Proposal to Covenant with other Associations in the Michigan Conference, United Church of Christ to participate in a Unified Committee on Ministry (UCoM)
Final Draft 2026

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Background

- Over the years, Members-in-Discernment, Committee on Ministry (COM) members, and Conference staff have expressed concerns about the ability of the current COM structure to effectively fulfill all of the responsibilities of the COM in a consistent and effective way.
- A description of all of the COM responsibilities was presented at a COM training retreat in March 2025 (all Association COMs were invited). Conversation around tables led to a general sense that COMs were not doing all of the work that they would like to be doing. Especially difficult are the processes that only happen periodically and consistency in the Member-in-Discernment process.
- There was general agreement that working together across associations could be beneficial.
- Other Associations/Conferences in the UCC were researched for models of a Unified Committee on Ministry. Feedback revealed that a unified structure was particularly helpful in creating consistency and gaining experience and expertise by specializing in a few areas of work.
- Over the summer (2025), a group of COM members volunteered to work on this possibility for Michigan. A video introduction was disseminated in September and a workshop was led by this group at the Michigan Conference Annual Meeting in October. Excitement about moving this forward was expressed and the organizing COM group presented a draft time-line and proposal in November/December 2025.

A Brief Review of United Church of Christ Committee on Ministry Responsibilities

- Ministerial Authorization:
  - Members-in-Discernment
  - Lay Ministry Standing/ Licensed Ministers
- Ministerial Standing:
  - Calls, Covenants, and Endorsements
  - Leave of absence, exempt standing, transfer of standing
  - Ecumenically Ordained Ministers: Privilege of Call, Dual Standing, Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing
- Ministerial Support and Accountability
  - Vocational Support Consultations
  - Peer support
  - Periodic Vocational Support
  - Situational Support
  - Information Reviews
  - Fitness Reviews

- Church Support and Accountability
    - Church support consultations
    - New church starts
    - Local church standing
    - Exit Interviews
    - Farewell services

Scriptural Reflections

- *Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?* (I Corinthians 12:27-30)
    - The Committee on Ministry has many responsibilities: discernment, oversight, listening, encouraging, decision-making, support, celebrating, record-keeping, praying, organizing, formation, and more. Many gifts are needed for this work.
    - The proposed unified structure will allow team members to focus on particular work to be done in a more specialized fashion. UCoM members will be invited to participate with their particular gifts and passions for their part of the work, rather than expecting everyone to have expertise in all of the work.

- *Neither is new wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved. (*Matthew 9:17)
    - The 2018 Manual on Ministry proposes new ways of support and accountability in the United Church of Christ. It suggests that a competency-based evaluation (Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers) for those seeking authorization in the UCC is more faithful and effective in preparing people for ordained or lay/licensed ministry. It imagines covenants between clergy and their ministry setting, naming expectations of each partner in ministry. It provides many new resources for the ministry of the Committee on Ministry.
    - The Unified Committee on Ministry structure is intended to help our COMs do their work in a new and more effective way. The new structure itself will free us up to think creatively and focus strategically. It will bring strengths from different areas together.
    - The vision is preparation, support, connection, and oversight that meets the varied needs of those engaged in ministry across all of the Associations of the Michigan Conference UCC.
    - Sometimes new structures serve as better containers for ministry.

Proposal Summary and Rationales

- The five Associations of the Michigan Conference of the United Church of Christ will delegate the work of the Committee on Ministry to a Unified Committee on Ministry.

The UCoM will be a Committee formed by the Associations of the Michigan Conference, staffed by Conference staff at the direction of the Conference Minister.

- The proposed unified structure will focus expertise on a smaller number of tasks. This will result in more consistency and allow the group to develop experience in a specialized area. Bringing COM members from across associations will increase diversity in the committee across contexts. This diversity is important, as authorization for ministry is for the whole UCC, not just a particular Association. Support and accountability processes are also aided by this diversity, increasing resources and reducing conflicts of interest.
- Training each team for their particular work will be more effective in providing consistent support and accountability for authorized ministers and churches.
- A Coordinating Team will take responsibility for the ongoing training of members of the other four teams.
- A Unified Committee on Ministry may make more effective use of staff time. Equipping teams to do their work more effectively with focused training may lessen the need for staff to be the "experts" in the room and/or to carry the work of the committee outside of the team meetings.
- A number of UCC Conferences and Associations have moved to a Unified Committee on Ministry model and find that the specialization is particularly helpful.

