

FAQ Sheet

Answering UCC Questions Relating to UMC Clergy – March 2019

Conferences and Committees on Ministry are hearing with some frequency questions about movement of United Methodist ordained clergy (“elders”) into the United Church of Christ as Ministers of Word and Sacrament. Since the nature of our polity is local decision-making under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Associations are central in answering these questions through the deliberation of a Committee on Ministry. For clarity and consistency, the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization (MESA) Team restates the following information. This information can also be found in the [Manual on Ministry](#), or in other resources cited below.

FAQs

Q: How might United Methodist clergypersons enter the clergy of the United Church of Christ?

A: Each ordained minister can proceed to engage the Privilege of Call process with an Association local to them. The UCC and the UMC do not have a denomination-to-denomination ecumenical agreement regarding clergy. The Privilege of Call process relates to all clergy from bodies with which the United Church of Christ does not have such an ecumenical agreement.

Note that Privilege of Call is different from Dual Standing. Dual Standing for a minister of another denomination might apply if that minister already is serving in the UCC, for as long as they are serving in that setting. Dual Standing temporarily adds the oversight of a UCC Committee on Ministry. However, Dual Standing does not transfer primary oversight of that minister (primary oversight still belongs to the home denomination), and Dual Standing does not confer eligibility to seek a future call in the UCC.

Q: Can a United Methodist chaplain receive UCC endorsement?

A: Ecclesiastical Endorsements, whether for government agencies or professional organizations, are not transferrable between denominations. In the United Church of Christ, Ordained Ministerial Standing is required for ecclesiastical endorsement. Therefore, a minister must be granted Ordained Ministerial Standing through their Committee on Ministry before applying for endorsement. A minister granted Dual Standing does not qualify for UCC ecclesiastical

endorsement. If a chaplain is already endorsed and is newly coming into the United Church of Christ, this chaplain should undertake the endorsement process at the same time as the Privilege of Call process. Always contact the UCC's denominational endorsement office.

Q: What are the requirements of the Privilege of Call process?

A: The requirements for Privilege of Call are spelled out in the [Manual on Ministry](#), pgs. 44-47, and include a course on UCC history, polity, and theology, and other documentation by the minister meeting the COM's standards for "The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ." Privilege of Call, once granted, confers the ability of a minister to seek a call through circulating a UCC Ministerial Profile.

The process of Privilege of Call is a relational discernment process that takes time, just as it takes time afterward to seek a UCC pastorate or a ministerial position with a UCC-recognized calling body. It is important to note that the outcome is intended to transfer a minister's standing with oversight from their denomination of origin into standing with oversight from the United Church of Christ, upon the receipt of a UCC call. Once a minister has received a call in a church (Three-Way Covenant) or on behalf of the church in a specialized ministry setting (Four-Way Covenant), then Privilege of Call status is concluded and Ordained Ministerial Standing begins.

Q: What are common expectations and researched data regarding a UCC call?

A: In the United Church of Christ there is not a centralized system of supply and demand between pastors and churches, either nationally or at the Conference scale. Calls are extended by a Local Church, entering into a Three-Way Covenant with the Association, or by professional settings that enter into a Four-Way Covenant with the Local Church and the Association. Ministers are authorized by their Association's Committee on Ministry to seek a call throughout the system nationwide and/or to serve on behalf of the UCC in specialized settings such as chaplaincy. Expectations vary across UCC settings. The total number of UCC churches is 4,956. The number of UCC ordained ministers is 9,876, which includes parish pastors, retired ministers, unclassified ministers, and ministers serving on behalf of UCC Local Churches in specialized settings. For further information on United Church of Christ demographics see: [2018 UCC Statistical Profile](#). Regarding the experience of Open and Affirming settings in pastoral Search and Call, see recent MESA research published by the Center for Analytics, Data, and Research: "[What Ministers Should Expect in an ONA Denomination.](#)"

Q: What might prospective future ministers consider as they inquire about the Member in Discernment process?

A: Those who are not yet ordained might be interested in preparing for the ordained ministry by joining a Local Church with standing in the UCC, and by approaching the respective UCC Association for Member In Discernment status. The association's Committee on Ministry, during this 1-7 year process, will be looking for ministerial candidates who have a heart for relational leadership in the United Church of Christ, not merely for those seeking a convenient arena in which to exercise an earned credential. Members In Discernment are expected to learn the history, theology, and polity of the United Church of Christ, and overall to demonstrate the abilities named "The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers," as specified in [Manual on Ministry](#), pgs. 1-17; 19-34.

Q: What is the process for churches that might seek UCC standing as a congregation, alongside seeking UCC ministerial standing for their clergy?

A: A Committee on Ministry can consider receiving the standing of affiliating churches on a case-by-case basis. This process is separate from, but may proceed alongside, the process of a minister seeking UCC Ordained Ministerial Standing.

The affiliation process referenced in the 2005 draft Manual on Church was last described in the online resource: "[Considering a New Church Covenant](#) in the United Church of Christ: A Process for Exploring, Developing, and Affirming New Relationships." This resource, now dated, was developed to answer congregations' questions. It should be accompanied by current information from a COM about the UCC as a denomination, including the latest materials from UCC Resources, and the polity video series "[Who We Are](#)." At an early juncture, a COM will ask questions about the standing of a church within its home judicatory. If the church still has standing within a United Methodist body, the COM will encourage any individual UMC church to seek counsel from its related UMC judicatory body. Dual Affiliation for congregations also exists, and a historical report from 2015 can be found online: "[Multiply-Affiliated Congregations](#) in the United Church of Christ."

Q: Is there a process for affiliation by a group of non-UCC congregations who are seeking United Church of Christ standing as their own regional decision-making body?

A: No documentation on such a process exists, beyond precedent. Conversation if initiated by the non-UCC regional decision-making body would proceed more widely than the Committee on Ministry, to include UCC conference and national settings.

Q: What is the status of an agreement including the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church through Churches Uniting in Christ (formerly COCU)?

A: UCC and UMC are not currently part of a full communion agreement, though other significant relationships exist. Ten communions have had ongoing historical dialogue within the ecumenical process known as “Churches Uniting in Christ.” The member churches of CUIC include the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal Church, the International Council of Community Churches, the Moravian Church (Northern Province), the Presbyterian Church (USA), the United Church of Christ and the United Methodist Church. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is a partner in mission and dialogue. The goal of discussions beginning in the 1960s was to bring together historically-white and African-descended churches. This dialogue has proceeded along different lines from those generating bilateral and multilateral agreements, and therefore “orderly exchange” has not been achieved, in contrast to Formula of Agreement and Ordained Ministerial Partnership agreements in which the UCC participates. More information is available at: <https://churchesunitinginchrist.org>. See *Manual on Ministry*, pgs. 35-43, for more information on ecumenical agreements in which the UCC participates.

Q: How does UCC polity compare to UMC polity?

A: There are a number of differences, including the location of ministerial oversight (*episcopate*) and a covenantal versus connectional polity.

For United Methodists, support and accountability for ministers are located in the office of a bishop, and there is a tradition of both itinerancy and “guaranteed appointment.” For the United Church of Christ, support and accountability for ministers are located in the Association made up of lay delegates and clergy, and while there is clergy mobility across Conferences, there is no guaranteed employment.

A connectional polity means that United Methodist churches belong to one another with specific material obligations to one another, including property that under certain conditions belongs to the UMC conference, not the congregation. A covenantal polity in the United Church of Christ ensures the local autonomy of each congregation, allowing them to choose to enter into responsible partnership with each other through intermediary settings and instrumentalities.