

2 Ministerial Authorization

ARTICLE 5: CALLS, COVENANTS, AND ENDORSEMENTS

COVENANT

Covenant—the commitment of God to God’s people, of the people to God, and of the people to one another as the Body of Christ—is foundational to United Church of Christ identity and is at the heart of our governance. God’s covenant with creation and humankind inspires deep and binding commitment in relationships within and beyond the Church, “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). The covenantal relationships between parts of the Body of Christ are characterized by mutuality, transparency, accountability, and a desire to represent Christ together for the glory of God.

When a member of the United Church of Christ, in response to God’s call and with the affirmation of the wider Church’s discernment through a Committee on Ministry acting on behalf of an Association, is ordained and/or granted ministerial standing, the commitments of covenant are formalized among participating covenantal partners:

- the person who holds ministerial standing;
- the Local Church of which they are a member;
- the ministry setting to which the person is called;
- the Association through its Committee on Ministry.

These commitments are typically outlined as Three-Way Covenants and Four-Way Covenants (depending on a person’s employment and ministry setting); however, all persons who hold ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ—regardless of employment—bear responsibility to participate with mutuality,

Three- and Four-Way Covenants are named according to the number of covenantal partners.

While “call” has many meanings in the processes of discernment and ministerial authorization, here the word “call” refers to a ministry setting and role for which a person is gifted and qualified and in which they are asked to serve on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The “call” includes a call agreement (or employment contract) that outlines scope of work and compensation, among other details. A Three- or Four-Way Covenant is written separately from the call agreement.

transparency, and accountability in relationship to the above-mentioned covenantal partners.

The conditions and obligations of employment with a ministry setting are set by the employer, sometimes in the form of a call agreement.⁶² A call is not required to maintain ministerial standing; however, a call is required for a person to initially receive ministerial standing after the appropriate process of discernment with a Committee on Ministry. In order to be ordained, for example, a Member in Discernment who is “approved for ordination pending call” must first receive a call to an approved ministry setting; this is referred to as an ordainable call. Similarly, in order to receive ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ through Dual Standing or following the discernment process for Privilege of Call, an ordained minister from another ecclesiastical body must first receive a call to a UCC ministry setting that is considered by a Committee on Ministry to warrant ministerial standing; this is referred to as an authorizable call.

At the heart of any ordainable or authorizable call is covenant: the sacred commitment among the person with ministerial standing, the ministry setting, the Local Church, and the Association, to one another and to Christ, in order to faithfully and effectively minister together for the glory of God.

ORDAINABLE CALL

In ordination, the person makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic ministry, they continue the witness of Christ’s followers from New Testament times with responsibilities for the proclamation and continuation of the Christian faith and of the Church itself.

A Member in Discernment who is “approved for ordination pending call” must receive a call for representative, ministerial service before they are ordained to serve and to lead on behalf

⁶² Local Churches, Conferences, and ministers may obtain a sample call agreement through ucc.org/ministers. The Call Agreement Workbook, a resource for ministers and their ministry settings, can be purchased through uccresources.com.

of the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal. The decision of whether a call is an ordainable call is empowered to Committees on Ministry on behalf of their Associations. When a Member in Discernment who is approved for ordination pending call has been invited to accept a position, the Committee on Ministry is charged with reviewing the position—including the setting and scope of work—to discern if the position serves God, Jesus Christ, the Church Universal, and the United Church of Christ in such a way that ordination is necessary. Not every call is an ordainable call, and not every employment setting necessitates the covenantal relationship and oversight of ministerial standing.

As ministry changes in the 21st century, the United Church of Christ and its Associations are coming to understand that the setting for an ordainable call may or may not be in the Local Church and may or may not include full-time compensation. Instead an ordainable call must demonstrate three essential qualities to the Committee on Ministry's satisfaction:

- **The call is covenantal.** In the United Church of Christ, no one does ministry alone. An ordainable call demonstrates clear connectedness with a Local Church (or in the case of a call beyond the Local Church, connectedness between the Local Church and the calling body), as the person being called to serve represents the commitments of the Local Church and the Association to a shared mission on behalf of the United Church of Christ. This commitment is illustrated in the creation of a Three- or Four-Way Covenant that documents the covenantal expectations of the person who will be ordained, the Local Church of membership, the ministry setting (if different from the Local Church of membership), and the Association.

