The Business Committee of the Thirty-first General Synod has recommended this proposed resolution be sent directly to the United Church of Christ Board of Directors.

**Manual on Ministry, Re-Visioned**

**A Prudential Resolution**

Submitted by the Pennsylvania Southeast and Massachusetts Conferences

**Summary**

The United Church of Christ’s *Manual on Ministry* has shaped the formation, authorization and oversight of ministers since the denomination’s inception and in its predecessor traditions. Recently re-visioned, the newest iteration of the *Manual on Ministry* has been developed through prayerful discernment and conversation with all settings of the denomination. This re-visioned *Manual* reflects the latest understandings of ministerial formation, authorization and oversight not currently reflected in the UCC’s Constitution and Bylaws. This prudential resolution calls for a period of engagement and reflection with the re-visioned *Manual* prior to presenting Constitution and Bylaws recommendations at General Synod in 2019.

**Biblical, Theological, and Historical Grounding**

From the start, the United Church of Christ’s *Manual on Ministry* has served as a touchpoint of covenantal relations within the denomination. Through periodic revisions, the *Manual* has continued to reflect the ecclesiastical needs of the church regarding formation, authorization and oversight of ministers.

“The LORD answered me and said: Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.” Habakkuk 2:2

In 2013 an invitation was extended to all members of the United Church of Christ via letters to every local congregation to participate in the re-visioning of the *Manual on Ministry*, last updated in the 1980’s and printed in 2002. Out of an applicant pool of one hundred fifty persons a diverse working group of seventeen members was called together under the name Habakkuk Group, derived from the prophetic call to “capture the vision and make it plain.”

“I will stand at my watch-post, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me.” Habakkuk 2:1

The Habakkuk Group engaged with all settings of the denomination to take seriously the prophet’s declaration to stand at the watch-post and be stationed on the ramparts, that is, to observe the church’s and world’s landscape and prayerfully discern God’s movement. During this work of prayer and observation, the Habakkuk group noted significant changes in the life of the church including:

- a decade of implementation of the Ministry Issues Pronouncement from General Synod Min 2005, most notably the Marks of Faithful & Effective Authorized Ministers;
- counter to the work of Ministry Issues, an understanding and use of licensed ministry in some contexts to underpay local church pastors with non-seminary formation;
- the failure of “authorized” to achieve equal regard for and among licensed, commissioned and ordained ministers;
the multiplication of ministry settings beyond local churches and familiar institutions such as hospitals and military service and universities.

“For there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.” Habakkuk 2:3

Taking in these observations the Habakkuk Group engaged with partners across the United Church of Christ to build and test a vision for ministerial formation, authorization and oversight reflective of the current needs of the church. The materials were tested and honed with diverse readers, conference staff, committees on ministry, seminaries and regional theological education programs, and ecumenical partners.

“Though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit is on the vines.” Habakkuk 3:17

Recognizing that there is always a period of growth between planting and harvesting, the re-visioned Manual on Ministry bears within it theological grounding, practices of covenantal relationships, and numerous resources for Committees on Ministry in the United Church of Christ, all of which will take time and intentionality for the church to explore.

The Manual on Ministry is the consistent resource used to shape the common work of Committees on Ministry. Committees on Ministry are the central locus of covenant in the United Church of Christ, binding together local churches, individual authorized ministers, associations, conferences, and the national church. Service on a Committee on Ministry is a ministry in and of itself. The United Church of Christ depends on COMs to make decisions for the whole church, thus it is imperative that COMs are well trained and maintain consistent practices across diverse settings.

Text of the Motion

Whereas the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry has been re-visioned in order to continue serving as a touch point of covenantal relations within the denomination.

Whereas the Manual on Ministry reflects theological foundations, covenantal relationships, and best practices in response to current needs of the church regarding formation, authorization and oversight of ministers.

Whereas Committees on Ministry are a locus of covenant, needing regular training and shared understanding working from a common denominational resource.

Whereas changes to the Manual need to be explored and experienced by the wider church before changes can be recommended to the United Church of Christ Constitution and Bylaws.

Whereas a transition plan to move from the existing Manual on Ministry to the re-visioned edition has been presented to conferences and associations.

Therefore the Thirty First General Synod of the United Church of Christ calls for a time of exploration and transition using the re-visioned Manual on Ministry in our Committees on Ministry prior to the consideration of consequent changes to the UCC Constitution and Bylaws at General Synod in 2019.

Funding:
The funding for the implementation of the Resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

**Implementation:**

The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.