

**4. RECOGNITION OF THE MINISTRY OF BEVERLY CHAIN**

The Moderator called on Mr. Jeffrey Clarke, Chair of the Office of Communication's Board of Directors and Ms. Eleanore Chong, Vice Chair, who recognized Ms. Beverly Chain for her twelve years of service to the Office of Communication on her retirement. Ms. Chain expressed her appreciation for all those who give their talents so freely to the United Church of Christ, including the staff of the Office of Communication.

**5. CANDIDATE SPEECHES**

The Moderator announced that, since there were no contested elections, the candidate speeches scheduled for this time would not be necessary. There was an enthusiastic round of applause!

**6. RESOLUTION "UCC RESPONSE TO CHURCHES IN COVENANT COMMUNION AND PROPOSED RECOMMENDED ACTION"**

The Moderator called upon the Rev. Rod Mundy to present the work of Committee Fourteen. Mr. Mundy spoke regarding the work of the committee. He then called the delegates attention to the United Church of Christ Response to Churches in Covenant Communion on pages 137-144 of the Program/Worship and Business Book. Mr. Mundy moved the acceptance of the resolution, "UCC Response to Churches in Covenant Communion and Proposed Recommended Action." Mr. Mundy spoke to the motion and Assistant Moderator Taylor asked for discussion.

Ms. Paula Gustafson (NY) moved to replace the words "must use" on page 142, column 1, line 18 with the words "will continue to honor" and to add the words "while being open to further exploration by the leading of the Spirit" at the end of line 19. The new sentence to read: "Until that time, membership in the Church of Christ Uniting seems to mean that the United Church of Christ will continue to honor the traditional biblical expression of the Trinity in baptism while being open to further exploration by the leading of the Spirit." The motion was seconded.

Clarification was made that the other eight denominations do not have to agree to any change made to the document in the Program/Worship and Business Book. However, the General Synod cannot make changes to the Churches in Covenant Communion which is a separate book.

There was discussion for and against the amendment and a friendly amendment was offered to insert the word "theological" between "further" and "exploration." The friendly amendment was accepted.

The Rev. Jeffrey Williams-Brinks (PNE) moved the previous question and the Twentieth General Synod voted to close debate.

The Moderator read the amendment and called for the vote on the amendment. The Moderator stated that the amendment passed. Rev. Maurice Smith (PW) called for a Division of the House.

95-GS-24 VOTED: The Twentieth General Synod adopts the amendment by a vote of 398 to 283.

Discussion continued and Ms. Mary Miller (OHIO) moved to replace the language on page 141, line 55, column 2, "must be the subject of" to "is a gift that the United Church of Christ brings into the continuing dialogue"...

Mr. Robert Peterson (MINN) moved to close debate and the motion was seconded. The Moderator called for the vote and indicated that debate was closed. Mr. David Kingsbury (OHIO) called for a Division of the House. The Moderator indicated that it takes a two-thirds vote to close debate. After a count by the tellers, it was determined that the vote to close debate had failed by a vote of 355 "yes" and 253 "no." Consequently, debate on the proposed amendment continued.

Assistant Moderator Taylor recognized Ms. Mary Miller (OHIO) who reread her motion and there was a second from the floor.

There was further discussion for and against the amendment. The Moderator informed the Synod that the delegates needed a majority vote to pass the amendment and he asked for the vote.

95-GS-25 VOTED: The Twentieth General Synod adopts the amendment.

Ms. Margaret Jacoby (CAL.S) moved to add the word "heterosexism" on page 139, column 1, line 21, after the word "sexism." The motion was seconded. Ms. Jacoby spoke to the motion.

Rev. Frank Dietz, Chairman of the Council for Ecumenism, stated that the amendment is problematic because it seeks to amend the covenanting proposal rather than the United Church of Christ's response to the proposal.

There was discussion regarding where the word "heterosexism" could be added so that it would not amend the covenanting proposal.

There was a call for the question and the Twentieth General Synod voted to close debate.

## SUNDAY MORNING

95-GS-26 VOTED: The Twentieth General Synod defeats the amendment.

Discussion continued and the Rev. Daryl Greene (OHIO) moved to replace the word "handicapism" on page 141, column two, line 10, with "discrimination against persons with disabilities." There was a second. Mr. Greene spoke to the motion pointing out that the word "handicapism" suggests that these persons have some kind of power.

Ms. Inez Luna (WIS) pointed out that while she was in support of the amendment, this wording was seeking to amend the covenanting proposal which the General Synod has no authority to change. It was suggested that the quotation marks could be dropped and the change could be made and Mr. Greene accepted this as a friendly amendment.

Mr. Joseph Sellers (CAC) called for the Order of the Day.

