# LAY MINISTERIAL STANDING COVENANT TEMPLATE

## Introduction

The theological grounding of the *Manual on Ministry* states that covenantal polity is foundational to the United Church of Christ. Grounded in the Church’s commitment to covenant, the Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization Team recommends renewed ritual and prayer around the service of lay persons fulfilling sacramental, pastoral, and ministerial roles within a Local Church on behalf of the United Church of Christ when an Ordained Minister is not available.

Lay Ministerial Standing is a temporary and accountable covenantal relationship among the Association, the lay member, and a Local Church of the United Church of Christ. The Lay Ministerial Standing covenant outlines ecclesial expectations for each party in relationship to each other.

Unlike Ordained Ministerial Standing, Lay Ministerial Standing does not connote portability across the church, nor recognition by the church universal, and does not include lifelong vows. It confers authorization within one Association for a recommended period not exceeding seven years. Local Churches participate in church life most fully when there is a balance of calling forth the gifts of lay and ordained members.

Several stages of discernment are critical to the formation of a Lay Ministerial Standing covenant. First, the Local Church outlines a request to the Association specifying: clear roles and tasks, boundaries and duration, the specific need for representative leadership on behalf of the United Church of Christ, and supervised authority for sacraments. The Association will review materials including a criminal background check, self-disclosure form, and psychological assessment; will conduct an interview; and will ensure the church member’s agreement to adhere to the UCC Ministerial Code. Upon granting Lay Ministerial Standing, the Association will communicate requirements for maintained standing, provide supervision, and offer formation opportunities for ongoing learning and reflection.

It is the Association’s responsibility to practice discernment annually, considering: whether the lay person's call by God and the Church might extend beyond the particular role and season to which they are granted Lay Ministerial Standing, and thus include the Member in Discernment process which may be undertaken concurrently; whether the Local Church’s identified need for a Lay Minister might be served in the long term by other means; or, whether the search and call process might equip the Local Church to envision its pastoral leadership in new ways. Prior to renewal of Lay Ministerial Standing, the Association will assess and convey understanding of their assessment to the Local Church.

An ongoing Local Church Discernment Committee will meet regularly with the Lay Minister and with the Association Committee on Ministry when appropriate. The Local Church Discernment Committee may be a standing committee (elders, deacons, council, etc.) or an ad hoc group formed for this purpose and is comprised of a small group of church members who gather with the person exploring their call and to listen, encourage, and provide feedback throughout their ministry.

Lay Ministers may choose to develop their gifts as Members in Discernment of the Association, entering the process to be considered for Ordination.

# LAY MINISTERIAL STANDING Covenant

## Among

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| Click or tap here to enter text. | Lay Member |
| Click or tap here to enter text. | **Local Church Discernment Committee** |
| Click or tap here to enter text. | Local Church |
| Click or tap here to enter text. | Association Committee on Ministry |

## COVENANTS OF MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

## The Lay MinisterClick or tap here to enter text. covenants

*To the Local Church, United Church of Christ in City/State:*

* To participate in the life of the local church and pray for the well-being of this congregation and its ministry;
* To study and apply The Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers;
* To accept supervision for carrying out responsibilities of Word and Sacrament;

*To the Local Church Discernment Committee:*

* To meet with the Local Church Discernment Committee at least every other month.

*To the Association/Conference*

* To participate in the life of the Association and pray for the well-being of all churches and ministries within the Association;
* To communicate regularly with the Association Committee on Ministry;
* To adhere to oversight and all requirements as presented by the Committee on Ministry, including the UCC Ministerial Code;
* To meet annually with the Committee on Ministry reflecting on ministry commitments, ongoing education and development, the needs of the church, and God’s call.

**Local Church United Church of Christ covenants:**

*To Lay Minister*

* To compose a Local Church Discernment Committee, and to provide support and nurture for their discerning the Spirit’s movement in the life of the Local Church and the Lay Minister;
* To pray for the Lay Minister and the Local Church Discernment Committee and their journey;
* To support the Lay Minister with fair and just compensation, and an employment agreement appropriate to the church’s means and intentions for its future.

*To the Local Church Discernment Committee*

* To receive both concerns and joys from discernment conversations with openness and prayerful consideration.

*To the Association/Conference*

* To attend Association meetings and participate in the life of the Conference;
* To contribute annually to Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) in recognition of the role of the wider church in the formation and oversight of authorized ministers in the United Church of Christ.

**The Local Church Discernment Committee (LCDC) covenants:**

*To the Lay Minister*

* To believe in God’s call to all people of faith;
* To trust in God’s providence for the faith journey of this community;
* To be the primary locus for discernment with the Lay Minister;
* To assess strengths and areas for growth in ministry.

*To Local Church United Church of Christ in City/State:*

* To report annually on the standing of the Lay Minister including information from Association/Conference;
* To encourage receiving guidance from the Conference regarding fair and just compensation.

*To the Association/Conference:*

* To exchange information with the Committee on Ministry, including documentation on the progression of the lay ministry;
* To remain faithful to the covenants of mutual accountability as articulated in this document.

**The Association/Conference of the United Church of Christ covenants:**

*To the Lay Minister*

* To meet annually with the Lay Minister in ongoing discernment of the minister’s call;
* To provide support and accountability, prayer and discernment in the ongoing work of ecclesial oversight;
* To offer clear communication of the Association’s/Conference’s support for education and leadership development opportunities for the Lay Minister;
* To initiate clear communication of the Association’s/Conference’s requirements and expectations of those with Lay Ministerial Standing.

*To Local Church:*

* To assign a Lay Ministerial Standing supervisor;
* To appropriately support and provide oversight of all authorized ministers in covenant with your Local Church and the Association;
* To report/convey to the Local Church Discernment Committee initial and ongoing assessment of the Lay Minister’s adherence to the UCC Ministerial Code.

*To the Local Church Discernment Committee:*

* To share a written outline of best practices for Local Church Discernment Committees;
* To communicate in writing annually when a determination is made as to whether to continue granting Lay Ministerial Standing for one year at a time;
* To communicate about education and leadership development opportunities offered for the Lay Minister.

We trust in God’s presence with us as we seek to be faithful to this covenant:

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| Member with Lay Ministerial Standing |  | Date |
|  |  |  |
| Moderator, Local Church, City/State |  | Date |
|  |  |  |
| Chair, Local Church Discernment Committee |  | Date |
|  |  |  |
| COM Representative |  | Date |
|  |  |  |
| Representative of Association/Conference |  | Date |
|  |  |  |
| Conference received by |  | Date |