Process and Polity

UCC Constitution https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/constitution-and-bylaws/ :

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- An Association is related to the General Synod through its Conference.

UCC Bylaws https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/constitution-and-bylaws/ :

- An Association ordains, commissions, and licenses qualified candidates; grants standing as a covenantal relationship with Ordained Ministers, Licensed Ministers, Commissioned Ministers, and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; certifies to, transfers, and terminates Ordained Ministerial Standing, Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, commissioned ministerial standing and licenses; installs Ordained Ministers and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; covenants with Licensed Ministers, Commissioned Ministers, and the Local Churches to which they are called; grants Privilege of Call and Leaves of Absence; reviews and ecclesiastically oversees Ordained, Commissioned, and Licensed Ministers and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; and verifies that

an Ordained Ministerial Partner has demonstrated knowledge of, and appreciation for, the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ.

Unified Committee on Ministry implications:

- The United Church of Christ covenants with Associations and Conferences to fulfill its ministry in the world. Associations covenanting together to fulfill the ministry of the Committee on Ministry work mirrors this covenantal relationship.
- Each Association will fulfill its responsibilities as indicated in the UCC Constitution and Bylaws and its own Constitution and Bylaws by participating in each of the UCoM Teams (see Team composition below).
- All outcomes rendered by the UCoM will be received and accepted by the Association.
- Conference staff will provide support for each of the teams.

Composition of the Unified Committee on Ministry

- Each participating Association will elect 2 members (1 lay and 1 clergy) to each of the four working UCoM Teams.
- An additional person will be elected by each Association to serve on the Coordinating Team as an At-Large member.
- Four working teams will be:
    - Ministerial Authorization Team
    - Ministerial Standing Team
    - Ministerial Support and Accountability Team
    - Church Support and Accountability Team
- A Coordinating Team will include a Team Leader elected by UCoM members, a registrar, 4 team leaders (from the working teams), and 5 at-large members (one from each association).
- Team leaders will be elected by the team.
- A registrar will be appointed by the Coordinating Team.
- In making its choices, Associations will consider the balance of gender, clergy, lay Committee members, as well as the skills and experience needed for effective service on the particular team, while being mindful of guidance provided by the Bylaws of the Conference with regard to diversity of nominees.
- The Unified Committee on Ministry will be staffed by Conference staff at the direction of the Conference Minister.
- The term of service for each member will be two years. The Association may choose to renew a member of the UCM team for up to two more terms of service, after confirming the member's willingness to continue to serve.
- Initially there would be a staggered term of service established. A portion of the first class will hold one year or two year terms. All those serving may have their membership renewed for up to three full two-year terms.
- The following qualifications are recommended.
    - Ability to address difficult and important issues in a faithful, discerning manner
    - Patience, prayer, preparation and stamina
    - Passionate commitment to Christ's church
    - Grounding in a discerning relationship with God
    - Ability to work cooperatively and collaboratively with others

- Ability to apply deep listening skills – both with interviewees and fellow committee members
- Attentiveness to details
- Positive attitude
- Capacity to approach the task with openness, rather than a pre-determined agenda
- A sense of integrity, and respect for others
- Ability to hold information confidentially (sharing information only with those who need to know, when they need to know)
- Capacity to participate in a group and to come to consensus
- Active supporter of the church, Association, and Conference
- Recognition for wisdom, integrity, openness, and ability to be fair and impartial
- Trust and respect within and by the Association
- Willingness to serve for at least 2 years

Principle Responsibilities of Unified Committee on Ministry Members

- To act in cooperation with other UCoM members, in accordance with the current UCC Manual on Ministry, UCC Manual on Church, and with the procedures identified in this document, along with any additional procedures adopted by the UCoM itself.
- To communicate progress and decisions for authorized ministers and churches with the Association of their standing.
- To hold information confidentially (sharing information only with those who need to know, when they need to know)
- To receive training from time to time to enhance appropriate skills.
- To share mutual responsibility, to participate, to ask questions and share opinions about the important issues before the committee.
- To support the clergy and local churches in preserving and extending covenantal relationships.