### 7. MAKE A DIFFERENCE! PRESENTATION

The Moderator called on Rev. Paul Sherry who introduced Mr. Jim Halfaker, National Director for the MAKE A DIFFERENCE! Campaign. Mr. Halfaker invited several of the campaign leaders to share their experiences. Those who spoke were: Ms. Bernice Powell Jackson, Executive Director of the Commission for Racial Justice; the Rev. John H. Krueger, Conference Minister of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference; Mrs. Phyllis Pulfer, volunteer, Washington North Idaho Conference; Mr. Robert Peterson, volunteer, Minnesota Conference; the Rev. John M. Schaeffer, Conference Minister of the Montana Northern Wyoming Conference. Mr. Kevin Manz, major gift donor from Reston, Virginia and Abilene, Kansas, spoke of how important the United Church of Christ has been to him and his family and his desire to contribute to the future United Church of Christ.

The Moderator thanked all who contributed their time and financial resources to the MAKE A DIFFERENCE! Campaign.

### 8. AMENDMENT TO "UCC RESPONSE TO CHURCHES IN COVENANT COMMUNION AND PROPOSED RECOMMENDED ACTION"

The Moderator announced that the Synod would finish addressing the amendment from the previous committee

report. The motion is to remove quotation marks from the word "handicapism" located on page 141, second column, line 10 and change it to read "discrimination against persons with disabilities."

GS-95-27 VOTED: The Twentieth General Synod accepts the amendment.

### 9. RESPONSE TO THE BOMBING OF THE OKLAHOMA CITY FEDERAL BUILDING

The Moderator invited Rev. Robin R. Meyers, Pastor of Mayflower Congregational Church in Oklahoma City, to address the delegation.

Rev. Meyers spoke to the Synod and thanked the United Church of Christ for its reaction to the bombing in Oklahoma City.

### 10. ANNOUNCEMENTS AND RECESS

Moderator Taylor called on Ms. Edith Guffey for announcements. At 12:00 PM the Moderator declared the Fifth Plenary of the Twentieth General Synod to be in recess.

### 11. FESTIVAL SERVICE OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

The Twentieth General Synod gathered for worship at 3:00 PM in the Kaiser Convention Center based on the theme "In Christ, Strangers No More." Selections were read from Psalm 137:1-4, Habakkuk 1:2-6, and Mark 12:28-34. Ms. Valerie E. Russell delivered a sermon entitled "On Breathing Water" and the congregation shared Communion. *[The text of Ms. Russell's sermon is located in Appendix B.]*

Following Worship the congregation moved to the lawn of Laney College for an International Food Festival hosted by the Northern California Nevada Conference. An evening of song and entertainment, also hosted by the Northern California Nevada Conference, was held in the Kaiser Convention Center following the festival.

## MONDAY MORNING, JULY 3, 1995

### 1. CALL TO ORDER

Assistant Moderator Donna Debney called the Twentieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ to order at

9:00 AM and called upon the Worship Committee to lead morning worship.

## MONDAY AFTERNOON

compliance with the substance and intent of these guidelines.

### ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR LABOR RELATIONS FOR UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST ORGANIZATIONS AND RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

#### I. TREAT EMPLOYEES AS YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE TREATED

- A. Unambiguously affirm that employees do not forfeit their right to organize and bargain collectively when they go to work for a UCC organization or related organization.
- B. Refrain from any actions, legal or illegal, which exercise the power of the employer in an abusive or coercive fashion, including, but not limited to, the following:
  1. Conducting “closed door” or “captive audience” meetings with employees.
  2. Subtle or overt threats to employee job security as a result of any involvement in union organizing activity.
  3. In the event of a strike, hiring of permanent replacement workers.

#### II. RESOLVE DIFFERENCES QUICKLY

- A. Immediately recognize the self-determination of employees expressed through an affirmative majority vote to be represented by a union. Refrain from engaging in challenges to election results unless there is unambiguous evidence that elections were unfairly conducted.
- B. If a union is recognized, make every effort to negotiate a fair contract quickly. Specifically, refrain from engaging in any delaying tactics which might be perceived as an effort to overturn the original result in a recertification election.
- C. Consider allowing card-check recognition as an alternative to the standard union election procedure.

#### III. SEEK WIN-WIN SOLUTIONS

- A. If a union representation is established, retain labor relations counsel with a reputation and record for fair and timely negotiation of labor contracts.

B. Openly affirm that employees can be loyal to both the union and the employer. Avoid statements or materials which imply that union participation is anti-employer behavior.

C. Expect to work with the union as a partner and resource in the pursuit of the organization’s mission to those it, and by extension its employees, serves.

#### 18. RESOLUTION “UCC RESPONSE TO CHURCHES IN COVENANT COMMUNION AND PROPOSED RECOMMENDED ACTION”

The Moderator recognized the Rev. Rod Mundy to continue the report of Committee Fourteen, which was begun during the Fifth Plenary. Mr. Mundy reviewed the status of the resolution before the delegates and referred them to the advanced materials. He explained that the information on pp. 137-140 of the Program/Worship and Business Book is background information; the information on pp. 140-153 is the response; and that the recommendations are found on pp. 143-144. Mr. Mundy read the main motion, which was the item before the body at the time this piece of business was last considered.

Assistant Moderator Taylor asked for discussion; there was no further discussion.

