



Newly Commissioned Minister Serves on National Staff

By Christy Trudo

Editor’s Note:

Last October, Christy Trudo, Minister for Parish Life on the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries, was installed as a commissioned minister – one of the first to serve in the national setting of the United Church of Christ since commissioned ministry became an authorized ministry in 1984. I asked Christy to comment on her new standing.



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I began to think about becoming commissioned many years ago when I was an active layperson. I went to a workshop on commissioning at Faithworks in 1993 and was disappointed at that time to learn that commissioning is only for those working in churches or with other covenantal partners of our denomination.

After I began my work here at the national office in 2001, and one of my early assignments was to partner with AUCE as you prepared the General Synod Resolution, “Affirming the Essential Role of Commissioned Ministry.” At that time I began to think much more seriously about becoming commissioned myself.

When I finally did apply, I had to explain to the In-Care Committee why a member of the national staff would want to be commissioned. There is an aspect of commissioning that is about the authority and affirmation it carries, both of which are already informally conferred on national staff by the church. However, I decided to be commissioned because I feel it is appropriate for me to be accountable to the wider church in a formal way, just as ordained ministers are. In my work, I often advise Committees on the Ministry about the process for accountability and discipline, which is a part of their responsibilities. It is my strong feeling that where authority is conferred, there should be appropriate accountability. For me, that is what being commissioned is primarily about.

I had previously completed a fair amount of seminary work, as well as a two year conference-based lay education program about twenty years

ago. I told the Committee that I feel it is appropriate for candidates to complete education in UCC polity, which I did not have. So I took a course through the Western Reserve Association’s “Lay School of the Church,” and even though I have worked for several years in the national setting, I found that there a few things I still did not know!

I finished my commissioning paper when I was on sabbatical, after which I was commissioned in a ceremony here in the Church House last October. In my work, I already have been an advocate for commissioned ministers and commissioned ministry, but being commissioned myself is an additional way that I put the issue before the church. A great many people are unaware of commissioned ministry, and Committees on the Ministry have varying

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levels of experience and different perspectives about it. Putting it out there in this way is one more invitation to consider who they will commission and why.

The charge at the service of commissioning was given by Joe Malayang, the Executive Minister of Local Church Ministries at the time. Joe’s words, and in our conversations with others since then, have given our colleagues in the national setting an understanding of commissioned ministry that many of them previously did not have. More than one have now begun to consider commissioning for themselves.

For more information about commissioned ministry, visit www.AUCE-Educators.org and click on “Resources.”

Commissioned Ministers Are Still Speaking

By Deborah Gline Allen, C.M.C.E.

Commissioned ministry is an authorized form of ministry that emerged from the category of Commissioned Worker when it became a recognized form of ministry in the United Church of Christ in 1984. The *United Church of Christ Manual On Ministry* lists several areas in which a person may be commissioned: Christian education, church administration, church music, missionary work related to the United Church of Christ, conference and denominational staff work, certain ministries of advocacy or community change. There are currently 127 commissioned ministers in the United Church of Christ; 45 of them are commissioned in Christian education.

"I was encouraged to seek commissioning by my conference minister," says **Mary Sicher**, Minister of Christian Education for the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, and a member of AUCE. "He wanted me to go among the congregations in the conference to preach and teach with the authority of the Church behind me. For me, commissioning makes every task more sacred, more (w)holy."

Christy Trudo, of the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of the United Church of Christ, reminds us that the ministries of word and sacrament require ordination. "But if one's sense of call does not clearly lead in that direction at the outset of the discernment process, it is important to consider commissioning as a possibility for authorization."

Carol Wilson, a Commissioned Minister of Christian Education in the Southwest Conference, says that her work as a commissioned minister has been to help local congregations that have no volunteer or paid Christian education staff. As an authorized minister in the United Church of Christ, it has been important for her to live out the covenantal relationship within the various settings of the UCC. One way is by providing needed support for Christian education in the churches of the Southwest Conference. Another way that she lives out this covenantal relationship is in her work throughout the UCC as a United Church Education Consultant with the Partners In Education.

For **Timothy Brown** of the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns, "Commissioning was a natural response to my call to work for the Coalition. I needed to respond to God's tapping on my shoulder with ministerial acknowledgment from my denomination."

When **Elsa Marshall**, Commissioned Minister for Christian Education and Youth Ministry at Maple Street Congregational Church in Danvers, Massachusetts, was asked why she became commissioned, she said, "That is simple. God called me to this unique and blessed ministry and that has formed and transformed my life. God did not call me to word and sacrament and if I had decided to go to seminary and be ordained, that would have been unfaithful to the discernment of my call. I am indeed fortunate to be in a denomination that recognizes and authorizes many different calls to ministry."

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Clearly, the commissioning process provides an opportunity for those called to specific forms of ministry to bring together their faith, their passions, and God's presence in it all. Commissioned ministers are then affirmed by the various settings in the United Church of Christ, validating what these people have always known to be God's work through them.

More information about commissioned ministry is found in the Commissioned Ministry section of the *United Church of Christ Manual On Ministry*, which is available at <http://www.ucc.org/ministers/manual> or by calling United Church Resources at 800.537.3394.

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