Proposed Operating Procedures

- Each team of the UCoM will organize itself to carry out the specific work assigned to that team (guided by the current UCC Manual on Ministry and UCC Manual on Church). Its organization may vary depending on the team's needs. It would also be free to consult with whomever it chooses, recognizing the necessity of maintaining strict confidentiality.
- Teams will meet at least 10 times per year
- Four working teams will carry out the work of the Committee on Ministry
- Ministerial Authorization Team
    - Manual on Ministry responsibilities from sections 2:1 and 2:4
        - Members-in-Discernment
        - Ministerial Standing for Lay Persons
- Ministerial Standing Team
    - Manual on Ministry responsibilities from sections 2:2, 2:3, and 2:5
        - Ordained Ministerial Standing
        - Ecumenically Ordained Ministers
        - Covenants and Endorsements

- Ministerial Support and Accountability Team
    - Manual on Ministry responsibilities from section 2:6
        - Support Processes
        - Accountability Processes (including Fitness Reviews)
- Church Support and Accountability
    - Manual on Church responsibilities
- Coordinating Team
    - Oversee and support the work of four working teams
    - Communicate processes and decisions to Association governing bodies regularly, as appropriate
    - Fulfill registrar responsibilities
    - Coordinate registrar responsibilities with Conference registrar
    - Plan and implement training for UCoM members
    - Hear Fitness Review appeals
    - Other coordinating work as needed

- The UCoM teams will meet at least annually for training, support and evaluation. The Coordinating Team will be responsible for scheduling these activities (in coordination with Conference staff).

Adoption and Initial Organization and Roles

- Adoption of this proposal and proposed Association bylaw revisions with a ⅔ majority vote, by no fewer than four Associations will initiate the formation of the Unified Committee on Ministry.
- Any Association not voting in the affirmative would not be represented on the UCoM. The Conference will continue to provide staff support to non-participating Associations.
- The UCoM will be identified as a "Committee formed by the Associations of the Michigan Conference."
- When all nominees are identified, the Conference Minister or his/her designee will convene the first meetings of the UCoM teams. At that first meeting, among other things, the UCoM will elect a Chair and begin to self-organize.
- The goal is to implement this model starting September 1, 2026 or no later than January 1, 2027. Terms will initially begin with training in the summer of 2026.

Suggested Association Bylaws Revision

- The _____ Association covenants with other Associations of the Michigan Conference UCC to participate in a Unified Committee on Ministry (UCoM). The Association retains the right and responsibility to elect members of the UCoM to fulfill the responsibilities of the Association Committee on Ministry in this unified structure.
- The Association covenants with other Associations in the Michigan Conference UCC to fulfill the Committee on Ministry responsibilities named in the UCC Constitution https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/constitution-and-bylaws/ and UCC Bylaws https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/constitution-and-bylaws/ :
    - 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.

