

Preparing for General Synod 31: A Guide to Proposed Changes to UCC Constitution and Bylaws

What is being proposed?

Delegates to General Synod will be presented with amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ. This is intended to be a written guide to those proposed amendments. Additional forms of communication will be presented to help gain greater insights to the amendments as leaders of the United Church of Christ Board of Directors (UCCB) share their thoughts on this subject.

United Church of Christ Board of Directors and Its Structure

Amendments are being presented that alter the structure of the United Church of Christ Board of Directors (UCCB) Ministry Committees and Executive Committees, as well as change how the Secretary and Treasurer of the UCCB are appointed.

A. Ministry Committees

The amendments relating to the Ministry Committees are in the Bylaws at Paragraph 236 (lines 1043-1064).

The UCCB is currently divided into three Ministry Committees that correspond to the Covenanted Ministries: Local Church, Justice and Witness, and Wider Church. These committees are intended to make recommendations to the UCCB regarding program functions of the corresponding Covenanted Ministry. This structure does not lend itself to effective governance and instead isolates Board members into a ministry area rather than encouraging the Board to focus on mission and ministry of the United Church of Christ and the priorities and policies which allow the Church to achieve that mission and ministry. Therefore, the UCCB will establish committees to focus on mission, ministry, priorities and policies, working with National Setting staff and allowing Board members to utilize individual expertise and gifts to advance the work of the Church. Article XI, Section 61a of the UCC Constitution states that the members of the UCCB comprise the Board of Directors of the Covenanted Ministries. In other words, the UCCB sits as the Boards of Local Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries and Wider Church Ministries, exercising all legal duties and responsibilities of each individual corporation. These responsibilities will continue to be vested in the UCCB.

B. Executive Committee

The amendments related to the UCCB Executive Committee are found in the Bylaws in Paragraphs 238-239 (lines 1072-1107).

Presently, the UCCB Executive Committee is comprised of twelve (12) members: the Chair and the Vice chair of the UCCB, one representative of the three Ministry Committees, the Officers of the UCC, one Conference Minister, a member of the Finance and Budget Committee and one additional member of the UCCB. The amendments being brought before General Synod 31 would embody the commitment of

the UCC to be a multicultural and multiracial Church with members of the Executive Committee reflecting age, race and gender diversity, open and accessible to all. While the Executive Committee strives to reflect this commitment currently, this amendment speaks to the belief it be stated and mandated. Because Ministry Committees are proposed to be removed from the Bylaws, representatives of these committees are removed from the Executive Committee. The composition of the Executive Committee is being amended to include sixteen (16) members and add the Chairs of the Standing Committees, the Moderator of General Synod and an at-large member from each of the three classes of board members.

C. Appointment of Secretary and Treasurer

The amendments related to the appointment of the Secretary and Treasurer are in the Bylaws in two (2) new paragraphs to follow current Paragraph 226 (lines 933-940).

These amendments give the UCCB the power to appoint a Secretary and Treasury and establish the duties of those positions. The bylaws currently vest the corporate responsibilities of these positions in employees of the National Setting who report directly to the General Minister and President under Paragraphs 233-235 (lines 1014-1034), which are deleted.

The United Church of Canada

The amendments related to The United Church of Canada are presented in a separate document. In the Constitution, a new Article VIII is being proposed. In the Bylaws, the amendments are to Paragraphs 107 and 114, the addition of multiple new paragraphs following Paragraph 129, and to Paragraphs 133 and 195.

At General Synod 30 (2015), the United Church of Christ General Synod voted to enter into full communion with The United Church of Canada. This agreement recognizes the sacraments and ordination of ministers, allowing them to be called by congregations of either denomination. The United Church of Christ already has a full communion with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The proposed amendments reflect a very similar full communion with The United Church of Canada.

Number and Responsibilities of Officers

The amendments relating to the number and responsibilities of the Officers is in the Constitution at Article IV, Paragraphs 7-8 (lines 46-74), and in the Bylaws at Article III, Paragraphs 193 (line 520-522), 209-220 (lines 661-842), 270-271 (lines 1439-1450), and the addition of a new paragraph following paragraph 254 (lines 1272-1274).

The current leadership structure in the National Setting consists of a Collegium of Officers: the General Minister and President, the Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries, the Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries, and the Executive Minister of Wider Church Ministries. These Officers have equal authority as to decisions made relating to the church as a whole.

The amendments remove the connection of the Officer to a specific Covenanted Ministry, creating a process in which the work for the Covenanted Ministries will be delegated and directed by the General Minister and President and affirmed by the UCCB, and change the name of Executive Ministers to Associate General Ministers (AGM). These amendments simplify the language governing administration of the National Setting.