95-GS-52 VOTED: The Twentieth General Synod adopts the Resolution “United Church of Christ Response to Churches in Covenant Communion and Proposed Recommended Action.” *[The text of the Resolution “United Church of Christ Response to Churches in Covenant Communion and Proposed Recommended Action” is located in Appendix E.]*

#### 19. RESOLUTION “DEEP ECUMENISM”

Assistant Moderator Taylor asked Mr. Mundy to continue the report of Committee Fourteen. Mr. Mundy stated the only remaining piece of business was the Resolution “Deep Ecumenism.” Mr. Mundy moved on behalf of Committee Fourteen that the Resolution “Deep Ecumenism” be referred to the Executive Council. There was no discussion. *[The complete text of the Resolution “Deep Ecumenism” is located in Appendix C.]*

95-GS-53 VOTED: The Twentieth General Synod refers the Resolution “Deep Ecumenism” to the Executive Council.

#### 20. MUTUAL RECOGNITION AND RECONCILIATION OF ORDAINED MINISTRIES CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS

The Moderator called on the Rev. Susan Henderson, Chair of Committee Nine, who directed the attention of the

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST RESPONSE TO  
CHURCHES IN COVENANT COMMUNION  
(Consultation on Church Union, 1989)**

**INTRODUCTION**

Churches in Covenant Communion is a proposal for the nine member churches of the Consultation on Church Union to share their common life as The Church of Christ Uniting. This “new ecclesial reality,” if embraced by the churches, will not involve institutional merger, nor will it create “a new denomination.” It will mean “a new relationship of unity in all things which are essential to the church’s life, namely: faith, sacraments, ministry, and mission.” Rather than a “consolidation of forms and structures,” it will embody what the early church described as a “communion in sacred things” [Covenant, Foreword, 1, 5].

This proposal is before the member churches of the Consultation because of the conviction that “division in the life of the Church is a contradiction of its very nature” [The COCU Consensus, I.1]. The churches have come to believe that division is “a stumbling block to the world. It is a scandal that calls into question the being of God and the resurrection of Christ, and so imperils the credibility of the gospel,” [Consensus, I.10]. Stated more positively, the Consultation believes the proposal represents a form of unity which is

at once faithful to God’s will, appropriate to the present circumstances, and open to the future for renewal and reformation. It is a proposal which calls for unity of heart and mind, for unity in faith, in prayer, in the breaking of bread, in the Word of the gospel, in ministry, in sharing, and in witness and service to the world. (Acts 2.42-44). Such unity will be a visible witness to the world of God’s saving power in Jesus Christ [Covenant, I.4].

Such an understanding of unity for the sake of mission corresponds to Christ’s prayer, so important to the ethos of the United Church of Christ, “that they all may be one. . . so that the world might believe” (John 17.21).

Churches in Covenant Communion is composed of two parts: (I) The Covenanting Proposal, which includes definitions of unity and covenanting as understood in this context, elaboration of eight “elements of covenanting,” and the proposed covenanting process; and (II) Liturgies for Inauguration of Covenanting, including national, regional, and local services for celebrating the covenant, reconciling ministries (including putting forward persons who would serve in The Church of Christ Uniting in a renewed form of the three-fold order of bishop, presbyter, and deacon), establishing local, regional, and national councils for common decision making, and sharing the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Churches in Covenant Communion was adopted by the Seventeenth Plenary of the Consultation on Church Union December 5-9, 1988, and presented to the member churches for study and final action at their national governing bodies. The nine members of the Consultation on Church Union are: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Episcopal Church, International Council of Community Churches, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Church of Christ, and United Methodist Church. Participant-observers include the Roman Catholic Church, Reformed Church in America, and Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
INVOLVEMENT IN COCU**

The United Church of Christ has been integrally involved in the Consultation on Church Union since its inception in 1962. United Church of Christ delegates have participated regularly in the thirty-year evolution of dialogue and consensus. Official United Church of Christ responses to earlier COCU documents and proposals, together with our official response to the World Council of Churches’ significant document, Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (1982), and experience in ecumenical partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), helped shape the proposal now before us. The Seventeenth General Synod (1989) affirmed The COCU Consensus: In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting (1984), the theological agreement upon which Churches in Covenant Communion builds, as “a sufficient theological basis for the covenanting acts and the uniting process proposed at this time by the Consultation” [Minutes of the Seventeenth General Synod, UCC, p. 153].

It is important to note, however, that our denomination voted its support after the Consultation had revised its definition of church unity and incorporated it in The COCU Consensus. The COCU Seventeenth Plenary (1988) resolved “that the revised text of Churches in Covenant Communion: The Church of Christ Uniting . . . is the statement of the Consultation concerning ‘covenanting,’ superseding all prior statements thereon. Hence, The COCU Consensus (1984) is hereafter to be interpreted in the light of the revised understanding of these matters set forth in the document, Churches in Covenant Communion (1988).” According to this view, covenanting was no longer seen, as in 1984, as “an interim step” toward institutional union; rather, “covenant communion” itself will manifest church unity and constitute The Church of Christ Uniting. “The name here given to the churches in covenant communion is **The Church of Christ Uniting**, and the means by which it comes into being is referred to as ‘covenanting’” [Covenant I.4].

