

The presiding officer of your church is the chief lay elected officer who presides at the major meetings of the congregation. He or she may be called the moderator; the president; the parish manager; the presiding elder; or chairperson of the consistory, church council or deacons. Whatever the title, she or he is a link between the governing board and the congregation, and between the governing board and the pastor.

Common Practices

Presiding officers usually are elected by the church members to a term of office, indicated by the constitution or bylaws, of one or two years. In churches that have a council with representatives from all church organizations, presiding officers may be elected from among the council members at the first meeting of the year. Presiding officers are in a position to keep their eyes on the long-range goals of the church. They keep meetings running smoothly, oversee activities and help assess the church's program. In some churches, they may be mainly moderators, whose major responsibility is to moderate the annual meeting.

In churches without a pastoral relations committee, presiding officers probably are the link between church members and the church staff. They get the complaints, phone calls about the church member who didn't get a hospital call and feedback about any

number of things. They also are a sounding board for the pastor's ideas, so they should have some idea of what church members are thinking.

Presiding officers can be a link to the wider church, too. They may represent the church at conference annual meetings and association meetings. People look to them for information about the United Church of Christ and ecumenical activities. Presiding officers help make sure their church's voice is heard in the association and conference and at General Synod.

Responsibilities

Your specific responsibilities grow out of the history and practices of your church. These responsibilities may be shared with a church clerk, pastoral relations committee, deacons or others in the church. Some or all of the following responsibilities are yours:

- Seeing that the long-range goals of the church are carried out.
- Being a sounding board for the pastor.
- Being a sounding board for the members.
- Representing the church at association and conference meetings or seeing that someone else does.
- Making sure the church is represented at ordinations, installations and other ecclesiastical activities in the association.
- Reading information sent from

United Church of Christ national bodies to the church and ordering additional materials.

- Making the denomination aware of your church's points of view.
- Making your church aware of the General Synod's, conference's and association's points of view.
- Calling the church's official meetings in accordance with the constitution or bylaws.
- Planning the church's official meetings.
- Moderating at the church's official meetings.
- Being chairperson of the governing board.
- Coordinating the church's programs and activities.
- Overseeing activities of church officers.
- Seeing that official decisions are carried out.
- Actively participating in the life and mission of the church.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- Ability to inspire the trust and respect of church members and staff.
- Appreciation of a broad spectrum of theological perspectives.
- Understanding of the church's constitution and bylaws.
- Sense of vision and direction.
- Ability to work cooperatively with a number of people.
- Ability to listen.
- Ability to deal with conflict.

- Ability to organize and delegate responsibilities.
- Understanding of parliamentary procedure.
- Ability to evaluate.
- Diplomacy.
- Dedication and zeal.
- Skill in leading meetings.
- Clear speaking voice.
- Ease in front of groups.
- Self-confidence.
- Understanding of group process.
- Understanding of group and organizational decision-making.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Ask for a position description outlining responsibilities, expectations and accountability.
- Attend workshops and seminars sponsored by your association or conference, ecumenical groups, or organizations specializing in congregational life.
- Use the **UCC Desk Calendar and Plan Book**, produced by the Local Church Ministries. It's a good way of keeping up with your meetings and the schedule for ordering materials. Order additional copies from United Church of Christ Resources. Telephone, toll-free, 800-537-3394.
- Read **Robert's Rules of Order** and observe carefully how parliamentary procedure is used.

Presiding Officer

- Meet regularly with your pastor and other members of the church staff.

Issues Facing the Church

- The pastor and the presiding officer must work closely together. What is the role of the pastor in choosing the presiding officer?
- If the presiding officer doesn't represent all the links between governing board and members, pastor and members, pastor and governing board and church and wider community, who does? Should all these links be the responsibility of the church staff?
- What is the division of labor between the governing board and the presiding officer?

Questions

- What is the presiding officer called in your church?
- What are the responsibilities of the presiding officer?
- Is there one thing in particular upon which you need to work?