Affirming Licensed and Commissioned Ministers as Authorized Ministers in the United Church of Christ

Source
Executive Committee of the Aha O Nā Mokupuni ‘O Maui, Moloka‘i, A Me Lāna‘i (formerly the Tri-Isle Association of the Hawai‘i Conference UCC)

Date of Adoption by Source or Sponsor

Brief Summary
This resolution is an overture to the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ to affirm both Licensed Ministry and Commissioned Ministry as Authorized Ministries of the United Church of Christ in accordance with the current Constitution and Bylaws of the UCC and to direct Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ to amend Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 to reflect the United Church of Christ Constitution and Bylaws regarding both Licensed Ministers and Commissioned Ministers.

Biblical, theological and ethical rational for the resolution
In the letter to the church at Corinth, the Apostle writes:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good… Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. (1 Cor. 12:4–7, 27–31 NRSV)

Similarly, the Apostle writes to the church in Rome:
I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of
God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.  

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Rom. 12:1–8 NRSV)

Under the heading “Theology of Ministry and Ordination” in Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018, we read:

The United Church of Christ believes that God calls every Christian to be a servant of God, a minister, living and serving in Christ’s name. This call is celebrated sacramentally in baptism as persons are claimed for Christ by the Holy Spirit and the Church; all who are baptized spend the rest of their lives responding to God’s call and claim. The particulars of each person’s call and ministry vary with time, place, talents, experience, personal situation and responsibilities, and, importantly, the needs of the world. Ministry is lived in every aspect of one’s life as God’s love is shown in word and deed.

The particular ministry of reconciling all God’s children with one another, with creation, and with God, was given to God’s people in scripture: “All this is from God, who reconciled us...through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to Godself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us” (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). This ministry is claimed daily by the United Church of Christ as it is called to love God, neighbor, and self, and to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God (Matthew 22:36-50 and Micah 6:8).

Christians are members of the Body of Christ, the Church, under the sole headship of Jesus Christ. This is a living body (1 Corinthians 12), called, formed and sent into the world by the power of the Holy Spirit. Loving and serving God, the Church has multiple purposes:

- embodying and proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to all;
- nurturing and empowering the gathered Church through worship and sacraments, fellowship and mutual care, education and spiritual formation;
- acting in the world through deeds of justice and lovingkindness.(pp. 7–8)
In defining ordination, the Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 states:

The Church acknowledges that its members have many diverse ministries in the world and in the Church. It also recognizes a specific need for representative servant leaders “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:12). The United Church of Christ, along with the Church Universal through the ages and throughout the world, affirms God’s call to some individuals to be such leaders who help the Church to be what God intends it to be. These persons are set apart through prayer and the laying on of hands in the rite of ordination.

In ordination, the individual makes a lifetime commitment to God in Jesus Christ and to the Church, relying on the Holy Spirit. As Ordained Ministers enter the apostolic ministry, they continue the witness of Christ’s followers from New Testament times. They receive authority from the Triune God to serve in Jesus’ name. Ordained Ministers have particular responsibilities for the proclamation and practice of the Christian faith and for the life of the Church itself. (p. 8)

God calls some to serve for a season in a particular ministry to address the needs of the church. In those cases, the United Church of Christ has authorized individuals to serve as Licensed Ministers and Commissioned Ministers without requiring ordination (Constitution Article VI and Bylaws Preamble and Article I). Those faithful ministers have often served small congregations and offered specialized ministry in various settings. Those Licensed and Commissioned Ministers have shared their gifts and proclaimed the gospel through faithful and loving service. Some have pursued ordination. Associations and Conferences have authorized Licensed and Commissioned Ministers to serve for a “season” as Ecclesiastes states: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1 NRSV). Affirming those ministries, gifts, and seasons with authorization is consistent with the belief that all ministry flows from the gift of the Spirit in Baptism.

Based on the covenantal polity of the United Church of Christ, local Associations have authorized Licensed Ministers and Commissioned Ministers. The Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ have not been amended, and the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization, Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ has set before the United Church of Christ the challenge of considering the elimination of Licensed Ministry and Commissioned Ministry as they have been practiced without significant discussion and discernment in all settings of the United Church of Christ since Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 was published. Some local Churches, Associations, and Conferences have found it necessary to affirm Licensed and Commissioned Ministers as valued “authorized” ministers and calling for amending Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 to guide Associations in the process of authorizing Licensed and Commissioned Ministers.

While this Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 is subtitled “A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ,” it is a
“guide” that lays out ordained ministry as the ultimate goal of all authorized ministers who have not been ordained, and it is not congruent with the Constitution (Article VI) and Bylaws (Preamble and Article I) of the UCC and conflicts with the practice of many Associations and Conferences in authorizing Licensed Ministers and Commissioned Ministers.

Text of the Resolution

WHEREAS the Constitution (Article VI) and Bylaws (Preamble and Article I) of the United Church of Christ recognize three forms of authorized ministers—licensed, commissioned, and ordained,

AND WHEREAS those forms of authorized ministry affirm the United Church of Christ’s belief that all are called to minister,

AND WHEREAS local churches, Associations and Conferences have been faithfully served by Licensed Ministers and Commissioned Ministers,

AND WHEREAS many have affirmed the importance of maintaining both Licensed Ministry and Commissioned Ministry, as authorized ministries of the United Church of Christ,

AND WHEREAS the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization Team of Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ endeavored to set before the United Church of Christ a common understanding of ordination in Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018, such a common understanding requires the affirmation of Associations and Conferences whose practices regarding authorized ministry differ,

AND WHEREAS the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization Team of Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ in Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 set forth an understanding of ordination and provided a path to move through lay ministry to ordained ministry,

AND WHEREAS the Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 eliminates both Licensed Ministry and Commission Ministry as authorized ministry,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the delegates to the 200th ‘Aha Pae‘āina of the Hawai‘i Conference of the United Church of Christ meeting at Honolulu, Hawai‘i June 12–18, 2022 do call upon the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ to reaffirm Licensed Ministry and Commissioned Ministry as authorized ministries of the United Church of Christ in compliance with the Constitution (Article VI) and Bylaws (Preamble and Article I) of the United Church of Christ.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the delegates meeting as the Thirty-Fourth General Synod of the United Church of Christ direct Local Church Ministries to amend Manual on Ministry: A Guide to Authorizing Ministry in the United Church of Christ © 2018 so that it reflects the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ and the practice of many Associations.
AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the United Church of Christ Board communicate this action to all Conferences, Association, and Local Churches.

Implementation

This resolution would require the Conference Council to forward the resolution to the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ to the appropriate committee for consideration at General Synod Thirty-Four.

Adopted by the 200th ‘Aha Pae‘aina 6/18/22