Questions to ask while discerning the covenantal aspects of an ordainable call may include:

- ▼ Has the United Church of Christ through an Association demonstrated an ongoing commitment to this position

To be recognized as a calling body, an organization/ ministry setting/faith community typically must have: an identifiable structure of leadership and governance; a willingness to recognize and provide appropriate oversight for a person's ministry; and a commitment to participate fully in a Three- or Four-Way Covenant with the person, the Local Church, and the United Church of Christ through an Association.

and/or this ministry setting? If the commitment to this particular ministry is new, how have the Association and other potential covenantal partners demonstrated a plan to invest in the ministry over time? How does the Local Church show engagement with and support for the ministry and the position?

- ▼ How will the Ordained Minister show engagement with and support of the Local Church and the wider United Church of Christ?
- ▼ Does the United Church of Christ have a particular need for a representative on its behalf to this ministry setting? Is that need ongoing or temporary?

- **The call responds to the needs of the church.**⁶³ An ordainable call meets the needs of the Body of Christ for a representative of the United Church of Christ and of the Church Universal through priestly and pastoral servant leadership. The particular need that leads to an ordainable call relates to the whole and holy life of the Church, with responsibility for representing Christ and the Church and for equipping the Church's response to God's work in the world.

The call, whether to a Local Church or a setting beyond the Local Church, must be carefully reviewed for its intent, authenticity, and validity to serve the ongoing and expanding needs of the Church. A Committee on Ministry may be asked to consider calls to interim ministry, community organizing, or a wide variety of entrepreneurial ministry settings for ordination. The ministry setting, the Member in Discernment who is approved for ordination pending call, and the Association should articulate a sense of commitment to meet the identified need of the Church faithfully and effectively through this call.

Some calls, including active duty military chaplaincy, have additional requirements in order for a person to meet the needs of the Church in that particular setting, such as several years of post-ordination experience, and therefore cannot be considered an ordainable call.

⁶³ See Section 1 for "Needs of the Church."

Questions to ask while discerning the needs of the Church for an ordainable call may include:

- ▼ Do this position and ministry setting require a person who is ordained by the Body of Christ to serve in Jesus' name on behalf of the United Church of Christ? Do the position and ministry setting require the person to embody and proclaim the good news for all of God's children through preaching, teaching, and acts of loving-kindness?
 - ▼ Does this ministry setting ask the one who serves to nurture and empower a community through worship and sacraments, fellowship and mutual care, lifelong education and spiritual formation, pastoral presence and spiritual guidance? Does the position bear particular responsibilities to nurture and inform the Church itself?
 - ▼ Will the need of the Church for faithful and effective authorized ministers be met if this particular person accepts this particular call? Is the potential call considered to be within the Member in Discernment's capacities and capabilities?
- **The call involves mutuality in ministry between the minister and the community.** An ordainable call demonstrates tangible commitments to shared concerns and mutual accountability for the sake of sustained ministry. Whether a minister is serving in a Local Church or in a specialized setting, it is expected that there are ongoing structures of both support and accountability in place to encourage the long-term well-being of the minister and the ongoing viability of the ministry being undertaken.

Questions to ask while discerning the quality of mutuality of an ordainable call may include:

Not every call is an ordainable call and not every employment setting needs the covenantal relationship and oversight of ministerial standing. There may be times when a position is employment but not a call. University instruction, for example, may be employment for which a Member in Discernment is qualified but for which ordination is not a professional requirement, and therefore it might not be an ordainable call. Seminary instruction, however, might be considered an ordainable call. Similarly, a position of Minister for Christian Education may be an ordainable call while the role of Sunday school teacher might not.