Ordained Ministry and Ecclesiastical Oversight

The proposed amendments made to this section reflect work by Local Church Ministries to update terminology and reflect changes in practice many Committees on Ministry have adopted as the nature of authorized ministry has changed over time. Key changes include:

- Constitution: Articles V, VI, VII, VIII, Paragraphs 9-50, (lines 76-325)
 - Editorial changes to consistently capitalize Ordained Minister, Standing, Ordained Ministerial Partner, and Local Church when referring to the United Church of Christ
 - Clarification that Conferences and Associations may establish voting membership as specified in their constitution and bylaws
- Bylaws: Articles I & II, Paragraphs 101-180 (lines 17-425)
 - Editorial changes to capitalize Ordained Minister, Standing, Ordained Ministerial Partner, Local Church, Privilege of Call, and Leave of Absence when referring to the United Church of Christ
 - Changes in terminology to ecclesiastical oversight (from discipline), denominational support (from Our Church's Wider Mission)
 - Implementation of gender-neutral language
 - Revisions to language governing Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing to reflect practice

Why These Proposals?

Good governance principles

Effective governing bodies evaluate organization performance against vision, mission, purpose and strategy. As part of that evaluation, governing bodies also evaluate obstacles in the constitution, bylaws and policies, identifying how those documents might be changed to allow for greater organizational efficacy. In the case of the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ, the power to amend those documents is vested in General Synod.¹ This is why the proposed amendments are being brought to General Synod 31. Future General Synods should expect similar evaluations resulting in further amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws. This is a reflection of the UCCB engaged in ongoing strategic planning to ensure health and vitality for our beloved Church.

Response to Evaluation of UCC Governing Structures

Since the first significant restructuring, which took place in 2000, obtaining a unified vision, mission and purpose has proven difficult. While many of the obstacles were removed with the movement toward unified governance, obstacles continue to exist. They are:

- Composition of the Executive Committee: these amendments reflect the ongoing challenge in populating the committee established in the Bylaws. The objectives in these amendments include embodying the commitments to diversity already articulated by the UCC. Additionally, the committee will include individuals already involved in key areas of responsibility for the UCCB, specifically the moderator and committee chairs.

¹ Constitutional amendments must also be approved by the Conferences.

- UCCB Ministry Committees: the amendments in this section give the UCCB flexibility to establish committees that focus on areas of strategic direction as opposed to corporate function. The UCCB already sits as the Boards of WCM, LCM and JWM. The UCCB is already charged with the functions of those corporate bodies. These responsibilities would not be neglected. Instead, the UCCB is given the flexibility and latitude to focus the work of the committees on strategic direction, priorities, resourcing and opportunities which grow out of the generative process. The current mandate of the Bylaws impedes this work.
- Officer Responsibilities: currently, Executive Ministers are called to a portfolio of responsibilities that are directly related to one of the Covenanted Ministries (Justice and Witness, Local Church, Wider Church). One of the core principles of good governance is that the Board evaluates program services, priorities and executive job performance, using this process to set policies for human resourcing purposes. Given the current provisions of the Constitution and Bylaws, the Board is not able to act upon those evaluations or adjust human resourcing. The movement to Associate General Ministers being called by General Synod with responsibilities for the position being affirmed by UCCB, allows the UCCB, the General Minister and President and Associate General Ministers to build upon collective and individual officer talents and sense of call. Equally important, these decisions allow for human resource decisions to be made in furtherance of the purpose, mission and vision of the UCC. These amendments allow the UCCB to engage in this process in an effective and spirit-driven fashion, unencumbered by governing structures which dictate form above function. Such an adjustment in the governance documents reflects not only principles of good governance, but also allows the UCCB to dream, guided by the Holy Spirit.

[Response to General Synod 30 Directive: United Church of Canada](#)

As directed by General Synod 30, these amendments formally establish the UCC's Communion with The United Church of Canada. These amendments were crafted in consultation with the Ecumenical Officer of the UCC.

[Response to Changes in Ministry, Settings:](#)

Ordination, Standing and Privilege of Call: The Governance Committee took a great deal of advice from the Office of Ministerial Excellence Support and Authorization to help identify changes in terminology and practice which have occurred and warrant amending governing documents related to ministerial authorization and oversight.

[Response to Feedback after General Synod 30](#)

In October of 2015, after General Synod 30, the UCCB committed to seeking feedback to the amendments which did not gain sufficient support for enactment. With assistance from staff in the National Offices, a survey was created and distributed to the wider church, with the whole church being invited to participate. More than 2,000 people provided feedback to questions aimed at gaining a greater understanding of the amendments brought to a vote. In response to that feedback, the UCCB decided not to pursue a number of amendments that were proposed at GS 30 (including amendments related to the Preamble of the Constitution) and altered other amendments (including amendments related to ministerial standing, and number and responsibility of officers). The UCCB engaged in an extensive process of discernment, deliberation and negotiation to present the amendments for consideration at General Synod 31.