

The United Church of Christ

Covenant
between
the UCC National Setting (UCC)
and
the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns (The Coalition)

I. Introduction

The UCC National Setting and the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns affirm this covenant in the spirit of the National Setting's Core Purpose: "Drawn together by the Holy Spirit, we are a distinct and diverse community of Christians that come together as one church, joining faith and action. In covenant with the church in all of its settings, we serve God in the co-creation of a just and sustainable world as made manifest in the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

We stand together at a critical moment—poised for a spirit-filled revival of the progressive Christian movement. The creative energy of the growing LGBT/SGL/Queer movement in the UCC and beyond, coupled with the prophetic witness of the United Church of Christ in all of its settings, offers synergy and deep hope for the larger Christian church and for the intersectional movement for justice. We offer this covenant as one gift towards the revival of our beloved Church.

II. Background

Founded in 1957, the United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior. It acknowledges as kindred in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God. In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among evangelical Christians, it recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion.

Founded in 1972, the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns has helped the United Church of Christ reach each of its milestones on the journey towards and acceptance and justice for its LGBT and same-gender-loving (SGL) members. From General Synod's first resolutions advocating for the civil rights of LGBT citizens to Synod's historic affirmation of marriage equality, the Coalition has been a spur to the conscience of the church. By claiming the right of all members of the church to participate fully in

ministry and fellowship, by reminding UCC members of injustices that continue to prevail in wider society, by providing leadership for the growing Open and Affirming movement, the Coalition has been an effective agent for change in the UCC.

III. Theological Foundation

Since its beginning, the Coalition has advocated for “extravagant welcome” as a “core value” (Coalition Strategic Plan, June 2010). Following the teachings of Christ, the Coalition helps congregations follow Paul’s admonition to “[w]elcome one another ... as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.” (Rom. 15:7-13 NRSV) The Coalition’s ministry—especially its stewardship of the Open and Affirming movement—has restored thousands of LGBT/SGL believers to Christian fellowship. Moreover, our horizons embrace not only justice for the LGBT/SGL community but for all whose lives are afflicted by economic, social and racial injustice—in obedience to the ethical teachings of both Testaments:

“This is the sort of fast that pleases me: Remove the chains of injustice! Undo the ropes of the yoke! Let those who are oppressed go free, and break every yoke you encounter!” (Is. 58:6 TIB)

“My children, our love must not be simply words or mere talk—it must be true love, which shows itself in action and truth.” (1 John 3:18 TIB)

IV. UCC Core Values

The Coalition’s Leadership Team joins the UCC Collegium of Officers in affirming the Core Values of the United Church of Christ:

- **Continuing Testament**

Our faith is 2000 years old; our thinking is not.

God is still speaking is more than slogan or branding. It leads us to talk about God’s continuing revelation in the church and in the world.

- **Extravagant Welcome**

No matter who you are, or where you are on life’s journey, you’re welcome here.

God’s table is open. God’s gifts and claim in baptism are irrevocable.

- **Changing Lives**

Never place a period where God has placed a comma.

We claim God’s redemptive power; therefore we know that individual lives, communities, and systems can be changed.

V. Partners

A. The Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ

The Covenanted Ministries in the national setting are charged with carrying out the mission of the Church through its elected Officers, known as the Collegium of Officers. Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end that the whole church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each expression of the church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the church listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.

B. The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns

The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns advocates for LGBT/SGL inclusion and justice in the United Church of Christ. It represents the LGBT/SGL community in the UCC and the growing movement of Open and Affirming congregations in the church. It supports congregations on their journey towards an ONA covenant and officially certifies new ONA congregations. The Coalition works closely with the national setting and other settings to advocate for basic human rights for the LGBT/SGL community both in the United States and abroad and collaborates with ecumenical partners in the wider welcoming-congregation movement.

VI. Covenant

This Covenant is intended to strengthen the ministries of the UCC and the Coalition so they may be more faithful to God's mission in the world.

The UCC Collegium of Officers

The Collegium of Officers, in Covenant with the Coalition, will continue to promote and support ministries throughout the whole church that demonstrate the Core Values of the UCC, particularly as they relate LGBT/SGL inclusion and justice advocacy. Decisions that require substantial funding will be made by the Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate staff and the Coalition.

