

1 BYLAWS OF THE
2 **NORTHERN PLAINS CONFERENCE**
3 **OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**
4

5 **Purpose**

6 Grounded in God’s presence, the Northern Plains Conference serves as a catalyst for
7 God’s love in action.
8

9 **Our Covenant**

10 We, the members of the
11 Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ,
12 do hereby covenant together in the presence of God
13 to be a nurturing and prophetic community of the followers of Christ,
14 to walk together in deep commitment to God and each other,
15 to offer God’s extravagant welcome in the world,
16 and to do God’s will as it is revealed to us through the Spirit and the Word.
17
18

19 **ARTICLE I – Settings of the Church**
20

21 The Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ affirms the covenantal
22 relationship among the various parts of the church as outlined in the *Constitution and*
23 *Bylaws of the United Church of Christ*. We freely enter into this covenantal relationship to
24 carry out the work and ministry of the Conference recognizing that each ministry has its
25 own mandates, responsibilities and voice. We seek to honor each other’s mandates,
26 responsibilities and understandings by working in consultation and building cooperation
27 as we walk together in all
28 God’s ways.
29

30 **CONFERENCE**

31
32 The membership of the Conference shall consist of all local churches holding
33 standing in the Conference, and all ordained, commissioned, and licensed
34 ministers who have been granted standing by the Conference.
35

36 As established in consultation with the General Synod of the United Church of
37 Christ, the geographical boundaries of the Northern Plains Conference shall
38 consist of the State of North Dakota in the United States of America, and the Prairie
39 Provinces of Manitoba and Alberta in Canada, and one historically connected
40 church located in East Grand Forks, MN.
41

42 **LOCAL CHURCHES**

43
44 The basic unit of the life and organization of the Northern Plains Conference of the
45 United Church of Christ is the local church. The Northern Plains Conference shall
46 include all local churches, located within the boundaries of the Conference, which

1 by their action have covenanted with the United Church of Christ and have been
2 granted standing by the Conference.

3
4 The autonomy of the local church is inherent and modifiable only by local church
5 action. Nothing in these bylaws shall abrogate or limit the right of each local church
6 to operate according to its structures and customs, as it deems appropriate through
7 the democratic actions of its members. The local church shall have exclusive rights
8 over the ownership and control of any real or personal property owned by the local
9 church. Neither the local church nor the Conference may obligate or encumber
10 each other except by specific mutual agreement.

11
12 The Conference embodies a covenantal relationship by which local churches
13 within the Conference voluntarily work together to further their ministry and the
14 work of the entire church in all its settings.

15 16 ASSOCIATIONS

17
18 The Northern Plains Conference acts as Association for the Conference. There
19 are no separate Associations.

20 21 AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS AND SERVICES

22
23 Organizations and services that hold membership in the Council for Health and
24 Human Service Ministries (CHHSM) and Fort Berthold Council of Congregational
25 Churches (FBCCC) shall have voice without vote.

26 27 28 **ARTICLE II – Ministry & Standing**

29
30 Authorization for ministry and the standing of local churches within the Northern Plains
31 Conference shall be determined by the Conference, acting as an association, in
32 accordance with the provisions of the *Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of*
33 *Christ.*

34 35 STANDING OF MINISTERS

36
37 Standing of ordained, commissioned, licensed ministers is granted by the
38 Conference, acting as an association. The purpose of ministerial standing in the
39 Conference is to secure and assure local churches and their members of qualified
40 and authorized pastoral leadership, and to provide recognition and authorization
41 for persons qualified for ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministry.

42
43 Ordained, Licensed and Commissioned Ministerial standings are defined, granted
44 and maintained in accord with the provisions of the current *Constitution and Bylaws*
45 *of the United Church of Christ*, and the current *United Church of Christ Manual on*
46 *Ministry*. The Conference may modify and/or supplement the *Manual on Ministry*

1 through the adoption of policies that are not inconsistent with the *Constitution and*
2 *Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.*

3
4 The Conference may, from time to time, train and approve persons to serve as
5 Trained Lay Worship Leaders under the guidance of the Committee on Ministry,
6 with accountability to that committee, for renewable three-year terms. They may
7 be approved to supply preach and lead worship in the churches of the Conference
8 and may administer Communion with the approval of the congregation where they
9 are leading worship.

