



A SURE FOUNDATION

resources for the relationship
between pastors and congregations

ETHICAL CODES

in this section

- UCC Ministerial Code (*Manual on Ministry*, 2018 edition)
 - Local Church in Relation to Its Pastor (*Manual on Ministry*, 1986 edition)
 - Behavioral Covenants for Congregations
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ucc ministerial code

All persons with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ are expected to abide by the UCC Ministerial Code.

I acknowledge as the Church's sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior, and as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. I will look to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world.¹

Affirming that I have been called by God to be a minister of the Lord Jesus Christ and granted ministerial standing by the United Church of Christ, I agree to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church with integrity, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership in covenant with others.

Relying on the grace of God, I...

COVENANT WITH GOD TO:

- Lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.
- Demonstrate a sincere yearning for connection with the triune God, expressed in prayer, worship, Bible study, retreat, and other spiritual practices.
- Affirm the importance of discernment in relationship to my call and, using the Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers, will continue to discern the nature of my call in community.

¹ Preamble to the United Church of Christ Constitution

- Grow in faith, knowledge, and the practice of ministry through intentional continuing education, study, and devotional life.
- Cultivate a culture of call by nurturing the gifts of others in the Church and joining their gifts with mine in seasons of change and continuity for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ and the health of the Church.
- Honor the diversity of God's creation and work for the unity of the body of Christ (John 17:21).
- Recognize the communal nature of God, ensuring that ministry does not happen in isolation.

COVENANT WITH SELF AND FAMILY TO:

- Attend to my physical well-being by adopting a healthy life style including diet, exercise, and rest, setting aside time for Sabbath and vacation.
- Steward my time, talents, and personal financial resources responsibly.
- Accept responsibility for all debts that I incur.
- Refrain from abusive behavior including abusive behavior toward others; the abuse of alcohol, drugs, or any other substance; to seek appropriate care for physical and mental health concerns; and to avoid addictive behaviors.
- Engage in sexually healthy and responsible behavior.
- Honor my family commitments, including my family's need for privacy and time together.
- Develop and maintain meaningful personal relationships outside of my ministry setting.

COVENANT WITH THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST TO:

- Actively participate in the covenantal life and work of all settings of the United Church of Christ.
- Adhere to all requirements for maintaining ministerial standing as set forth by my Association, and abide by the terms of my call agreements and covenants with energy and vitality.
- Seek the counsel of others, including Conference staff and/or the Association Committee on the Ministry, should divisive tensions threaten my relationship with those with whom I minister.
- Serve as an ambassador for the United Church of Christ, and participate in activities that strengthen its mission, vision and purpose.
- Advocate for fair standards of compensation for all ordained and lay employees of the Church, and honor the search and call process of the United Church of Christ.
- Seek to know, understand and respect the diversity of opinions and people within the United Church of Christ, affirming that all settings of the UCC speak to the church and not for it.
- Encourage and participate in the evaluation of my ministry, understanding and demonstrating that ministry is of and for the Church as it seeks to advance God's mission in the world.

COVENANT WITH MY MINISTRY SETTING TO:

- Preach and teach the gospel without fear or favor, regarding all persons with equal respect and concern, and undertaking to minister impartially.
- Honor all confidences shared with me; telling only those who need to know, what they need to know, when they need to know it.
- Steward church funds and property faithfully, while overseeing the administrative tasks of ministry with integrity.
- Speak the truth in love, not using my position, power, or authority to exploit any person nor using my position for unwarranted personal gain, including financial gain.
- Assess with care the implications of accepting gifts from congregation members.
- Not perform pastoral services within a congregation or for a member of a congregation, without the invitation of the current pastor of that congregation.
- Neither interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor upon my departure from a ministry setting; and to deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.

COVENANT WITH ALL MINISTERS TO:

- Work cooperatively and collegially, with intercultural awareness.
 - Stand in mutual relationships with colleagues in ministry, offering and receiving counsel and support with intentionality.
 - Use technology and social media responsibly.
 - Act to prevent and to report known or suspected cases of physical or sexual abuse or neglect.
 - Attribute the sources of words and ideas that are not my own.
 - Accurately represent my professional qualifications, education, experience and affiliations, acknowledging the limitations of my office, abilities, skills and competencies, and making referrals when necessary and/or appropriate.
 - Maintain appropriate boundaries and practice self-differentiation in both my personal and professional life, including within the Local Church where I hold membership.
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the local church in relation to its pastor

THE MINISTRY

This local church recognizes itself as a part of the people of God and fulfills its purpose as it becomes a community for ministry and mission. We recognize our pastor as a person called by God who has attained particular skill and competence in leading our local church in fulfilling its mission and ministry.

We have called our pastor to preach and teach the gospel, to administer the sacraments and rites of the Church, and to exercise pastoral care and leadership. As we expect the pastor to be responsible in preaching and teaching the gospel and in administering the sacraments and rites, so will we be responsible for receiving and heeding the Word of God that comes through the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments and for responding to the pastoral care and leadership offered.