Responsibility for preparing a United Church of Christ Response to the proposals in Churches in Covenant Communion was given to the Council for Ecumenism. A Study Guide was prepared and all conferences were asked to invite local churches, association or conference ecumenical commissions, and interested individuals to study the proposals and submit a response. Over thirty-five detailed responses were received during 1992 and 1993. These came from individual pastors and lay persons, from local church study groups, from conference and association ecumenical commissions, and from a theological society. Thirteen of the thirty-nine conferences, from every region of the church and each of the major theological traditions, were represented in the response.

Following this two year process, the Council for Ecumenism developed a first draft of a UCC Response based on the response to the Study Guide as well as its own deliberations. This draft was then sent to each conference, to persons who had submitted earlier responses, and to ecumenical partners for comment. This second round of testing produced twenty responses which helped shape the Report submitted to the Executive Council for action by the Twentieth General Synod of the United Church of Christ in June 1995.

## THE COVENANTING PROPOSAL

The Consultation on Church Union understands “covenanting” as both an act and a process. It is an act by which “the churches will commit themselves, before God and each other, to live henceforth in one covenantal communion even though they continue to exist as distinct ecclesiastical systems” [Covenant II.1]. This act will also “inaugurate a process of deepening commitment by these churches to one another. . . as the covenanting churches jointly identify and take such mutually agreed actions as may serve to deepen their communion in faith, sacrament, ministry, and mission” [Covenant II.3]. Covenant Communion does not require “uniformity in structure.”

In covenant communion the churches may maintain, for so long as each may determine, their own church structures and traditions, including present forms of worship, systems of ministerial selection, training, and placement, their international, confessional, and communion relationships, and their mission programs [Covenant II.5].

It is the hope and expectation of the Consultation that this proposed form of Christian unity will “focus the energy of the churches’ shared life upon the local communities of now separated congregations” [Covenant II.6]. The proposal aims at making it possible for

several congregations in each place to see themselves not only as members of a particular communion but also as members of a living and functioning communion of communions, sharing the one baptism, proclaiming the one faith, receiving together the one bread and cup, recognizing the ministry of each as a ministry to all, and reaching out as one in love and service to the world [Covenant II.6].

The goal of this proposal, therefore, is a unity that will bring renewal in every setting of the church’s life, but particularly to the faith, life, and witness of local churches. For this reason, the most important question before each of the member churches of the Consultation is not whether this proposal is compatible with its own historic faith, polity, and traditions. Rather the crucial question before the churches is whether covenant communion is a faithful instrument of renewal, not only for the member churches, but also for the church universal and for the “whole inhabited earth.” “Covenant communion is intended to be a sign and foretaste of the community God wills for the world. In its ultimate intent, it is for the salvation of each and all. It is for the redemption of the world” [Covenant II.9].

Because the unity proposed in covenant communion is not “chiefly organizational,” the Consultation has identified eight “elements” of covenanting that are regarded as basic marks characterizing the proposed relationship between the churches. These elements are:

- claiming unity in faith
- commitment to seek unity with wholeness
- mutual recognition of members in one baptism
- mutual recognition of each other as churches
- mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministry
- celebrating the Eucharist together
- engaging together in Christ’s mission
- formation of covenanting councils

What follows is a brief summary of each of these elements as set forth in Churches in Covenant Communion, chapter IV.

1. Claiming Our Unity in Faith. Claiming the faith of the one holy catholic and apostolic church is basic to covenant communion. Over twenty years of work by official representatives of the member churches resulted in the articulation of this common faith in The COCU Consensus: In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting (1984). It is not intended to be a complete exposition of Christian doctrine. Rather, the Consultation has attempted to set forth a “sufficient expression of the apostolic faith, order, worship, and witness” which, while allowing for differences of emphasis and interpretation, will enable the covenanting churches to “affirm their essential unity in the faith” [Covenant IV.2-4].

2. **Commitment to Seek Unity With Wholeness.** Covenant communion seeks a “unity that is inclusive of all who are baptized into Christ, while rejoicing in the diversity of persons and gifts which the Spirit has given to the church” [Covenant IV.7]. Racism, sexism, handicapism, or the inability of rich and poor to worship together reveal the church’s disobedience to the will of Christ “that they may all be one” just as truly as differences over sacraments or mission. Covenant communion will call the churches to a “new community in Christ in which differences are affirmed, accepted, and celebrated as the gifts of God for the common good” [Covenant IV.12.].

3. **Mutual Recognition of Members in One Baptism.** Covenant communion is based, in part, on formal acts of recognition by all the member churches between 1974 and 1979 affirming that “all who are baptized in Christ are members of Christ’s universal church and belong to and share in Christ’s ministry through the people of the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” [Covenant IV.14]. Diverse baptismal practices among the churches, including different baptismal modes and a variety of patterns of “preliminary” acts of dedication or blessing or “additional” acts of affirmation of baptismal vows such as confirmation, reflect not “different baptisms, but different facets of the one baptism into the one body of the one Lord” [Covenant IV.13].