    - 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.
    - An Association ordains, commissions, and licenses qualified candidates; grants standing as a covenantal relationship with Ordained Ministers, Licensed Ministers, Commissioned Ministers, and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; certifies to, transfers, and terminates Ordained Ministerial Standing, Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, commissioned ministerial standing and licenses; installs Ordained Ministers and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; covenants with Licensed Ministers, Commissioned Ministers, and the Local Churches to which they are called; grants Privilege of Call and Leaves of Absence; reviews and ecclesiastically oversees Ordained, Commissioned, and Licensed Ministers and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; and verifies that an Ordained Ministerial Partner has demonstrated knowledge of, and appreciation for, the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ.
- Primary responsibilities of the UCoM include:
    - To fulfill the particular Association COM responsibilities designated to their team:
        - Ministerial Authorization Team (Manual on Ministry responsibilities from sections 2:1 and 2:4)
            - Members-in-Discernment
            - Ministerial Standing for Lay Persons
        - Ministerial Standing Team (Manual on Ministry responsibilities from sections 2:2, 2:3, and 2:5)
            - Ordained Ministerial Standing
            - Ecumenically Ordained Ministers
            - Calls, Covenants, and Endorsements
        - Ministerial Support and Accountability Team (Manual on Ministry responsibilities from section 2:6)
            - Support Processes
            - Accountability Processes (including Fitness Reviews)
        - Church Support and Accountability (Manual on Church responsibilities)
            - Process the granting and removal of standing of local churches and bringing a recommendation to the Association for final approval
            - Other support for local churches
        - Coordinating Team
            - Oversee and support the work of four working teams
            - Communicate processes and decisions to Association governing bodies regularly, as appropriate
            - Fulfill registrar responsibilities

        - Coordinate registrar responsibilities with Conference registrar
        - Plan and implement training for UCoM members
        - Hear Fitness Review appeals
        - Other coordinating work as needed
    - The UCoM teams will meet at least annually for training, support and evaluation. The Coordinating Team will be responsible for scheduling these activities (in coordination with Conference staff).
    - To cooperate with other UCoM members, with primary guidance from the current UCC Manual on Ministry, UCC Manual on Church, and with the procedures identified in this document, along with any additional procedures adopted by the UCoM itself.
    - To communicate to the Association decisions made regarding Members-in-Discernment, authorized ministers, and churches in the Association.
    - To honor confidentiality.
    - To receive training from time to time to enhance appropriate skills.
    - To share mutual responsibility, to participate, to ask questions and share opinions about the important issues before the committee.
    - To support the clergy and local churches in preserving and extending covenantal relationships.
- All outcomes rendered by the Unified Committee on Ministry will be received and accepted by the Association as final.
- The Association maintains the right to rescind its participation in the Unified Committee on Ministry at a regular or specially called meeting of the Association and a ⅔ majority vote, with at least 6 months' notice and good faith attempts to resolve concerns.

Adoption Process:

Move that the _____ Association adopt this proposal to covenant with other Associations in the Michigan Conference United Church of Christ to participate in the Unified Committee on Ministry, beginning no later than January 1, 2027.

Second

Discussion

Vote (⅔ majority of voting delegates at the meeting is required)

Adopted at a meeting of the _____ Association on _____ (date).

Separate motion to amend the bylaws by striking previous references to the Committee on Ministry/Church and Ministry Committee and inserting the proposed language (see above for a sample).

Covenant

Between the Associations of the Michigan Conference UCC

After careful review by Association leaders and in recognition of our mutual ministry in service to the churches and authorized ministers of the Associations of the Michigan Conference, United Church of Christ, we hereby covenant to:

- Participate in the Unified Committee on Ministry as described in the preceding document.

- Delegate the responsibility and authority of the Association Committee on Ministry to the Unified Committee on Ministry, with the exception that the Association retains the responsibilities that explicitly require a called Association meeting: Ecclesiastical Councils, ministerial installations, ordinations, granting standing to local churches, and terminating the standing of local churches.

- Share the cost of ministerial candidates. When a person seeking to be a Member-in-Discernment or seeking Privilege of Call has received the recommendation of their local church, they may seek the support of the Association to cover the cost of their ministry assessment. Associations with funds for other assistance will follow their own procedures for providing financial support for a candidate from a local church in their Association.

- In the context of appropriate confidentiality, communicate openly, sharing information in a timely way.

- Respect the decisions of the Unified Committee on Ministry as final.

- Acknowledge the right of any association to withdraw from participation in the Unified Committee on Ministry with at least 6 months' notice and good faith attempts to resolve concerns.

Agreed to by:

For the Covenant Association

_____Date_____

For the Detroit Metropolitan Association

_____Date_____

For the Grand West Association

_____Date_____

For the Southwest Association

_____Date_____

For the United Northern Association

_____Date_____