



The Manual on Local Church



Manual on Local Church

- Introduction
- I. The Congregational Code
 - II. Marks for Faithful and Vital Local Churches
 - III. Local Church Governance
 - IV. Standing Support and Accountability for Local Churches
- Resources, Glossary and References



Context for the Manual on Local Church



United and Uniting

Conversation and debate around covenant, accountability and Local Church autonomy goes back to our founding in 1957.

Yearning for Vitality

Many local churches yearn for vitality and the steps to get there with their community.

Associations and Oversight

Associations or Conferences acting as associations have oversight of Local Churches according to their bylaws but there is currently no process of accountability or covenantal framework.

General Synod 2019

Delegates (representing local churches) charged the body with this task. (Text on next slide.)



Play Break!



The Manual on Local Church



The following resolution was approved by the delegates at a plenary of the Thirty-Second General Synod.

**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**

A Prudential Resolution

WHEREAS Article V, paragraphs 10 and 11 of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ
employ objectionable language; and

WHEREAS Article V of the Constitution of the United Church of Christ met with criticism
during the hearing preceding its adoption at the Twenty-Seventh General Synod, but rules
prevented changes in the language of the Article that delegates found objectionable; and

WHEREAS the Bylaws adopted by the Thirty-First General Synod contain that same
objectionable language; and

WHEREAS General Synods 9, 11, 12, 14, 16 and 17 have affirmed the use of inclusive

50 THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Thirty-Second General Synod of the United Church
51 of Christ calls on the United Church of Christ Board to convene a working group representative
52 of the whole of the United Church of Christ to:

- 53 1. lead the United Church of Christ in a process of discernment regarding Article V of the
54 Constitution of the United Church of Christ; and
- 55 2. recommend revisions to Article V in accordance with the working group's discernment
56 and conclusions including, but not limited to, equal clarity about Local Church covenant
57 and autonomy, parameters for local church accountability and the oversight of local
58 churches, a provision for releasing congregations from the United Church of Christ, and
59 amendments to Articles III and VIII and other sections of the Constitution of the United
60 Church of Christ so that the whole of the document is consistent; and
- 61 3. produce a Manual on the Local Church, akin to the Manual on Ministry, for use by all
62 settings of the Church to fully live into their covenantal responsibilities and privileges
63 under the Constitution of the United Church of Christ; this Manual will speak to items
64 including, but not limited to, a Congregational Code, Marks of Faithful and Vital
65 Congregations, and processes and resources for birthing, admitting, strengthening,
66 revitalizing, and releasing congregations; and
- 67 4. report its progress along with its recommendations for revising Article V of the
68 Constitution to the next General Synod.

The United Church of Christ Constitution

and the role of Associations

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ARTICLE IX. ASSOCIATIONS AND CONFERENCES

43 Associations and Conferences are bodies organized on a territorial basis to perform functions in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.

Associations

44 An Association is that body within a Conference of the United Church of Christ which is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area, all Ordained Ministers holding Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing therein, all Commissioned Ministers and Licensed Ministers in that Association.

45 The boundaries of any new Association, or any adjustment of boundaries between Associations, shall be determined by the Associations concerned with the approval of the Conference or Conferences involved. The standing of an Association as a body of the United Church of Christ is determined by the Conference in which it is located.

46 An Association is that body which determines, confers, and certifies to the standing of the Local Churches of the United Church of Christ within its area.

47 An Association is that body which grants authorization that is required for various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the Church. Such authorization is granted through the rite of ordination, through commissioning, licensing, granting either Ordained Ministerial Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing and other acts of authorization. Such authorization may be terminated by the Association.

48 An Association may retain or secure its own charter, and adopt its own constitution, bylaws and other rules which it deems essential to its own welfare and not inconsistent with this Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.

Timeline



Timeline



Timeline



What is the Manual on Local Church For?

The *Manual on Local Church*'s purpose is to resource Local Churches to embody faithful and vital witness and ministry by:

- 1) recognizing themselves as part of the whole body of the United Church of Christ through covenant;
- 2) building and continuing faithful and effective expressions of the Local Church through healthy governance;
- 3) proclaiming and engaging its identity and membership in the United Church of Christ through obtaining and maintaining Local Church standing in its Conference or Association;



What is the Manual on Local Church For?