- ▼ Does the United Church of Christ have a particular need for oversight of the person called to this position? Do all of the potential covenantal partners have a shared understanding about the processes for accountability in this potential call, and are those processes outlined in a call agreement and Three- or Four-Way Covenant?⁶⁴
- ▼ Are the ministry setting and position structured to grow together mutually, informing, encouraging and challenging one another to the glory of God? (Internships, Clinical Pastoral Education residencies, and training positions, for example, are not considered ordainable calls due to the imbalances in mutuality; such ministry settings are intended to shape the person but are not structured to be shaped in return).
- ▼ How does the ministry setting attend to its own vitality over time and to the ongoing well-being of the person who is called to it? Regardless of whether the call is full-time or part-time, does the scope of work represent fair expectations of labor and clear commitments to time and compensation (for example, is a quarter-time pastor expected to be “on call” 24/7 for a congregation)?

Additional tools that can help a Committee on Ministry discern whether a call to ministry is authorizable include:

- prayer and discernment;⁶⁵
- the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers;
- position description and scope of work;
- call agreement/employment contract;
- Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

⁶⁴ See Section 3 for sample Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

⁶⁵ See Section 3 for the Discernment Travelogue.

AUTHORIZABLE CALL

An authorizable call is that call by which, following appropriate discernment processes, an ecumenically ordained minister is granted ministerial standing: Dual Standing, Ordained Ministerial Standing through Privilege of Call, or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing. An authorizable call refers to a call for which a person is tasked with representative, ministerial service on behalf of the United Church of Christ and through which a covenantal relationship of UCC ministerial standing is established.

The discernment of an authorizable call is a decision empowered to Committees on Ministry by their Associations. Such a decision considers both the local ministry context and the wider context of the United Church of Christ. Like ordainable calls, authorizable calls must demonstrate three essential qualities to the Committee on Ministry's satisfaction:

- **The call is covenantal.** An authorizable call demonstrates clear connectedness with the United Church of Christ (whether through a Local Church or a UCC-affiliated ministry setting), demonstrated in the creation of a Three- or Four-Way Covenant that outlines the covenantal expectations of the person who will hold ministerial standing, a Local Church, the ministry setting (if different from the Local Church), and the Association.
- **The call responds to the needs of the church.** An authorizable call meets the needs of the Church—the Body of Christ—for a priestly and pastoral servant to represent the United Church of Christ and the Church Universal, and to equip the Church's response to God's work in the world. Both the ministry setting and the ecumenically ordained minister seeking ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ articulate a sense of commitment to meet that Church's needs faithfully and effectively on behalf of the United Church of Christ.

When a Committee on Ministry is considering the appropriateness of an employment or ministry setting to provide an ordainable or authorizable call, it may be helpful for the potential ministry partners to draft a Three- or Four-Way Covenant as an exercise to review the scope of proposed ministry, mutual accountability and oversight, as well as the ways in which the call would require of the person an embodiment of Word and Spirit through preaching and teaching, rites and sacraments, justice and pastoral care.

- **The call involves mutuality in ministry between the minister and the community.** Outlined in a Three- or Four-Way Covenant, an authorizable call demonstrates shared expectations of ecclesial accountability and relationship among the minister, the ministry setting, and the United Church of Christ through its Association and/or Local Church, for the sake of sustained ministry. A call agreement or job description may be used to demonstrate mechanisms of oversight in the employment setting.

Tools that can help a Committee on Ministry discern whether a call to ministry is authorizable include:

- prayer and discernment;⁶⁶
- the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers;
- position description and scope of work.

Discernment of an authorizable call is also beneficial for a Committee on Ministry in conversation with an Ordained Minister who is considering Leave of Absence or Exempt Standing, in order to assess whether employment and/or entrepreneurial work indicate a ministry for which oversight is needed and in which the United Church of Christ understands itself to be represented.