4. **Mutual Recognition of Each Other as Churches.** While membership in the Consultation implies some level of tacit recognition as a participant in the one church of Jesus Christ, “covenanting provides the occasion and the means whereby that which is implicit in the relationship among churches may become explicit, that which is privately and unofficially acknowledged may be openly and joyfully declared before God and many witnesses [Covenant IV.16-17].

5. **Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation of Ordained Ministry.** Within The Church of Christ Uniting all previously ordained ministers would be recognized as having valid ordinations and no future ordinations would be “carried out in denominational isolation from the other covenanting churches” [Covenant IV 20, 27]. Reconciliation of ministries would mean that, with the prescribed liturgical steps and with appropriate invitation, “the ordained ministries of each covenanting church [will] become one ministry of Jesus Christ in relation to all” [(Covenant IV.21). In regional services of worship ministers who exercise oversight (episkope) will liturgically acknowledge “the reconciliation of bishops” by offering “words of mutual commitment to one another” and by “mutually laying hands upon each other” [Covenant IV.23]. These “authorized minister[s] of oversight” will then “in silence” lay hands on all other ministers in a “liturgy for the reconciliation of presbyters and welcoming of deacons.” It is expressly stated that “these are not liturgies of ordination or reordination, but of reconciliation among those whose ordained ministry already has been mutually recognized” [Covenant IV.23-24]. If the church is to be truly “catholic,” as well as “evangelical, and reformed,” it is believed that the laying on of hands by reconciled bishops will express this catholicity in such a way as to invite the broadest possible recognition in the universal church [Covenant IV.25].

The proposal, recognizing that “not all [churches] have a personalized ministry of episkope” or the office of deacon (envisioned here as minister of service), leaves “each participating church, prior to the COCU liturgy in which the covenant is declared and ministries are reconciled, to determine how its present categories of ordained ministry relate to the historic categories” embodied in The Church of Christ Uniting [Covenant IV.28). It is important to note that covenanting does not require each of the nine churches to adopt a uniform three-fold pattern for the ordering of its own ministry. What covenanting does require is that each member church put forward persons from its own ministry who will serve as bishops, presbyters, and deacons in The Church of Christ Uniting. The proposal allows considerable flexibility in this process:

Each covenanting church may find these ministerial offices already existing within its polity, or may make amendment of existing offices, . . . or may create a new office within the integrity of its continuing polity but in a manner conformable to the intention of ministry reconciliation through covenanting. Each church may assign or continue to use such names for these offices as it may desire; however, in the shared life of the churches they commonly will be identified as deacons, presbyters, and bishops of (the Church of Christ Uniting) [Covenant IV.30].

6. **Celebrating the Eucharist Together.** Because the Consultation believes the sacrament is “at the heart of the church’s life, regular celebration of the Eucharist together is at the heart of covenanting as well” [Covenant IV.32]. Shared celebrations are seen as both a “sign and a means of unity in Christ,” as a “powerful centering reality for the church’s mission.” Therefore, common celebrations should be planned with “intentional regularity,” although the “frequency of such occasions is left to the discretion of the covenanting partners in each place” [Covenant IV.35-37].

7. **Engaging Together in Christ’s Mission.** Because “mission is essential to the life of the church,” it will be “essential to life in covenant communion among the churches.” [Covenant IV.38]. In covenant communion, the churches will engage together in mission through worship, proclamation of the gospel, and action which embodies God’s justice, peace, and love.

8. **Formation of Covenant Councils.** In the Church of Christ Uniting covenanting councils at every level and location of church life -- local, regional, and national -- will give life to the communion. These covenanting councils, composed of elected representatives of the member churches, will “enable the communion of churches in covenant” by “creat[ing] the corporate ecclesial setting for the ordering of covenanting ministries of bishops, presbyters, deacons, and lay persons.” The councils will plan common celebrations of the eucharist, carry out “joint ordinations among all the covenanting churches,” provide “joint spiritual oversight” in common areas of church life, and enable common social witness [Covenant IV.46].

The “process of covenanting” will be implemented through a series of steps and stages. The first formal step is “claiming the theological consensus” as found in The COCU Consensus: In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting. The second act of covenanting is approving the covenanting proposal. Third, after all the member churches of the Consultation have acted on the proposal, a Plenary Meeting of the Consultation will be called (currently planned for 1998) to “carefully examine the actions of the churches, . . . and determine next steps accordingly” [Covenant V.4]. A fourth step will involve each church determining what it must do to prepare to participate in the inaugurating liturgies of covenanting. In particular, this will involve determining how it will choose to “put forward” appropriate persons for reconciliation as bishops, presbyters, and deacons in The Church of Christ Uniting, as well as electing and authorizing delegates to covenanting councils. A fifth step is participation in national, regional, and local liturgies for inaugurating covenant. The process anticipates that following these services there will be some “unevenness” in the way covenanting is developed in different places. “Even after the regional judicatories of the churches have entered into covenanting, groups of congregations within the region will celebrate the covenant and form a local covenanting council when they are prepared so to do” [Covenant V.12]. The unevenness of this process is judged acceptable by the Consultation, particularly given the even greater “anomalies” found in the divisions currently dividing the one body and one Table of Christ.