The *Manual on Local Church* is also a resource for Conferences and Associations, equipping them to support their Local Churches and maintain accountable relationships in their ongoing witness and ministries.

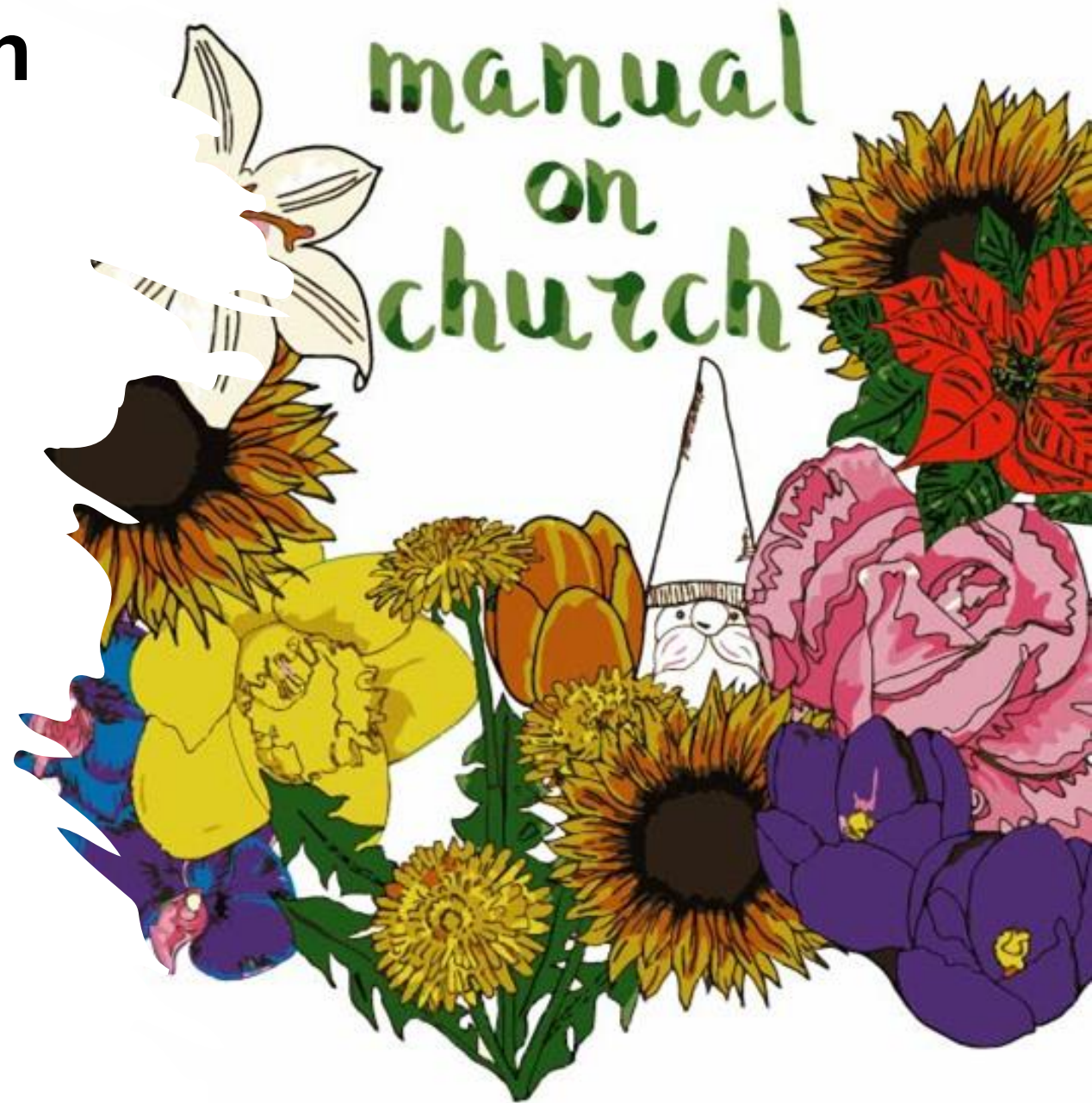
And, The *Manual on Local Church* is also a resource for the whole United Church of Christ, imparting a vision of faithfulness and vitality by offering Marks of Faithful and Vital Local Churches that build upon the specific and continuing witness and ministry of the United Church of Christ.

