

03-GS-50 VOTED: The Twenty-fourth General Synod adopts the resolution “Affirming the Essential role of Commissioned Ministry as an Authorized Ministry of the United Church of Christ.”

AFFIRMING THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF COMMISSIONED MINISTRY AS AN AUTHORIZED MINISTRY OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

WHEREAS, in the letter to the Church at Ephesus we are told “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the Body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12); and

WHEREAS, in Paul’s first letter to the Church at Corinth he says, “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Corinthians 12:4-7); and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of the United Church of Christ “recognizes that God calls the whole Church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the Gospel in church and society” (Article VI, paragraph 20); and

WHEREAS, “The United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls certain of its members to various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the church for which ecclesiastical authorization is required by the church (Constitution and Bylaws, Article VI, section 21); and

WHEREAS, “Commissioning is the act whereby the United Church of Christ, through an Association, in cooperation with a person and a local church of the United Church of Christ, recognizes and authorizes that member whom God has called to a specific church-related ministry which is recognized by that Association, but not requiring ordination or licensing” (Constitution and Bylaws, Article VI, paragraph 27); and

WHEREAS, professionals in the areas of Christian education, parish nursing, church music, church administration, worship and the arts, parish visitation, spiritual direction, and other church ministries serve in positions in our congregations or in other settings of the church that do not require ordination or licensing; and

WHEREAS, these ministries are vital for the faith formation, continued spiritual growth, and empowerment of the children, youth, and adults of our local churches to live as a people of faith in an ever-more-volatile society and are undertaken on behalf of the entire United Church of Christ.

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod reaffirms, emphasizes, and celebrates the essential role of commissioned ministry as an authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ, as one that seeks to empower lay persons through the granting of ecclesiastical authority and standing to those individuals who have demonstrated a call from God to specific ministries for which they have gained the credentials required by the authorizing Association or Conference and in which they will serve a calling body that will enter into covenant with the authorizing Association or Conference; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that in so recognizing and affirming the essential role of commissioned ministry as an authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ, the Twenty-fourth General Synod requests that the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries works intentionally and as needed to increase knowledge and awareness about commissioned ministry with committees on the ministry in the various Conferences and Associations so that they are able to provide adequate assistance and support of candidates for commissioned ministry, including a period of mentorship and preparation that is patterned after the “In Care” process used with candidates for ordination, for the length of time deemed appropriate for the discernment and commissioning process to evolve effectively; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod requests that the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of Local Church Ministries undertakes a diligent effort to determine how best to provide support and assistance on commissioned ministry to all interested parties and to undertake a study of commissioned ministry as it is currently being lived out in order to ascertain how best to provide that support and assistance; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod recommends that all professionals living out a call from God through their service in the various settings of the church in positions that do not require ordination or licensing should seek the recognition and authorization of their calls through the process for commissioned ministry, providing they possess the credentials deemed necessary for said authorization; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod recommends that all candidates for commissioned ministry be mentored effectively through the commissioning process by the local church and the Conference or Association and that once the process is completed and the authorization granted, the standing of all commissioned ministers be recognized through such official channels as listings in Conference and Association directories, inclusion as appropriate in United Church of Christ Ministers' Associations, and the recognition of anniversaries of commissioning for those with long periods of service; and

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Twenty-fourth General Synod urges local congregations, Conferences, Associations, and other settings of the church to consider commissioned ministers as viable candidates for those professional positions not requiring ordination or licensing and that the compensation for those positions be comparable for the level of credentialing and responsibility required, including such additional items as sabbatical time, access to pension and health plans, continuing education funds, and housing allowance as appropriate.

Funding for this action will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.