## **UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST RESPONSE TO THE PROPOSAL**

The responses received from across the United Church of Christ during the study process described above indicate nearly unanimous support for the basic concept and mandate put forth in the covenanting proposals. Specific aspects of the vision of church union embodied in the current proposal -- emphasis on local ecumenism, respect for denominational tradition and practice, conviction that ecumenism must be tied to “seeking God’s justice in church and world” [Covenant I.3e], and the notion that “visible unity” can be achieved through acts of “covenanting” [Covenant I] -- echo the persistent witness of the United Church of Christ. Responders affirmed that ours is a “united and uniting” church and so simply must be involved in this work. While some portions of the covenanting proposal may not be the way we would write them on our own, the United Church of Christ recognizes in the proposal a hope-filled way forward toward the unity and renewal of the church’s faith, life, and witness.

Responders celebrated that the special Ecumenical Partnership between the United Church of Christ and the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) will not be diminished if the two denominations also agree to “covenant” with the other seven members of the Consultation on Church Union, according to the proposal. We see this as an opportunity to “more faithfully reflect the universality of the body of Christ and include the strengthening of our previous ecumenical commitments” [Covenant I.3f].

The proposal’s elevation of the biblical/theological concept of covenant has broad appeal among us, and responders recognized its use in Churches in Covenant Communion as being in harmony with our own. Some members feel that the theology of the proposal is too “traditional and orthodox” and detect a “creedalism” foreign to our nature. Others are fully at home with the ecumenical consensus because of this very orthodoxy. Taken on balance, however, the responses suggest a complementarity of these positions, reflected by several sentences from The Consensus:

The Church Uniting will acknowledge the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene (Constantinopolitan) Creed as unique, ecumenical witnesses of Tradition to the revelation of God recorded in Scripture. . . . [It will] seek to respect the conscientious conviction of individual members and to enhance the deeply personal character of Christian faith. . . . It will value such confessions as they serve the renewal and revitalization of the Church in a common scriptural faith. . . . The responsibility of the Church Uniting as a guardian of the apostolic tradition will include, as part of its preaching and teaching office, an obligation to confess and communicate from time to time the substance and faith in new language to meet new occasions and issues [Consensus V.8-12].

Responders generally recognized the importance of unity in mission with the needy and the church’s social witness. Many suggested, however, that enthusiasm for national ecumenical relationships, even when they do not involve structural merger, may be quite low, especially at the local level. Energy seems to be required more urgently in other areas of the church’s mission. Furthermore, there is concern many members may have assumed that COCU “died” in the early 1970s and know little or nothing about the progress of the Consultation on Church Union in the last decade or two. There is broad recognition that genuine ecumenism must grow from the grass roots, and this is happening in many locations around the church. In this regard, some worry that this proposal is too “national” and wonder if it can become the engine of unity at all levels of church life. However, the “open-endedness” of covenanting as a “process” gives many of our responders hope that this may be so. In summary, the responses are so generally positive as to suggest that when presented the opportunity, our members are capable of being fired again by the ecumenical commitment that brought our church into being in 1957. And, while the proposal itself leaves much about the future uncharted, the United Church of Christ knows well, from its own founding, that commitment to Christian unity involves the risk of beginning without comprehending unity’s final shape.

The following more detailed comments are organized around the responses received to each of the eight elements of covenanting.

1. Claiming Our Unity in Faith. Churches in Covenant Communion cross-references the earlier theological document, The COCU Consensus (1984). The United Church of Christ at the Seventeenth General Synod (1989) has already embraced this theological basis of the Church of Christ Uniting. Responses gathered from across our church reaffirm that “an essential core of theological agreement exists and continues to grow” (Covenant IV.3). and that the theology which undergirds this proposal is “a sufficient expression of the apostolic faith, order, worship, and witness” [Covenant IV.4].

2. Commitment to Seek Unity with Wholeness. The United Church of Christ celebrates that Churches in Covenant Communion speaks strongly to the call for a united witness against forces which “divide and destroy” human wholeness, including “racism and sexism,” discrimination against persons with disabilities and the gap between “rich and poor.” The United Church of Christ embraces the convictions that “God abhors racism” [Covenant IV.8] and that “the church cannot be whole without the gifts both of men and women” [Covenant IV.10]. The United Church of Christ is encouraged by the presence of three historically African American churches in the Consultation on Church Union and is eager for greater partnership with them at all levels of church life.

The recent pronouncement of the Nineteenth General Synod (1993) “Calling the United Church of Christ to be a Multiracial and Multicultural Church” is encouraged by this element of covenanting, and we take particular instruction from the caution in this section of the document on the use of the word “inclusiveness.” We do note with concern that although the document laments the fact that “gay and lesbian persons in most churches seldom are included at all” [Covenant IV.11], the issue of how a Church of Christ Uniting would view homosexuality, and especially homosexuals in ordained ministry, is not addressed. While convictions and practices vary within the United Church of Christ as in each of the COCU member communions, the General Synod of the United Church of Christ has been on record since 1975 as supporting “the human rights of all persons in church and society regardless of sexual orientation,” and has called upon its churches to “adopt covenants of openness and affirmation of persons of lesbian, gay and bisexual orientation.” In addition, in 1991 the General Synod called upon local churches, associations, and conferences “to support openly lesbian, gay and bisexual students in care, and to facilitate the ordination and placement of qualified lesbian, gay, and bisexual candidates” [Minutes of the Eighteenth General Synod, United Church of Christ, (1991), p. 71]. In spite of the silence of Churches in Covenant Communion on these matters, the position of the General Synod, the strong convictions of many of our members and local churches which have declared themselves to be “open and affirming,” as well as debates within other member churches, suggest that the place of gay and lesbian Christians in the church is a gift that the United Church of Christ brings into the continuing dialogue within The Church of Christ Uniting.