In short, The *Manual on Local Church* seeks to provide tools to fulfill the mission that the United Church of Christ has proclaimed in faith.



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What is covenant in the United Church of Christ?

“The word means many things. But as a beginning it means this much: a way of being committed to each other as God is committed to us, a way of being defined by, accountable to and responsible for each other. God has made that deep and abiding commitment to us. And we affirm that our pilgrimage together is marked by such a costly, disciplined and abiding commitment.”

-Walter Brueggeman

The Risk of Heaven, the Possibility of Earth

Twelfth General Synod Minutes, 1979

Using the Appendix and “Brief Definitions and Descriptions of Covenant,” from Jane Fidler Hoffman’s, *Covenant, a Study for the United Church of Christ*, reflect on the following:

- What is the difference between a rule/law and a covenant?
- Do any of these definitions and descriptions trouble you?
- Do you experience living in covenant in your life? If so, how?
- What definition of covenant will best serve the Manual on Local Church?

Definitions and Descriptions from Covenant, a Study for the United Church of Christ by Jane Fisler Hoffman

“Covenant. An agreement between two or more persons...The Hebrew word for covenant is *berith*, which has the etymological meaning of ‘a bond.’” –Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary, 188

“I understand covenant in our own time and place to be a radical alternative to consumer autonomy, which is the governing ideology of our society and which invades the life of the church in debilitating ways.”

–Walter Brueggemann, *The Covenanted Self*

“In all its forms, the key focus of covenant is on *relationships*. A covenant is the constitutionalization of a relationship.”

–Walter Brueggemann, 12th General Synod Minutes

“A covenant is a communion between partners, solemnly initiated, binding the partners into a new pattern of life and letting them mutually define each other.” –Wolfgang Roth and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Liberating Bond*

“A covenant is a more comprehensive and less legally defined relationship than a contract. A contract relates only to specific aspects of claims of human relationships; it seeks to regulate them according to a fixed standard. The covenant relates to persons as whole human beings; it humanizes interpersonal relationships.”

–Wolfgang Roth and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *The Liberating Bond*

What is covenant in the United Church of Christ?

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Covenant and Local Church Autonomy (for the MLC)

Covenants between entities and settings in the United Church of Christ are God-initiated promises that 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.

Local Church Autonomy in the context of covenantal relationship in the United Church of Christ is the non-transferrable responsibility of a Local Church to discern and respond to God's call for it, inclusive of its purpose, mission and vision and the creative embodiment of these things in its place and time (Article 5, paragraph 18 of the [UCC Constitution](#)).

“Constituted by divine grace, what holds the United Church of Christ together from the human side are two things: (1) a common faith in ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour’ and ‘sole Head’ of the church; and (2) sets of covenant promises exchanged by the units and persons of which it is thereby composed.”

— Donald Freeman, *Autonomy in Covenant*

Relying on the grace of God, we Covenant with God to:

- Love God with our whole being and to love our neighbors as ourselves.**
- Affirm and proclaim that Jesus Christ is the sole head of the church.**
- Celebrate that the Church is an outpouring of the gifts of God through the Holy Spirit, and though individual members and Local Churches contribute to it in their own contexts, the whole Church belongs to God.**
- Continue to deepen our faith and embody our unique ministry in the world using the Bible, traditions, experiences, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and other resources that inspire and guide faithful discernment.**
- Administer the sacraments of Baptism and Communion faithfully, recognizing the legacy of previous generations, the importance of our ecumenical commitments, and the calling of the Spirit in our own time.**

Relying on the grace of God, we Covenant with God to:

Continued...

