Church Working Group has now completed its work. The following key considerations guided the Working Group's work:

- **Inclusive Language:** Ensuring that all language reflects inclusivity and represents the full diversity of the UCC community.
- **Covenant Accountability:** Clarifying the accountability necessary to live into covenant as local churches.
- **Justice-Oriented Church Organization:** Encouraging local churches to be structured in ways that actively create a just world for all.
- **Emphasis on Covenant:** Strengthening the focus on covenant within the UCC and between its churches.
- **Dual Affiliation:** Making room for local churches to have dual affiliations with other denominations or organizations.
- **Clarity on Local Church Covenant and Autonomy:** Offering equal clarity on both the covenantal obligations and the autonomy of local congregations.
- **Accountability and Oversight:** Establishing parameters for local church accountability and oversight from the UCC.
- **Provision for Releasing Congregations:** Creating a framework for releasing congregations that may choose to disaffiliate from the UCC.
- **Manual on Local Church:** Developing a Manual on Local Church, which includes a Congregational Code, Marks of Faithful and Vital Congregations, and processes and resources for local church organization.

### The Manual on Local Church

The Manual on Local Church Working Group has a webpage dedicated to both the Manual on Local Church and to educational videos that share important information about the Manual on Local Church. That webpage can be accessed here: <https://www.ucc.org/manual-on-church/>. The UCCB encourages everyone to spend time reviewing these resources and putting them to use.

## Proposed Amendments to Articles III and V

The Manual on Local Church Working Group also drafted amendments to Articles III and V of the UCC Constitution in response to the original resolution. The UCCB has not yet taken any action on the proposed amendments so as to create time and space for the UCC to live into the newly available Manual on Local Church. The proposed amendments from the Manual on Local Church Working Group arise specifically from the 2019 Resolution, which reads, in part:

...[The MLC working group will] recommend revisions to Article V in accordance with the working group's discernment and conclusions including, but not limited to, equal clarity about Local Church covenant and autonomy, parameters for local church accountability and the oversight of local churches, a provision for releasing congregations from the United Church of Christ, and amendments to Articles III and VIII and other sections of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ so that the whole of the document is consistent;...

The recommended changes from the Manual on Local Church Working Group are **in red** or ~~struck through~~ as appropriate. **Please note that no action has yet been taken on these proposals and are presented here as part of the Report about the work conducted. These proposals will receive further review before any additional action will be proposed.**

### ARTICLE III. COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIPS

37 6 Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church relate to each other in **covenant**.

38 ~~a covenantal manner.~~ **Covenants between entities and settings in the United Church of Christ are God-initiated promises made to knit us together in relationship and practice through the Holy Spirit for the faithful witness of the gospel and the mutual flourishing of Local Churches and wider expressions of the United Church of Christ.** Each expression of the Church has responsibilities and rights in relation to  
39 the others, to the end that the whole Church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission.  
40 ~~Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure.~~ As  
41 members of the Body of Christ, each expression of the Church **is accountable to, and responsible for, the rest**, called to honor and respect the  
42 work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the Church listens, hears, and carefully  
43 considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of  
44 the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.

### ARTICLE V. LOCAL CHURCHES

65 9 The basic unit of the life and organization of the United Church of Christ is the Local Church.  
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67 10 A Local Church is composed of persons who, believing in the triune God, accepting Jesus  
68 Christ as Lord and Savior, and depending on the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are organized for  
69 Christian worship, for the furtherance of Christian fellowship, and **committed to covenantal relationships in the United Church of Christ** for the ongoing work of  
70 Christian witness **and a just world for all**.

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72 11

~~In accordance with the custom and usage of a Local Church, persons become members by~~ **Local churches shall determine processes for admitting members, which shall include** (a)

73 baptism and either confirmation or profession of faith in Jesus  
 74 Christ as Lord and Savior; (b) reaffirmation or reprofession of faith; or (c) letter of transfer or  
 75 certification from other Christian churches.

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77 12 All persons who are or shall become members of a Local Church of the  
 78 United Church of Christ are thereby members of the United Church of Christ.

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80 13 Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed  
 81 Church unite in the United Church of Christ without break in their respective historic continuities  
 82 and traditions.

