

**Discussion Guide
For
Manual on Church**

1. Read the introduction to the document. Are you aware of instances where the relationship between a local church and an association (or conference acting as an association) has been misunderstood, strained or broken? Please share your observations and/or experiences.

2. Manual on Church is based on biblical and historical notions about the nature of covenant. After reading the section entitled, “The Church Shaped by Covenant,” discuss the following:
 - a. What does covenant mean to you?
 - b. What biblical stories or images inform your own understanding of what it means to be in a covenantal relationship?
 - c. How is covenant being lived out between the churches and associations in your area?
 - d. What are some of the strengths and challenges of living in covenant?

3. The concepts of “autonomy” and “oversight” as two aspects of covenant are highlighted in this document. What relationship do you see between these two concepts? How do they play out in your local church? In your association? Between your local church and the association or conference?

4. Oversight is defined as both nurture and accountability. How do nurture and accountability happen between your local church and your association or conference? How could they happen?

5. Read through the list of covenantal expectations of associations found on pages 14-17. Do these expectations reflect the practices in your association or conference? What are you doing well? What could be strengthened?

6. Read through the covenantal expectations of the Local Church on pages 18-21. Do these expectations reflect the practices in your church? What are you doing well? What could be strengthened?

7. Have you ever experienced a church wishing to become UCC? If so, what was that like? If not, does the process outlined in this manual sound reasonable to you? How could the relationship between an exploring congregation and an association or conference be strengthened?
8. Have you ever experienced a church leaving the denomination or closing? What was that like? Can you envision a covenantal support consultation as helpful in certain situations? When necessary, how do we “let go” with faith and integrity?
9. What are some of the joys that you have experienced living in covenant?
10. Is living in covenant as members of the United Church of Christ a “witness of integrity?” (p. 31)
11. How might this manual strengthen your ministry and witness?
12. What suggestions would you have for the next draft of this manual?

SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THIS GUIDE:

In Committees on the Ministry, you might take a few minutes at the beginning of each meeting to work on one or more of the questions. Another approach is to use these questions in small group reflection or as part of an annual retreat or planning day.

In a local congregation, the questions could be used with a church governing board of deaconate either in a retreat/planning day format or over a period of several meetings. The questions could also form the basis of a special evening or afternoon program for congregational members.

PRAYER FOR BEGINNING DISCUSSION

Faithful God, your steadfast love amazes and humbles us. In the face of your never-failing covenant we confess we sometimes struggle to maintain even the most rudimentary relationships with one another. In this time of discussion, prepare a receptive place in us for the gifts you offer through right relationship with you, with one another and with all creation – even and especially when we are tempted to walk away. Bless, O God, the ties that bind! Amen.