- Demonstrate our living relationship with the still-speaking God by faithfully engaging spiritual practices.**
- Use with care and grace the theological symbols, images, and languages that best express our understandings of God, one another, and the world.**
- Care for God's creation through stewarding the resources of our planet for future generations.**
- Nurture the gifts of all members of the Church and cultivate a culture where those gifts can uplift the entire body of Christ.**
- Model the generous and just love of God for all people through our service and care for our local and global communities.**

Relying on the grace of God, we Covenant with Ourselves to:

- Discern the nature of our call as a Local Church using multiple resources including the Marks of Faithful and Vital Local Churches.**
- Steward the time, talents, and financial resources of the Local Church responsibly, with an appropriate balance of transparency and confidentiality.**
- Attend to the physical, spiritual, mental, and emotional well-being of our clergy, lay leaders, and members by sharing responsibilities and communicating clear expectations.**
- Have governance practices that are attentive to our faith community and context, as well as the law.**
- Accompany those in our communities whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by systemic injustice, violence, poverty, and abuse, while acknowledging our relationships to historic injustices.**

Relying on the grace of God, we Covenant with Ourselves to:

Continued...

- Foster honest and humble communication with one another, respecting the traditions and practices of diverse cultures and lineages.**
- Strive for just and equitable behaviors, policies, and practices in our congregation so all persons are free from threats, harm, abuse, discrimination, and exclusion.**
- Act when harm of any kind is reported or suspected to have occurred in our church, addressing it with courage and clarity.**
- Navigate conflict within our congregation with care towards the health of the whole church.**
- Assess our congregation's ministry regularly.**

Relying on the grace of God, we Covenant with other expressions of the United Church of Christ to:

- Participate in the covenantal life of the United Church of Christ, including with other Local Churches, the Association, Conference, General Synod, and national and global expressions of the Church.**
- Engage in activities that strengthen the denomination's mission, vision and purpose, including those that expand the tangible unity of all of Christ's followers.**
- Maintain Local Church Standing as set forth by the Association and be responsive to the guidance of the Association.**
- Honor the Search and Call processes of the United Church of Christ, including Conference practices, and strive to offer equitable compensation for all staff.**
- Support the wider expressions of the United Church of Christ through denominational support (Our Church's Wider Mission), special mission offerings, and other pledges, dues, and gifts.**

Relying on the grace of God, we Covenant with other expressions of the United Church of Christ to:

Continued...

- Seek the counsel of others, including Conference staff and/or the Association Committee on Ministry, should divisive tensions threaten our relationships within the congregation, pastoral leadership, or wider expressions of the United Church of Christ.
- Model ecumenical and interfaith engagement with respect and cultural humility, offering clarity about our beliefs while respecting the differing beliefs of others.
- Prayerfully consider the [Just World Covenants](#) and if entering into them, engage them with integrity and ongoing reflection.
- Utilize established processes to dissolve our covenant with our Association/Conference should our Local Church choose to end our ministry with the United Church of Christ.
- Strive to know, understand, and respect the diversity of perspectives within the United Church of Christ, affirming that all settings speak to the Local Church and not for it.

Local Church Governance

- Legal Status
- Constitutions and Bylaws
- Policies for Local Churches
- Membership
- Leadership in the Local Church

manual
on
church



**How does
your
church
nurture
leadership?**

manual
on
church



Local Church Standing, Support & Accountability

- Process of Local Church Standing
- Supporting new church starts
- Processes of Support
- Processes of Accountability