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84 14 Local Churches with Standing in an Association or Conference acting as an Association which have  
 also approved this Constitution and/or voted to become a covenanted member of the United Church of  
 Christ shall be considered member congregations of the United Church of Christ.

An Association or a Conference acting as an Association of the United Church of Christ is responsible for  
 supporting its Local Churches, adopting processes for admitting and releasing Local Churches from their  
 covenantal relationship with the United Church of Christ, and holding Local Churches accountable to the  
 covenantal promises made as part of the Local Church's Standing in the United Church of Christ.

The following Local Churches compose the United Church of Christ:

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86 a) The Local Churches of the Evangelical and Reformed Church;

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88 b) The Local Churches of the Congregational Christian fellowship which vote to become a part of  
 89 the United Church of Christ, or which vote to approve this Constitution;

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91 c) Any Congregational Christian Local Church which, although it has not voted to become a part  
 92 of the United Church of Christ, or to approve this Constitution, votes to join the United Church of  
 93 Christ after this Constitution is declared in force;

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95 d) Any Local Church which, after this Constitution is declared in force, is accepted, on any basis  
 96 other than that described in paragraph 16, into an Association, or Conference, of the United  
 97 Church of Christ;

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99 e) The Local Churches of any denomination which, after this Constitution is declared in force,  
 100 unites with the United Church of Christ; and

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102 f) Any Local Church in a category not otherwise defined in this article, received upon its request,  
 103 subject to such provisions as in consultation with the Conference may be specified by the  
 104 Association within whose bounds it is located, and which are not inconsistent with this  
 105 Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.

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107 15 Local Churches of the United Church of Christ are represented in the General Synod by the  
 108 delegates from the Conferences to which they belong.

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110 16 An Association or a Conference of the United Church of Christ under such provisions as  
 111 it deems wise, admit, or continue to fellowship with, any Congregational Christian local church  
 112 which is not part of the United Church of Christ. The names and statistics of such churches shall  
 113 be kept separately; their members shall not be counted in determining the number of delegates  
 114 which the Conference is entitled to send to the General Synod or hold elective office in that body,  
 115 except that no Ordained Minister who has full Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing

116 in the United Church of Christ shall be ineligible to be a delegate to the General Synod or to hold  
 117 elective office in that body. No direct or indirect participation by any such local church in, or  
 118 support of, the work of the United Church of Christ, or of any of its Covenanted Ministries, The  
 119 Pension Boards—United Church of Christ, United Church Funds, or of any Conference or  
 120 Association, shall be construed as making it a Local Church of the United Church of Christ.

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122 17 The Local Churches of the United Church of Christ have, in fellowship, a God-given  
 123 responsibility for that Church, its labors and its extension, even as the United Church of Christ  
 124 has, in fellowship, a God-given responsibility for the wellbeing and needs and aspirations of its  
 125 Local Churches. In mutual Christian concern and in dedication to Jesus Christ, the Head of the  
 126 Church, the one and the many share in common Christian experience and responsibility.

127

128 18 **A Local Church fulfills the responsibility of congregational autonomy by discerning God’s call  
 for the congregation, setting the congregation’s missional priorities, organizing the gathered community,  
 and attending to the corporate and legal responsibilities of being an organization.** The autonomy of the  
 Local Church is inherent and modifiable only by its own action. Nothing

129 in this Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ shall destroy or limit the right  
 130 of each Local Church to continue to operate in the way customary to it; nor shall be construed as  
 131 giving to the General Synod, or to any Conference or Association now, or at any future time, the  
 132 power to abridge or impair the autonomy of any Local Church in the management of its own  
 133 affairs, which affairs include, but are not limited to, the right to retain or adopt its own methods of  
 134 organization, worship and education; to retain or secure its own charter and name; to adopt its  
 135 own constitution and bylaws; to formulate its own covenants and confessions of faith; to admit  
 136 members in its own way and to provide for their discipline or dismissal; to call or dismiss its  
 137 pastor or pastors by such procedure as it shall determine; to acquire, own, manage and dispose of  
 138 property and funds; to control its own benevolences; and to withdraw by its own decision from  
 139 the United Church of Christ at any time without forfeiture of ownership or control of any real or  
 140 personal property owned by it.

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142 19 Actions by, or decisions or advice emanating from, the General Synod, a Conference or an  
 143 Association, should be held in the highest regard by every Local Church.

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