3. Mutual Recognition of Members in One Baptism. The United Church of Christ, long before the 1974 and 1979 Consultation on Church Union agreements on this matter, has historically recognized the baptism of members in other churches, and has affirmed that different modes (immersion, pouring, or sprinkling of believers or of their children) merely reflect “different facets of the one baptism into the one body of the Lord” [Covenant IV.13]. Mutual recognition of members currently assumes baptism with water “in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” [Consensus 4.9]. Some members of our church will challenge this, desiring language for the Trinity that seeks to express greater inclusiveness of the whole people of God, while others will defend the use of traditional language with vigor. While other expressions are currently under study in the ecumenical arena, consensus has not yet been attained. Until that time, membership in the Church of Christ Uniting seems to mean that the United Church of Christ will continue to honor the traditional biblical expression of the Trinity in baptism while being open to further theological exploration by the leading of the Spirit.

4. Mutual Recognition of Each Other as Churches. The United Church of Christ acknowledges other Christian denominations as true churches, fellow members of the Body of Christ. Such judgments are based on the confession contained in the Preamble to the Constitution of the United Church of Christ:

The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Saviour. 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.

However, with the exception of the Declaration of Full Communion with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in 1989, the United Church of Christ has not formally entered into acts of mutual recognition with the other member churches of the Consultation. Covenant communion, based on a common confession of the apostolic faith expressed in The COCU Consensus, would end forever the sinful anomaly of non-recognition among the nine member communions. Some responders to the survey hope that for the United Church of Christ this mutual recognition will also bring greater fellowship with churches which are in ecumenical dialogue with other members of the Consultation. The fact that mutual recognition is to be accorded in services of worship is welcomed, for we recognize that liturgy unites us spiritually, especially when it culminates in Holy Communion.

5. Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation of Ordained Ministry. Many United Church of Christ concerns about the proposal centered on our ambivalence regarding the office of bishop and the three-fold ordering of ministry. With regard to the office of bishop, our church has always seen the need for the functions of a ministry of oversight (episkope) that witnesses to the unity of the church, and our Calvin Synod, a non-geographic conference composed of churches of Hungarian Reformed background, uses the title Bishop to refer to a personal ministry of episkope in its Synod. On the other hand, many in the



United Church of Christ are wary of both the title and the way a personal ministry of episkope has sometimes functioned throughout the history of the church. The response of the United Church of Christ to Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry continues to reflect our fears as well as our hopes about this issue:

We are not unaware, however, that the real issue behind the threefold pattern of ministry is not “labels” but the relationship of the bishop to both the other ordained ministers and the laity of the church. As we witness the threefold pattern across the centuries, it confronts us less with a matter of “titles” than with an approach to polity in which authority flows in a different direction than it is deemed to flow in the United Church of Christ. Therefore, only a transformed version of it, consistent with the best insights of our participatory polity, would be workable and welcome among us. Where the bishop is seen as a servant of Christ and of the church, as one responsible for “theological spiritual leadership,” rather than primarily as an institutional administrator, there is openness to that office [Churches Respond to BEM, Vol. II, 1986, p. 333].

We invest associations and conferences with corporate episcopal authority and have generally avoided personal episcopacy. In fact, it is often lay and clergy association officers (e.g. moderators) who preside at ordination liturgies. In our conferences we call conference ministers as staff persons to carry out various regional leadership functions, some of which are indeed comparable to the office as envisioned in The COCU Consensus. All of this takes place in a congregational and covenantal, not a hierarchical, polity.

The three-fold ordering of ministry also includes the office of deacon. Noting the lack of clarity within our own church, we wonder how we could easily identify a ministry of “deacons.” The term “deacon,” even in those parts of our church where deacons and elders are “ordained,” has connoted lay leadership in our traditions. Even though we have generally encouraged specialized ministries (hospital and campus chaplaincy, social service, teaching, etc.) we resist creating categories for ordination which might rob the laity of an important office. This element of covenanting will be challenging for the United Church of Christ.

Most, if not all, in the United Church of Christ would affirm the functions regarded as sine qua non (or essential) in identifying persons who are to be put forward initially for reconciliation as deacons (servants in pastoral care), presbyters (preachers of the Word and celebrants of the sacraments), and bishops (pastoral overseers of districts or regions, representative ministers in the act of ordination, and servants of unity in the church) [Covenant IV.29]. Nevertheless, receiving this ordering of ministry as a sign of unity and as a means of renewal, while maintaining polity commitments from our tradition that continue to have value, will require disciplined biblical and theological reflection on our own traditions as well as significant openness to the gifts of other traditions.

