

**BYLAWS
OF THE
NORTHERN PLAINS CONFERENCE
OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

As Approved by Delegates to the

2001 Conference Annual Meeting

Our Covenant

We, the members of the
Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ,
do hereby covenant together in the presence of God
to be a nurturing and prophetic community of the followers of Christ,
to walk together in deep commitment to God and each other, and
to do God's will in our personal and community journeys,
as it is revealed to us through the Spirit and the Word.

As the people of the United Church of Christ in the Northern Plains of
North America, we endeavor in covenant to be God's faithful servants as we:

- Live and proclaim the good news of God's love and God's gift of
salvation in Jesus Christ;
- Welcome all who would join in this pilgrimage of faith, inviting each to
accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to unite with the church
and live as Christ's servants to the world;
- Care for each other and our world by engaging in acts of mercy, love,
justice and peace;
- Engage all people with God's invitation to embrace healing,
forgiveness and reconciliation;
- Celebrate and uphold both our individuality and diversity that we might
rejoice together in community;

- Grow in understanding and appreciation of each other's heritages and cultures, and uphold them in settings of worship, fellowship, and support within our programs and our churches;
- Honor individual conscience and local church autonomy, cherishing and nurturing spiritual and intellectual honesty and freedom, while strengthening, upholding, and nourishing our unity in Christ;
- Join with each other and share in the tasks and responsibilities of our common faith;
- Guide and mutually support one another, empowering each local congregation to carry out its ministry;
- Identify, equip, and place church leaders in the settings for ministry which will call forth their unique gifts as they have been given by the Holy Spirit;
- Nurture the faith of children, youth, men, and women by providing Christian education, fellowship, and outdoor education;
- Extend outreach to establish and strengthen congregations and our presence in regions of growth and decline within our conference;
- Address the hurts, hopes and dreams of our people, creating safe, healthy and productive families and communities, seeking justice and upholding the dignity of all people and the integrity of God's creation;
- Resist hatred, refuse the aggressor, and shield the powerless;
- Serve through our daily labors as faithful, responsible, and accountable stewards of all the resources given to us by God; and,
- Minister harmoniously within our conference, with the entire United Church of Christ and in ecumenical efforts to build the dominion of God on earth as it is in heaven.

In our response to the gentle, yet persuasive, murmurings of the Holy Spirit of God within and among us, we acknowledge our covenantal relationship in this common ministry and mission, and to it we pledge our mutual fidelity, offering our interests, talents, concerns, wisdom, and financial support. Relying upon God's grace, we seek to be worthy of and faithful to this covenant to which we have been called.

Article D - Settings of the Church

The Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ affirms the covenantal relationship among the various parts of the church as outlined in the *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ*. We freely enter into this covenantal relationship to carry out the work and ministry of the Conference recognizing that each ministry has its own mandates, responsibilities and voice.

We seek to honor each other's mandates, responsibilities and understandings by working in consultation and building cooperation as we walk together in all God's ways.

B. CONFERENCE

The membership of the Conference shall consist of all local churches holding standing in the Conference, and all ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers who have been granted standing by the Conference.

As established in consultation with the General Synod of the United Church of Christ, the geographical boundaries of the Northern Plains Conference shall consist of the State of North Dakota in the United States of America, and the Prairie Provinces of Manitoba and Alberta in Canada.

C. LOCAL CHURCHES

The basic unit of the life and organization of the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ is the local church. The Northern Plains Conference shall include all local churches, located within the boundaries of the Conference, which by their action have covenanted with the United Church of Christ and have been granted standing by the Conference.

The autonomy of the local church is inherent and modifiable only by local church action. Nothing in these bylaws shall abrogate or limit the right of each local church to operate according to its structures and customs, as it deems appropriate through the democratic actions of its members. The local church shall have exclusive rights over the ownership and control of any real or personal property owned by the local church. Neither the local church nor the Conference may obligate or encumber each other except by specific mutual agreement.

The Conference embodies a covenantal relationship by which local churches within the Conference voluntarily work together to further their ministry and the work of the entire church in all its settings.

D. ASSOCIATIONS

An association is a body composed of all local churches within a given geographical area of the Conference and of all ordained, commissioned or licensed ministers who reside within its boundaries with standing in the Northern Plains Conference. The bylaws of an association of the

Conference shall be consistent with the *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ* and of the Conference.

The Conference shall act as an association on behalf of the churches within a given geographical area if there is no association, or as may be delegated by an association, or if an association is not functioning.