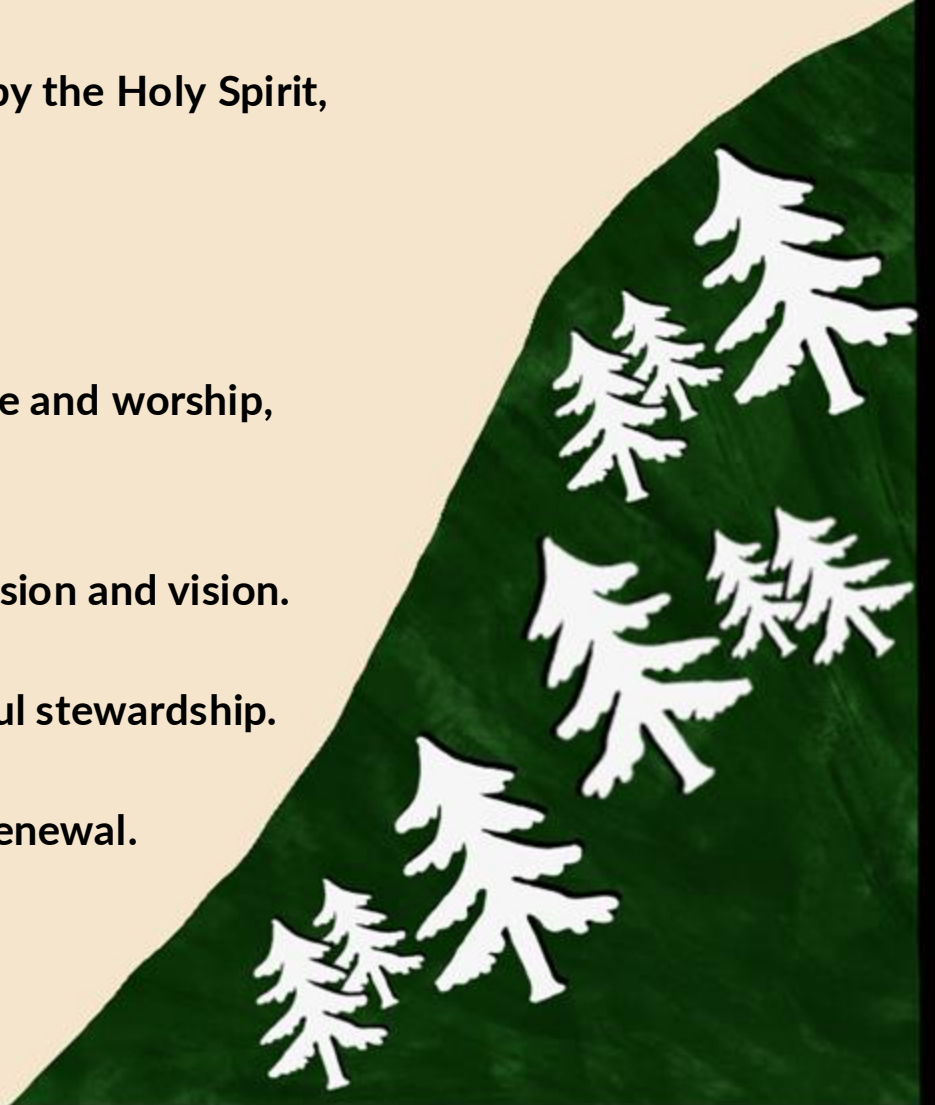


Marks for Faithful and Vital Local Churches

- The Marks for Faithful and Vital Local Churches were identified through CARDD research, interviews and surveys. They are also designed to mirror in style and format the Marks for Faithful and Effective Ministry from the Manual on Ministry (MOM).

Exhibiting a Spiritual Foundation and Ongoing Spiritual Practice

- Loving God, following Jesus Christ and his teachings, being guided by the Holy Spirit, and living a life of discipleship.
- Praying actively and embracing a diversity of spiritual practices.
- Creating space for the Holy Spirit to work through Christian practice and worship, including the sacraments.
- Practicing ongoing collective discernment of the Local Church's mission and vision.
- Showing a commitment to lifelong spiritual development and faithful stewardship.
- Encouraging opportunities for all to practice sabbath and spiritual renewal.



Engaging Sacred Stories and Traditions

- Exhibiting knowledge, understanding, and continuing study of Scriptures.
- Making relevant the sacred stories and traditions of the Gospel and the Local Church community in worship, proclamation, and witness.
- Embracing risk-taking and a spirit of innovation as exemplified in the Gospels.
- Understanding the history of the Christian Church and approaching the future of the Christian Church with curiosity and wonder.
- Creating faith formation opportunities across generations and learning styles.
- Shaping practices and liturgies so that all may experience love, belonging, and dignity.