PARTNERSHIP IN MINISTRY

We believe that the ministry and mission of the Church are given to all baptized Christians. We will nurture and join our gifts for ministry with those of the pastor in the Church and in the world.

In all matters pertaining to the life, organization, and mission of this local church, we will work cooperatively and collegially with the pastor. We recognize that our church and our pastor are part of the larger faith community that is the United Church of Christ, and we will be and will support our pastor in being responsible participants in our Association, the Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

We recognize that our church and our pastor are part of the Church Universal, and we will be and will support our pastor in being responsible participants in ecumenical activities in order to strengthen the unity, witness, and mission of the Church everywhere.

THE ETHICS OF MINISTRY

We will regard all persons with equal respect and concern and will support and expect our pastor to undertake to minister impartially. We will not discriminate against any person, group or

organization on the basis of race, gender, age, sexual orientation, faith, nationality, ethnicity, marital status, or physical, mental, or emotional disability.

We recognize that we have called our pastor as the pastoral leader of this local church, and we will not invite other pastors to provide pastoral services within this church or to members of this church without our pastor's consent.

We recognize and respect that our pastor receives confidential and privileged communication. We will establish policies regarding baptism, communion, marriages, funerals, and the use of church facilities and personnel in consultation with our pastor and will honor them in our life as a local church.

We respect the privacy of the pastor's family and the family's right to time together without interruption.

We do not expect the pastor's family to assume roles of leadership or levels of involvement beyond the family's wishes.

We recognize that conflict or tension between our pastor and the local church can arise. Should divisive tensions threaten our life together, we will seek the counsel of the Conference or Association Minister or the Association Committee on the Ministry.

COMMITMENTS IN MINISTRY

We recognize the many and diverse expectations we have of our pastor, and we will offer our support through prayer, encouragement, and partnership in the ministry of this church.

We recognize our responsibility to provide our pastor with adequate compensation and fringe benefits. We will make these decisions in consultation with our pastor and in light of the compensation guidelines established by our Conference. We will provide for an annual review of compensation that considers effectiveness, cost of living, ministerial competence, and years of service.

We recognize our pastor's need for physical and spiritual renewal, and we will provide adequate time and resources for study, devotion, leisure, vacation, and sabbatical.

Relying on the grace of God, we will lead lives worthy of the calling to which we have been called.



behavioral covenants for congregations

THEOLOGICAL GROUNDING

God calls us into holy relationship with one another, sharing our joys and sorrows, building each other up in truth and love, and exhorting us to forgive and seek forgiveness. The Bible is full of passages and stories that speak to these values, particularly in a congregational context. In particular, Matthew 18 and Ephesians 4:15 are commonly cited to outline the importance of honest, direct communication within a congregation. How people treat one another within the church reflects on how people tend to treat others outside the walls of the church.

Much of the time, congregants treat each other with kindness and grace, observing boundaries of appropriate behavior and striving to respond to conflict faithfully. Such graces include the importance of telling one's own truth and listening respectfully to others' truths, holding confidences appropriately, assuming good intent, seeking reconciliation directly from one who has hurt another, and approaching matters in a spirit of prayer. Sometimes, however, certain behaviors undercut the values the congregation professes to hold, such as gossip, slander, "parking lot" conversations that denigrate decisions made or those who made them, and inappropriate comments to or about one another (including pastoral leadership or the wider church).

OVERVIEW

Behavioral Covenants provide the opportunity for a congregation to name its best values around communication and conflict. These covenants work best when they are rooted in the core values and mission of the congregation, and when members have the opportunity to participate in the covenant's creation and periodic renewal. The true power of a Behavioral Covenant, however, comes from the congregation's willingness to hold each other accountable to that covenant. When someone acts contrary to the Behavioral Covenant, church leadership must be willing to refer back to this shared document, to say, "This behavior is not appropriate," and to mutually create a plan for reconciliation.

Behavioral Covenants describe norms for interpersonal behavior, outlining respectful face-to-face conduct, appropriate conduct via email or social media, and norms for physical contact. All physical contact within the church must be respectful, consensual, and mutually welcome. The

use of demeaning, sexually inappropriate, or unwelcome language or physical contact, regardless of to whom it is directed, is inappropriate.²

Finally, Behavioral Covenants help congregations develop tools for working through challenging decisions by placing the common good of the community at the forefront, rather than prioritizing an individual's "wants" in any given situation. A Behavioral Covenant that prioritizes the health and vitality of the community will prioritize those needs, even when that means making difficult decisions. The goal is not for everyone to be happy but for everyone to be able to have a voice in decisions that affect the congregation.