E. RECOGNIZED FELLOWSHIPS / CLUSTERS

Members of the United Church of Christ or local churches within the Conference may join together for common objectives in ministry and/or fellowship through recognized fellowships or clusters. Recognized fellowships or clusters, not otherwise represented, shall be granted voice, but not vote, at Conference meetings.

The Conference through its Standing Committees and Council may establish recognized fellowships or clusters to facilitate the ministry, activities, and community of the Conference.

The Conference Council may establish policies and procedures for the organization, structure, accountability and recognition of fellowships and clusters.

E. AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICES

Organizations and services that hold membership in the council for Health and Human Service Ministries (CHHSM) shall have voice without vote.

ARTICLE II – Ministry & Standing

Authorization for ministry and the standing of local churches within the Northern Plains Conference shall be determined by the Conference, acting as an association, in accordance with the provisions of the *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ*.

F. STANDING OF MINISTERS

Standing of ordained, commissioned, licensed ministers and authorized lay worship leaders is granted by the Conference, acting as an association. The purpose of ministerial standing in the Conference is to secure and assure local churches and their members of qualified and certified pastoral leadership, and to provide recognition and certification for persons qualified for ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministry.

Ministerial standing is defined and maintained in accord with the provisions of the current *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ*, and the current

United Church of Christ Manual On Ministry. The Conference may modify and/or supplement the *Manual on Ministry* through the adoption of policies that are not inconsistent with the *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.*

7. ORDAINED MINISTERIAL STANDING

Ordained ministerial standing may be achieved by: 1) ordination; 2) transfer of ordination; and, 3) privilege of call, and is granted by the Conference in accord with the *Manual on Ministry* and Conference policies.

8. COMMISSIONED MINISTERIAL STANDING:

Commissioned ministerial standing is granted by the Conference in accord with the *Manual on Ministry* and Conference policies.

3. LICENSED MINISTERIAL STANDING AND AUTHORIZED LAY WORSHIP LEADERS:

Licensed ministerial and authorized lay worship leaders standing is granted annually by the Conference in accord with the *Manual on Ministry* and Conference policies.

4. REVIEW AND DISCIPLINE OF MINISTERS

All authorizations for ministerial standing are subject to periodic review by the Conference Committee on Church and Ministry acting on behalf of the Conference. The committee shall conduct periodic consultations and information reviews. The committee may at its initiative or upon request conduct a situational support consultation or a fitness review. The committee may suspend or terminate a minister's standing only upon completion of a fitness. A minister may appeal the suspension or termination of standing to the Conference Council on question of procedure to ensure that the minister was afforded a full and fair hearing. Members of the Church and Ministry shall not participate in decision process of the Conference Council concerning an appeal. Such actions shall be in accord with the *Manual on Ministry* and Conference Policies.

5. ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCILS:

An Ecclesiastical Council is a meeting of the Conference called for the purpose of authorization or discipline of ministry. The Moderator of the Conference or the Moderator's designee shall preside at Ecclesiastical Councils.

B. STANDING OF CHURCHES

Local churches may be admitted and granted standing in the Northern Plains Conference upon completion of a process of application and upon a vote of approval by the Conference.

By a vote of its members in accord with its bylaws, a local church may withdraw from the Conference upon notification to the Conference.

The Conference may suspend or terminate the standing of a local church as a member of the Conference for detrimental actions, which show consistent disregard for the covenantal relationships within the United Church of Christ and which result in injury to the ministry of other local churches, authorized ministers, an association, or the Conference. The standing of a local church may only be suspended or terminated upon a hearing and a vote of three-fourths of the delegates present at a duly-called meeting of the Conference.

C. STANDING OF ASSOCIATIONS

The standing of an association within the Conference shall be determined by the Conference at a regular or special meeting of the Conference. The Conference may not suspend or withdraw the standing of an association without its consent if the association has met the requirements of its own bylaws.

The geographic boundaries of an association shall be established by the association in consultation and with the consent of the Conference.

Article DDD - Meetings Of The Conference

When convened in annual or special meeting, the assembled membership of the Conference is the governing authority of the conference and may take any action it deems necessary and appropriate in the interest of the Conference, except as may be specifically limited by these bylaws.

G. ANNUAL MEETING - The Annual Meeting of the membership of the Conference shall be held in June, normally on the second weekend, at a location determined by the Conference Council.

The Annual Meeting shall provide an opportunity for the membership of the Conference to receive, review and take appropriate action on the reports of the officers and committees, and on the activities and policies of the Conference.

