

Rev. Jennifer Sowell elected to serve as next Associate General Minister of the United Church of Christ

CLEVELAND, May 12, 2026 - The Rev. Jennifer Sowell, an ordained minister in the United Church of Christ with more than two decades of pastoral leadership experience, was elected to serve an unexpired term as the next Associate General Minister (AGM), Love of Church on Saturday, May 9, 2026. She was elected at a special meeting of General Synod 35, which officially ends a several year process that began at the end of 2023. Sowell's election is a historic one, marking the first time in the denomination's nearly 70-year history that leadership of the church is all women.

Sowell said she's honored to serve in this new role as AGM and is excited to be a part of the UCC's first all-women leadership team.

"I had faith the UCC would get here, but it's an added blessing to be part of the team," said Sowell. "I am looking forward to building new relationships with my colleagues all over the country, and listening to their hopes, needs and dreams for the United Church of Christ."

The Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, UCC General Minister and President/CEO says of this moment that Sowell is the right candidate for this time in the life of the church.

"She will be a wonderful addition to the staff and will serve the church well as we continue to animate the six Programmatic Priorities. Her experience in the local church will be beneficial as we prioritize the ministry of the local church," said Thompson.

Sowell currently serves as the senior pastor at St. John United Church of Christ in Collinsville, IL, which is a 500 member Open and Affirming congregation where she has led strategic planning initiatives, expanded children and family ministries, strengthened staff structures, shepherded the church through pandemic recovery, and expanded digital worship access.

The Rev. Cean James, senior pastor at Salt & Light Church in Philadelphia and chair of the search committee that identified Sowell as their recommended candidate, said the role of the local church is more important now, then it ever was and believes Sowell is the right person to provide critical leadership.

"Local churches and local church pastors are looking to the National Ministries for encouragement and resources to provide vitality," said James. "Rev. Sowell is an innovative pastor who specializes in providing imaginative energy to local churches."

Before taking over as senior pastor at St. John in 2020, Sowell served four years as the senior pastor at Pilgrim Church, UCC in Wheaton, Maryland, where she built a pipeline between older generation congregants to younger members, encouraging them to take on leadership roles in the church, facilitated repairing the church's reputation with the Conference and the National Ministries, and revitalized children's programming, writing the curriculum to offer a creative, experiential approach to learning about the themes of God's unconditional welcome.

Sowell also served churches in Catonsville, Maryland; St. Pete Beach, Florida; and Rockville Centre, New York, as well as a stint as an assistant editor for the John Milton Society for the Blind in New York City.

Sowell now joins Thompson and the Rev. Shari Prestemon, Associate General Minister and Co-Executive of Global Ministries, as elected officers of the church.

Sowell is scheduled to begin her service as AGM in August 2026.

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