From time to time, a congregation may need to develop a Behavioral Covenant that is specific to one individual within the congregation. This may be because of legal requirements (such as a registered sex offender who wants to join the church), previous conduct (such as abusive speech or conduct towards the pastor or others in the church), or for other reasons. These individualized Behavioral Covenants should be consistent with the congregation's Behavioral Covenant and tailored to the specific needs of the situation. Association or Conference staff should be a resource in the development of such a resource.

SAMPLES

The Discernment Travelogue's "Rules of the Road"³ provide a faithful roadmap for the creation of such a document, as well as some excellent samples of what to include in a Behavioral Covenant:

- Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome to and from others.
- Listen generously and suspend judgment about another's story. Hold stories with care and respect.
- Author your own story and share your own gifts.
- Wonder. Welcome discomfort. Love the questions.
- Be mindful and respectful of time.
- Practice hospitality and inclusion, especially when diverse cultures meet. There are many excellent methods for discernment but not all of them model intercultural awareness; therefore be discerning about discernment together: appreciate many ways of hearing God together.
- Believe that it is possible to emerge from our time together refreshed, surprised, and less burdened than when we came.

² The Insurance Board's Safe Conduct Workbench describes sexual harassment in detail and this resource may be helpful as congregations consider incorporating sexual harassment materials into their Behavioral Covenant; it is available here: http://www.insuranceboard.org/safety_solutions/safe_conduct_workbench.aspx

³ The Discernment Travelogue is available here: <https://www.uccresources.com/products/a-discernment-travelogue?variant=17675334660> and is also available in Spanish and Samoan.

Some congregations use Eric Law's Respectful Communications Guidelines⁴ as a model:

- R – take **Responsibility** for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E – use **Empathetic** listening
- S – be **Sensitive** to differences in communication/cultural styles
- P – **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak
- E – **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions
- C – keep **Confidentiality**
- T – **Tolerate** ambiguity because we are not here to debate. There are no “winners” or “losers.”

One congregation modeled its Behavioral Covenant on scripture; it is shared here with permission:

“Love your neighbor as you love yourself” (Matthew 22:39). As we walk together in all God's ways made known or to be made known to us, we seek to discern and do what is best for our church as a whole, not what may be best for individuals or factions (Philippians 2:4). We recognize that conflict and disagreement are normal and natural. We welcome a wide variety of voices and ideas when they are expressed in a way that reflects God's love.

As followers of Jesus Christ we promise to respect each other at all times in the following ways:

- We will approach all things in prayer. (1 Thessalonians 5:17)
- We will speak from our own personal experience. (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- We will speak face-to-face, honestly and without rancor when there is disagreement. (Ephesians 4:15)
- We will listen with an open and non-judgmental mind and try as hard to understand as to be understood. (Proverbs 4:7)
- If we are unable to effectively communicate with each other, we will ask a third party to be present to assist us. (Matthew 18:16)
- We will support the final outcome of the decision-making process. (1 Corinthians 1:10)
- As forgiven people, we will choose to forgive one another. (Luke 11:4) In the spirit of Jesus, and with God's help, we will show respect and love in all we do as we journey together.

⁴ These guidelines are found here: <http://www.kscopeinstitute.org/respectful-communication-guidelines/> and are also available in Spanish, French, Chinese, and Korean.

Another congregation calls its Behavioral Covenant a “Covenant for Christian Communication.” It too is shared with permission:

As people called to follow our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, we acknowledge His teaching in Matthew 18:15-17, 21-22 and the Holy Spirit’s leadership in Ephesians 4:15 concerning communication. As a Christian congregation in covenant with Christ as the Head of the Church, we accept responsibility to make God’s teaching our watchwords.

- When we hear something that raises concerns for us, we shall first make every effort to speak directly, one-to-one with the person involved. A deacon or the pastor(s) may be asked to coach us in advance, or to be present to witness communication as Jesus specifies at step two of the Matthew 18 process. If talking one-to-one or with one or two others fails, then concerns may be referred to the relevant group in the church or as a last resort to the whole congregation.
- In order to speak truth in love, we shall speak for ourselves using “I” statements, not claim to represent others or use accusatory “you” statements.
- When difficult subjects need to be named, we shall pray for all concerned and seek guidance of the diaconate and/or pastor(s) for help in speaking truth in love.
- We accept that understanding and respecting each other does *not* necessarily mean agreeing with each other.
- We affirm that the Holy Spirit may speak through any of us, so that all of us deserve a respectful hearing, even though congregational decisions are made by majority vote.
- While all people are welcome in Christian communities, behavior that is unchristian (for example: threatening, taunting, demeaning harassing or attacking) conflicts with Christ’s teaching and will not be tolerated.

While these covenants primarily focus on verbal behavior and listening, it is important to include commitments to abide by other guidelines established by the congregation, including Safe Conduct policies.

Congregations that use their Behavioral Covenants faithfully still experience conflict and disagreement, but they respond to those situations with a guideline that models respect, care, and Christian concern for the well-being of the entire body.

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a just world for all