The Annual Meeting shall include a financial report of the past fiscal year and a proposed budget for the next fiscal year. The fiscal year of the Conference shall be the calendar year. The financial report and proposed budget shall include the individual salaries and benefits of the professional staff of the Conference.

The Annual Meeting shall adopt Conference policies for the administration and use of endowment and other dedicated or restricted funds. The Annual Meeting shall receive reports on such funds, and consider any recommendations for changes to such Conference policies.

The Annual Meeting shall elect officers and members of the Standing Committees for the terms outlined by these bylaws, consider any resolutions received from members of the Conference or from Conference bodies, and consider any other business to come before the meeting in accord with the Standing Rules for Conference meetings.

At least once every three years, the Moderator shall appoint a bylaws committee to review the bylaws and report its findings and recommendations to the annual meeting of the Conference.

H. SPECIAL MEETINGS

Special meetings of the Conference other than Ecclesiastical Councils may be called by the Conference Council or by petition of one-fifth (1/5) of the local churches holding standing in the Conference.

C. DELEGATE REPRESENTATION

Every local church holding standing in the Conference shall be entitled to representation at annual or special meetings of the Conference, as follows:

5. Two adult lay delegates and two youth delegates for the first 50 members of the church; and,
6. One additional delegate for each additional 50 members or major fraction thereof, with the local church deciding on youth or adult representation.

All delegates must be members in good standing of the local church they represent. Local churches are encouraged to make every effort to ensure that their delegations reflect the diversity of their memberships.

All ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers holding standing in the Conference shall be delegates and have voice and vote.

Members of the Conference Council, who are not otherwise delegates, shall have voice and vote at meetings of the Conference. Members representing the Conference on a governing board of the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ shall have voice and vote at meetings of the Conference.

The Conference meeting may grant the privilege of either voice and/or vote to other persons as it may determine appropriate and helpful in the conduct of its meeting.

Each delegate shall have one vote on all matters before the conference. Such vote must be cast in person. However, delegates under the age of eighteen (18) shall not have vote in contractual property or fiscal matters. No votes shall be received by proxy.

D CONDUCT OF CONFERENCE MEETINGS

The Conference Council shall act as the business committee for the annual or special meetings, and shall propose Standing Rules for the Conference meeting for consideration and adoption by the delegates. The Standing Rules shall govern until the next Conference meeting.

The quorum for conduct of business shall consist of one-fifth (1/5) of the total registered delegates, providing that one-fifth of the local churches are represented by at least one lay delegate in attendance.

Except as may be outlined in the Standing Rules, conduct of business shall be governed by the Roberts Rules of Order. The Conference Moderator shall appoint a person to serve as parliamentarian to advise the Moderator and assist the delegates.

E MEETING NOTICES

Notice of the time, place, agenda, and purpose of annual or special meetings of the Conference shall be sent to each local church, ministerial member, Conference officer, member of Conference Standing Committees, and the officers of the United Church of Christ. The notice of meeting shall be mailed at least twenty-one (21) days prior to the meeting to the address of record in the Conference office.

Article DV - Conference Council & Conference Standing Committees

I. CONFERENCE COUNCIL

The Conference Council shall be the governing body of the Conference between annual or special meetings of the Conference. It shall be responsible for

implementing and coordinating the work and activities of the Conference in accordance with the directions established at the meetings of the Conference.

The Conference Council shall consist of the officers of the Conference and the members of the Conference Standing Committees. It shall meet at least three times per year. A quorum for the conduct of business shall be a majority of those entitled to vote at a council meeting. No proxy votes shall be accepted.

The Conference Council shall provide a report of its actions to the meetings of the Conference. It shall provide for an annual audit of the financial records of the Conference by an independent qualified auditor, and report the findings to the annual meeting of the Conference.

Members representing the Conference on the governing boards of the Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ shall be ex-officio members of the Council and the related Standing Conference Committee, with voice and vote on matters related to coordination of the Conference and that Covenanted Ministry.

The Conference Council shall establish written policies and procedures for the operation, administration and staffing of the Conference, and shall review and coordinate the work of the Conference Standing Committees. Except as may be provided in the council's written procedures and policies, Roberts Rules of Order shall govern the work of the conference council and the standing committees.

It may delegate responsibilities and activities to Conference Standing Committees. It may establish and appoint committees, and task groups as it may determine to be necessary and useful.