A national staff person will be appointed by the Collegium to serve as the official liaison to the Coalition with the role and responsibility to:

- Maintain ongoing and open communications between the Covenanted Ministries and the Executive Director of the Coalition and its Leadership Team;
- Serve as an ex-officio member of the Coalition Leadership Team;
- Serve as primary contact person for LGBT/SGL advocacy efforts from the national setting in cooperation with various settings of the church;
- Establish an internal network of national staff persons with related responsibilities;

- Develop and/or support the development of educational, advocacy, and evaluation resources as needed.

The Coalition

The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns will continue to assist congregations of the United Church of Christ to live into the UCC's Core Values. In 2013-14 the Coalition's strategic priorities include:

1. Growing the Open and Affirming movement from its current level of 1,040 congregations to 1,200. The Coalition will support churches exploring an ONA covenant by:
 - Updating the ONA Study Guide and other resources.
 - Aggregating resources and best practices published by the welcoming-church movements in other denominations.
 - Expanding capacity for "Building an Inclusive Church" workshops in every UCC Region.
 - Growing the number of trained ONA Consultants in Conferences.
 - Hosting welcoming-church webinars for lay and ordained leaders.
 - Expanding Coalition outreach through social media and in partnership with the UCC News Team.
2. Strengthening support for existing ONA congregations with new resources, webinars and training programs for:
 - Advocacy for marriage equality.
 - Advocacy for LGBT/SGL youth in public and charter schools.
 - Safe space and suicide-prevention programs for LGBT/SGL youth.
 - Advocacy for transgender persons and members of the church.
 - Advocacy and care for LGBT/SGL seniors.
 - Advocacy and care for LGBT/SGL members of the armed forces.
 - Effective strategies for evangelism, communication and church growth.
 - Advocacy and care for LGBT/SGL refugees, and advocacy for persecuted LGBT/SGL communities in other countries.
3. Assisting Conferences in building effective networks of ONA congregations, including the formation of Conference ONA Ministry Teams and sponsorship of annual or biennial ONA events to:
 - build relationships among ONA churches.
 - create mentoring relationships between ONA congregations and congregations considering an ONA covenant.
 - share best practices for ministry, advocacy and evangelism by ONA congregations.
 - build relationships with welcoming congregations of other faith traditions in preparation for campaigns for marriage equality, protection from employment discrimination, and safety for LGBT/SGL youth.

4. Partnering with ministry teams in the national setting in campaigns for justice, peace and human rights. Among other issues, the Coalition will encourage ONA congregations to “widen their welcome” by embracing persons living with cognitive disabilities and mental illness in their fellowship.

VII. Covenantal Agreement Implementation and Evaluation

Key to the faithful implementation of this program is an open and honest relationship between the Covenantal Partners. The Collegium of Officers of the UCC and the Coalition Leadership Team endorse this agreement as a measure of ensuring clarity and avoiding misunderstandings. What must follow is an ongoing system of regular communication between/among the partners.

We affirm that this covenant does not preclude the possibility of mutual challenge in the spirit of Christ. By holding each other accountable to our shared values, this relationship will remain healthy and vibrant.

The partners shall facilitate and encourage connections with progressive organizations and constituencies, thus expanding a network of advocacy relationships in order to advance LGBT inclusion and intersecting justice issues.

An evaluation of this agreement shall be conducted on an annual basis by Partners. Mutually agreed upon changes will be incorporated into this agreement prior to signing the following year’s agreement.

All final decisions regarding legal, financial, contractual, program and relationship issues will be made by agreement of the Executives of the Covenantal Partners (the Collegium of Officers of the UCC and the Leadership Team of the Coalition) who will report to their governing bodies as required. In the event of an unresolved conflict, the Partners will seek and share in the cost of a neutral, professional mediator to assist in reaching a negotiated resolution.

In the event of unforeseeable circumstances, either of the Partners may request this Covenantal Agreement be terminated. However, a reasonable period of time shall be devoted to thorough examination of the reasons for that action and the Collegium of Officers and the Coalition agree to institute a mutually agreed upon process in which to take such action.

Affirmed by the Coalition Leadership Team on March 2, 2013

Affirmed by the Collegium on March 5, 2013