THREE- AND FOUR-WAY COVENANTS

The sacred nature of shared ministry and relationship between a Local Church, an Association, the person who holds a form of UCC ministerial standing, and the ministry setting beyond the Local Church (if applicable) for the purpose of God’s mission is made explicit with a Three- or Four-Way Covenant.⁶⁷ Covenant—not only in writing but in all its forms—is meant to secure the well-being of God’s community and the Body of Christ. In the United Church of Christ, Three- and Four-Way Covenants are written to further the mutual ministry of all covenantal partners for the sake of God’s glory and on behalf of the United Church

⁶⁶ See Section 3 for discernment tools such as the Discernment Travelogue.

⁶⁷ See Section 3 for sample Three- and Four-Way Covenants.

of Christ. Accountability for healthy ecclesial relationships, good communication, and mutual concern for all participants is built into the fabric of the Three- or Four-Way Covenant in order to strengthen and encourage the ministry of each covenantal partner on behalf of the United Church of Christ. The authority and power of the Three- or Four-Way Covenant rests in the understanding of commitment and accountability on the part of each participant, believing that “as God gives God’s self to humanity for the sake of all, so Christians are called into covenant for the sake of one another rather than for one’s self.”⁶⁸

Three-Way Covenants outline ecclesial expectations, individually and in relationship to one another, of (1) the person with ministerial standing, (2) the Local Church of membership as the calling body, and (3) the Association.

Four-Way Covenants outline ecclesial expectations, individually and in relationship to one another, of (1) the person with ministerial standing, (2) the Local Church of membership, (3) the Association, and (4) the ministry setting as the calling body.

Three- and Four-Way Covenants are distinct from call agreements/employment contracts.

While the specific responsibilities in Three- and Four-Way Covenants can vary according to Association and ministry setting, some basic expectations are important to foster healthy relationships and communication among the covenantal partners and with God:

- Local Church responsibilities include participation in the Association and Conference (e.g. sending delegates to annual meetings and nurturing its own “culture of call” to identify members whose leadership gifts would bless the wider church); support of its members who are Ordained Ministers (pastors, ministers in specialized settings, and retired clergy alike) through pastoral relations and/or discernment committees; and appreciation for other

Three-Way Covenants are also valuable in non-employment seasons of an Ordained Minister’s career, for example while searching for a call or following retirement, especially if the minister is active in short-term opportunities such as pulpit supply or in volunteer capacities with the wider church. Adaptations of the Three-Way Covenant in such seasons outline the ecclesial relationship and expectations among an Ordained Minister, the Local Church of membership, and the Association.

⁶⁸ See Section 1.

In a church landscape where specialized and entrepreneurial ministries are multiplying, Four-Way Covenants are valuable to clarify and document the ecclesial relationships that support ministry beyond the Local Church. Those specialized ministers who should hold Four-Way Covenants include (but are not limited to) ordained ministers serving as judicatory staff, military chaplains, hospital and hospice chaplains, pastoral counselors, seminary faculty, etc.

settings beyond its own walls and programs as essential locations of ministry.

- Ordained Minister responsibilities include maintenance of ministerial standing, participation in the life of a Local Church and of the wider United Church of Christ, including financial support; and faithfulness to the UCC Ministerial Code and to the terms of a call agreement. Those ministers called to specialized settings are encouraged to engage and support their Local Church of membership through newsletter articles, annual reports, stewardship of their resources, and pastoral assistance if and when there is an appropriate opportunity.
- Association responsibilities include communication of expectations for ministerial standing; faithful exercise of oversight responsibilities, such as annual Information Reviews and opportunities for clergy renewal; the hosting of installation services; and participation in the wider United Church of Christ, including timely communication with other Associations' Committees on Ministry in matters of ministerial standing.
- Ministry setting responsibilities include fair terms of call/employment, written in proportion to the position's scope of work; affirmation of the Local Church as the locus of ministry and mission in the United Church of Christ; and communication with the Association as needed for support and oversight.

Occasionally, some ministry settings are unable to sign a Four-Way Covenant. In those situations, a Four-Way Covenant can be created using the minister's job description as a reference to outline support and accountability for all covenantal partners.