J. CONFERENCE STANDING COMMITTEES

There shall be three Conference Standing Committees:

- Church and Ministry Committee
- Faith and Nurture Committee
- Mission and Outreach Committee

Each Standing committee shall consist of five members elected by the Conference Annual Meeting.

Each Standing Committee at its initial meeting, following the Annual Meeting of the Conference, shall organize itself and elect a chairperson of the committee.

Each Standing Committee shall recommend to the Conference Council policies and procedures for the carrying out of its responsibilities for adoption.

Each Standing Committee shall report its activities to the regular meetings of the Conference Council and shall make a report to the annual meeting of the Conference.

- 3 The Church and Ministry Committee shall be responsible for the standing of the churches and for the authorization of ministry in the Conference, following the faith and order of the United Church of Christ. It shall administer those tasks which support ministers, local churches, and specialized ministries within the Conference. It shall encourage and assist ministers in participating in programs of continuing education, and conduct periodic retreats and workshops. It shall prepare guidelines for ministerial covenants with pastors, including salary and benefit packages. It shall encourage and facilitate the ministry of all persons within the Conference.

- 4 The Faith and Nurture Committee shall be responsible for conference-level nurture and education programs for youth, adults and recognized fellowship groups; local church leadership development; outdoor ministry programs; and other learning and faith experiences. It shall help provide resources for the education and nurture of local churches. It shall serve as a coordinator for conference participation in regional, national, and ecumenical education and nurture activities and events. The committee shall promote the growth of faith in local churches and encourage the use of United Church of Christ resources and leadership.

- 3 The Mission and Outreach Committee shall call members and leaders of local churches of the Conference to faithful engagement in service to God's world. The Committee shall keep the churches aware of the needs and opportunities of mission arising out of circumstances and issues affecting God's people within the conference and throughout the world. It shall develop strategies by which members of the Conference can join with others in seeking justice and in creating caring communities to express the good news of God's love. The Committee shall be responsible for assisting and encouraging local churches in stewardship development and participation in Our Church's Wider Mission.

Article V - Officers of the Conference

The officers of the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ shall be: Conference Chairperson, Moderator, Secretary, Treasurer and Conference Minister.

- K. CONFERENCE CHAIRPERSON - The Conference Chairperson shall be the executive officer of the Conference, and preside at all the meetings of the Conference Council. The Conference Chairperson shall serve as the corporate president of the Conference and sign all documents on behalf of the Conference as may be required by state, federal, or provincial law. The Conference Chairperson shall be an ex-officio member of all the conference standing committees and task groups of the Conference Council.

- L. MODERATOR – The Moderator shall preside at all Annual and Special meetings of the membership. The Moderator shall serve as the corporate vice-president and as the vice-chair of the Conference Council and fulfill the duties of the Conference Chairperson when needed due to the absence of the Conference Chairperson. The Moderator shall be an ex-officio member of the Nominating, Bylaws, and other committees established by the meetings of the Conference.

- M. SECRETARY - The Secretary shall be responsible for the recording of the minutes of all the meetings of the Conference and the Conference Council. Together with the Conference Chairperson, the Secretary shall sign all documents as may be required by state, federal, or provincial law. The Secretary shall be responsible for providing notices of meetings and communications as may be directed by the Conference or the Conference Council. The Secretary shall be responsible for forwarding proposed bylaws changes to the membership of the conference and forwarding resolutions to the meetings of the Conference.

- N. TREASURER – The Treasurer shall be responsible for the financial accountability and reporting system of the Conference to the membership of the Conference. The Treasurer shall assist and advise the Conference Council and its committees in matters of financial management. The Treasurer shall make a report of the financial condition of the Conference to the Conference Annual Meeting, and shall make other such reports as may be required or directed by the Conference Council.

- O. CONFERENCE MINISTER - The Conference Minister shall be the administrative officer of the conference and shall have supervisory responsibility for the employment and work of the professional and support staff of the Conference in accord with policies and procedures established by the Conference Council.

The Conference Minister shall be an ordained minister with standing in the United Church of Christ and shall be a voting member of the Conference. The Conference Minister shall be an ex-officio member, with voice but not vote, of the Conference Council, and all its Committees and task forces.

The Conference Minister shall be the liaison officer of the Conference in relationship to the Officers and Ministries of the United Church of Christ, associations, local churches and ministers, and ecumenical bodies.

- P. ASSISTANT OFFICERS, & ASSOCIATE OR ASSISTANT CONFERENCE MINISTER

The Conference Council may elect a Council member to serve as an assistant officer as it may deem necessary and appropriate.