Shaping Church Community

- Celebrating that all people are made in the image of God, and practicing an ongoing commitment to inclusion and accessibility.
- Relating to one another with gentleness, kindness, and compassion, with sympathy, empathy, and healthy, life-affirming behaviors.
- Welcoming the stranger into community and celebrating the transformation they bring to the Local Church.
- Developing healthy boundaries in relationships with one another and with pastoral leadership.
- Inspiring a culture of generosity and faithful stewardship, including the financial support of the Church.
- Creating and tending to faithful approaches to conflict.



Organizing Community with Intention

- Assessing the congregation's ministry to celebrate areas of vitality and discern areas needing attention or strengthening.
- Stewarding the resources of the Local Church wisely, using financial best practices and procedures for accountability.
- Maintaining transparent organizational policies that communicate roles, responsibilities, and expectations for staff and volunteers.
- Supporting employees with just and generous compensation and benefits, in conversation with Conference compensation guidelines.
- Balancing transparency and confidentiality appropriately in employment related decisions.
- Implementing safe conduct and abuse prevention practices and policies to foster a healthy environment for all people, particularly vulnerable individuals.



Building leadership Skills Within Local Churches

- Empowering the Church to be faithful to God's call, reflective of Christ's mission, and open to the Holy Spirit.
- Preparing the future of God's Church by fostering openness to change among leadership and creating responsive governance structures.
- Supporting and deepening the inextricable connection of faith and action.
- Nurturing gifts for ministry among lay people and equipping new generations of faith leaders.
- Working collaboratively with continuing commitment to intercultural awareness and sensitivity.
- Ensuring accountability, transparency, and responsibility through written policies, just practices, and regular assessment of ministry.



Caring for the Wider Community

- Providing hope and healing for one another and to a hurting world.
- Responding to the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of individuals and the community.
- Nurturing care and compassion for God's creation and those impacted by environmental harms.
- Practicing humility and respect with all people and groups who have been harmed by the Church or who are un/under-represented in the Church.
- Seeking to understand the lived experiences of the wider community, particularly those whose experiences differ from those in the Local Church in identity, ability, age, gender, race, and/or religion.
- Partnering with wider community groups by collaborating and being responsive to their directly expressed needs.



Working Together for Justice and Mercy

- Practicing the extravagant hospitality of Jesus in worship and community.
- Drawing on the liberating activity of God throughout Scripture to confront injustice and oppression locally and globally.
- Understanding community history and cultural context in order to be present to the needs of the community.
- Building relationships of mutual trust and interdependence, in order to better care for and be cared for by one another, always honoring the humanity of those with whom we partner.
- Dismantling physical and cultural barriers that hinder accessibility or inhibit connection or relationship with the Local Church and community.
- Identifying and working to overcome explicit and implicit biases in the life of the Church, including within the Local Church.



Living into UCC Identity

- Exhibiting a commitment to the core values of the United Church of Christ: continuing testament, extravagant welcome, and changing lives.
- Witnessing to the United Church of Christ value of inclusivity through loving God and neighbor.
- Celebrating the richness and diversity of UCC history and theology, and practicing UCC covenantal polity as a Local Church.
- Engaging with the various settings of the United Church of Christ, including other Local Churches, as well as the Association, Conference, General Synod, and global ministry partners.
- Demonstrating an appreciation for and participation in the ecumenical and interfaith partnerships of the UCC and participating in local partnerships.
- Living in covenantal relationship by practicing the UCC Congregational Code.

Q & A





It's Time to Engage the Whole Church!

Why is this?

To fulfill the mission that the UCC has proclaimed in faith.

Who is this for?

Current and Future Local Churches and the settings in covenant with them.

What is it for?

To guide local churches towards faith and vitality and offer a framework for covenantal relationships through which they can grow.

Our Hope

In the lead up to Synod 35:

- That local churches realize the wealth of wisdom and support available in the manual and in their Associations/Conferences.
- That local churches see it as a means for connectedness.
- That it ignites deep reflection and conversation around covenant.
- That Local Churches, Conferences and Associations see and experience themselves as part of the process.

In the ongoing life of the UCC:

- That people use it!
- That communities see it as a tool to develop relationship.
- That it is used and understood as a guide for, and reflection of, the diversity of Local Churches in the UCC.



Offer Feedback!

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/
MLCpresentation](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/MLCpresentation)



End.

Shall we have a prayer?