6. Celebrating the Eucharist Together. The ecumenical consensus on ways the sacrament of Holy Communion is understood, rooted in Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry and put forth in this proposal, is fully acceptable to the United Church of Christ. Responders to the study express eagerness for ecumenical services in which, as the document says, “shared celebration of the Eucharist is both a sign and a means of unity in Christ” [Covenant IV.35]. Many of our members also feel that more frequent Communion, a priority deriving both from a recovery of our own historical traditions as well as new ecumenical convergences, is an important trend in our church.

7. Engaging Together in Christ’s Mission. The United Church of Christ from its inception has sought to demonstrate that the social witness of the church is at the heart of ecumenism. Our official responses to earlier documents of the Consultation on Church Union have pushed in this direction. The present proposal identifies three levels of this mission which will be enhanced by covenantal communion: worship, evangelism (“proclamation”), and “faithful participation in Christ’s mission of justice, peace, and love for all people, and the integrity of creation” [Covenant IV.42]. The United Church of Christ says, Amen!

8. Formation of Covenanting Councils. Some of our members are wary of adding what may appear to be a new level of “bureaucracy” to our work. Most, however, recognize that some ongoing form of organization is necessary, acknowledging the Consultation’s belief that “church unity will be neither visible nor organic if it is not embodied in tangible form” [Covenant IV.45]. Some of our survey responders expressed concern about the relationship of these councils to local and regional councils of churches, but we would affirm the hope expressed in Churches in Covenant Communion that there would be enrichment, not competition, as “covenanting churches continue to participate fully in the life of other ecumenical bodies” [Covenant IV.51].

The United Church of Christ recognizes that these councils would represent only one expression of our ecumenical life. More narrowly, we would continue to enjoy our special partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). More broadly, we would continue to participate in councils of churches at local, regional, national, and world levels. Many of our members identify certain challenges within our church if this plan is embraced, including the financial implications of such an undertaking and the need for “institutional stamina” to incorporate it into our lives. Nevertheless, the United Church of Christ recognizes the need for visible, institutional expression of the unity we seek. The plan for establishing the councils is compatible with the covenantal way we now operate as a denomination.

Finally, the “Liturgies for Inauguration of Covenanting” which comprise Part II of Churches in Covenant Communion give voice to the theological/ecclesiological vision of the proposal. Some of our members find them eloquent, moving, and fully acceptable. Others are negative, finding the services “stale, static, and stuffy.” Some object to their “high church” tone and are reluctant to see the use of the Nicene Creed as normative. Of course, the services will be meaningful to us only if we can appreciate and appropriate the three-fold ordering of ministry, complete with our willingness to put forward for reconciliation persons prepared to serve as bishops in the Church of Christ Uniting with responsibility for oversight and presiding at services of ordination. At every level of church life, however, “renewal of vows” and reconciliation of ministry “for the wider exercise of ministry” in regional and local services involving the ministers of all nine member churches and culminating in the sharing of Holy Communion is an “inaugurating” experience well worth working and praying for.

### RECOMMENDED ACTION

The United Church of Christ hereby commits itself to continuing in “the process of covenanting” as presented in Chapter V of Churches in Covenant Communion.

1. The United Church of Christ approves this text as the definitive agreement for joining with other participating churches in covenant communion, including the acts sufficient to enable it.
2. The United Church of Christ declares its willingness to enter into a relationship of covenant communion with the member churches of the Consultation on Church Union and other churches which similarly approve this agreement and The COCU Consensus which is its theological basis, sealed by the proposed inaugural liturgies.
3. The United Church of Christ will begin immediately to identify for itself such steps and procedures as may be necessary to prepare for the reconciliation of ordained ministries and for entering into covenant communion as set forth in this document.

These steps and procedures will include dealing with a number of issues, including the following:

For the United Church of Christ the premier issue is how our historic understandings of the ordained ministry may be integrated with the three-fold order set forth for the Church of Christ Uniting. This will involve us in further study of the nature of the office of conference minister, our corporate vesting of authority for episcopal oversight in the conference and association, and the question of the extent to which membership in the Church of Christ Uniting will require a personal vesting of episcopal authority in ministers set apart (as opposed to “elevated”) as bishops. And it will require study of the ways diaconal ministry is now being carried out in our denomination. Resolution on the question of how some within the ordained ministry can be identified as “deacons” can partly be undertaken ecumenically, for the office as prescribed does not exist extensively in any of the Consultation’s member denominations.

United Church of Christ affirmation of Churches in Covenant Communion means our commitment to recognize the authority of covenanting councils (in the work for which they will be created and accountable to the church bodies that bring them into being) and to elect representatives in the local, regional, and national settings at which the councils will operate.

Further preparatory steps include effective communication of the covenanting process within our church in every setting so participation and commitment may be encouraged. If the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) joins the United Church of Christ in approving Churches in Covenant Communion our special ecumenical partnership should enable us to take steps together toward the more inclusive act of covenanting with the other members of the Church of Christ Uniting.