An Associate or Assistant Conference Minister shall be a member of the Conference, and serve as an ex-officio member, with voice but not vote, of the Conference Council and its committees and task groups, as may be determined to be appropriate by the Conference Council.

Article 00 - Terms, Nominations, Elections & Vacancies

A. TERMS AND ELECTIONS OF CONFERENCE OFFICERS AND CONFERENCE STANDING COMMITTEES

The Conference Chairperson and Conference Moderator shall be elected in even numbered years for a two-year term.

The Conference Secretary and Treasurer shall be elected in odd-numbered years for a two-year term.

Five members shall be elected to each Conference Standing Committee for two-year terms.

7. In even numbered years, three members will be elected to the Church and Ministry Committee, two members to the Faith and Nurture Committee, and two members to the Mission and Outreach Committee.
8. In odd-numbered years, two members will be elected to the Church and Ministry Committee, three members to the Faith and Nurture Committee, and three members to the Mission and Outreach Committee.

The Conference Chairperson, the Conference Moderator, and the members of Conference Standing Committees shall be eligible to succeed themselves in office for one additional term, having served one full term. The Conference Secretary, and Conference Treasurer shall be eligible to succeed themselves for two additional terms after serving a full term.

Terms of office shall begin upon the adjournment of the Conference annual meeting.

Upon adoption of these Bylaws at the 2001 Annual Meeting, those Officers and members of Standing Committees to be elected in even numbered years shall be initially elected for a one year term.

B VACANCIES

The Conference Council may appoint a person to fill the remaining unexpired term in case of a vacancy in an office or Conference Standing Committee.

C. CONFERENCE MINISTER

As is a custom of the United Church of Christ in the calling of a pastor, the Conference Minister shall be elected to an indefinite term of office.

Upon or pending a vacancy in the position of Conference Minister, the Conference Council shall appoint a Search Committee to seek applications and to nominate a person to fill the office. The Search Committee shall include one member from each Conference Standing Committee and such other persons as may be deemed appropriate by the Council to represent the diversity of the conference. The Search Committee shall present the candidate to a duly called meeting of the membership of the Conference. A two-thirds majority vote of those present and voting shall be necessary to elect the Conference Minister.

The call of the Conference Minister may be terminated by a majority vote of those present and voting at a duly-called meeting of the membership of the Conference.

D. NOMINATING COMMITTEE:

A nominating committee, consisting of five members representative of the diversity and geography of the churches of the Conference and including both lay person and clergy, shall be elected for two year terms at the annual meeting of the Conference. Three members shall be elected in odd-numbered years, and two members shall be elected in even-numbered years. The Moderator may appoint up to two additional members for one-year terms to ensure the committee is representative of the diversity and geography of the Conference.

The nominating committee shall seek out candidates for nomination to fill the positions to be elected at the next Annual Meeting, including officers, and members of the Conference Standing Committees and the Nominating Committee. The Standing Rules shall outline timetables and procedures to be followed by the Nominating Committee. In seeking candidates for positions, the Nominating Committee shall consider the diversity and geography of the churches of the conference, seeking representation from both clergy and laity for the officers and the members of each of the Conference Standing Committees.

The Nominating Committee shall report its nominations directly to the meetings of the Conference. The committee shall be convened by the Conference Moderator, at which time the committee shall elect one of its members to serve as chairperson of the committee.

The Nominating Committee shall assist the Conference Minister in developing and maintaining a list of United Church of Christ members within the Conference who could effectively serve the Conference, and represent the interests of the Conference on the governing bodies of the General Synod and Covenanted Ministries of the United Church of Christ.

Article 000 - Seal

The Northern Plains Conference shall have a corporate seal, consisting of a circle containing the words: "The Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ."

Article 0000 Dissolution

In case of voluntary or involuntary dissolution, the remaining assets of the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ shall be held in trust by the General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ and the Executive Council of the United Church of Christ. Such remaining assets shall then be made available and transferred to the successor organization(s) and shall be used to carry out the ministry of the United Church of Christ in the geographic area served by the Northern Plains Conference and for the purposes for which the funds were designated.

Article 0X - Amendments

Amendments to these bylaws shall be adopted upon a vote of two-thirds of those present and voting at a meeting of the members of the Conference. Notice of any proposed bylaw amendment, including the full text of the proposed amendment, shall be mailed by the Conference Secretary to the membership of the Conference at least sixty days prior to the Conference meeting at which such amendment is to be considered.