10 11 REVIEW AND DISCIPLINE OF MINISTERS

12
13 All authorizations for ministerial standing are subject to periodic review by the
14 Conference Committee on Ministry acting on behalf of the Conference in
15 accordance with the Manual on Ministry. The committee shall conduct periodic
16 consultations and information reviews. The committee may at its initiative or upon
17 request conduct a situational support consultation or a fitness review. A minister's
18 standing may be suspended pending completion of a fitness review. The
19 committee may terminate a minister's standing only upon completion of a fitness
20 review. A minister may appeal the suspension or termination of standing to the
21 Conference Council. Appeals may be based only on the Committee on Ministry's
22 faithfulness in executing the Fitness Review process; outcomes are not
23 appealable. Members of the Committee on Ministry shall not participate in decision
24 process of the Conference Council concerning an appeal. Such actions shall be in
25 accord with the Manual on Ministry and Conference Policies.

26 27 ECCLESIASTICAL COUNCILS

28
29 An Ecclesiastical Council is a meeting of the Conference called for the purpose of
30 authorization or discipline of ministry. The Moderator of the Conference or the
31 Moderator's designee shall preside at Ecclesiastical Councils.

32 33 STANDING OF CHURCHES

34
35 Local churches may be admitted and granted standing in the Northern Plains
36 Conference upon completion of a process of application and upon a vote of
37 approval by the Conference.

38
39 By a vote of its members in accord with its bylaws, a local church may withdraw
40 from the Conference upon notification to the Conference.

41
42 The Conference may suspend or terminate the standing of a local church as a
43 member of the Conference for detrimental actions, which show consistent
44 disregard for the covenantal relationships within the United Church of Christ and
45 which result in injury to the ministry of other local churches, authorized ministers,
46 church members, or the Conference. The standing of a local church may only

1 be suspended or terminated upon a hearing and a vote of three-fourths of the
2 delegates present at a duly-called meeting of the Conference.
3

4
5 **ARTICLE III – Meetings of the Conference**

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

10
11 **ANNUAL MEETING**

12 The Annual Meeting of the membership of the Conference shall be held on a date
13 and time, and at a location determined by the Conference Council.

14
15 The Annual Meeting shall provide an opportunity for the membership of the
16 Conference to receive, review and take appropriate action on the reports of the
17 officers and committees, and on the activities and policies of the Conference.

18
19 The Annual Meeting shall include a financial report of the past fiscal year and a
20 proposed budget for the next fiscal year. The fiscal year of the Conference shall
21 be the calendar year. The financial report and proposed budget shall include
22 the individual salaries and benefits of the professional staff of the Conference.

23
24 The Annual Meeting shall adopt Conference policies for the administration and use
25 of endowment and other dedicated or restricted funds. The Annual Meeting shall
26 receive reports on such funds, and consider any recommendations for changes to
27 such Conference policies.

28
29 The Annual Meeting shall elect officers, at-large members of the Conference
30 Council, and members of the Standing Committees for the terms outlined by these
31 bylaws, consider any resolutions received from members of the Conference or
32 from Conference bodies, and consider any other business to come before the
33 meeting in accord with the Standing Rules for Conference meetings.

34
35 At least once every three years, the Moderator shall appoint a bylaws committee
36 to review the bylaws and report its findings and recommendations to the annual
37 meeting of the Conference.

38
39 **SPECIAL MEETINGS**

40
41 Special meetings of the Conference other than Ecclesiastical Councils may be
42 called by the Conference Council or by petition of one-fifth (1/5) of the local
43 churches holding standing in the Conference.
44
45
46

1 ELECTRONIC MEETINGS

2
3 An Annual or Special meeting of the Conference, and any Conference Council or
4 Committee meeting, may be held solely by one or more means of remote
5 communication.

6
7 Additionally, a member not physically present at an Annual or Special meeting, or
8 meeting of Conference Council or a Committee may by means of remote
9 communication participate in a meeting of members held at a designated place.

10
11 The Conference Council shall take reasonable measures to ensure that members
12 participating electronically can read or hear the proceedings of the meeting
13 substantially concurrently with the proceedings, can have their remarks heard or
14 read if this would be permitted in person, and to vote on matters if entitled to do
15 so.

16
17 DELEGATE REPRESENTATION

18
19 Every local church holding standing in the Conference shall be entitled to
20 representation at annual or special meetings of the Conference, as follows:

21
22 Two adult lay delegates and two youth delegates for the first 50 members of
23 the church; and,

24
25 One additional delegate for each additional 50 members or major fraction
26 thereof, with the local church deciding on youth or adult representation.

27
28 All delegates must be members in good standing of the local church they
29 represent. Local churches are encouraged to make every effort to ensure that their
30 delegations reflect the diversity of their memberships.

31
32 All ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers holding standing in the
33 Conference shall be delegates and have voice and vote.

34
35 Members of the Conference Council, who are not otherwise delegates, shall have
36 voice and vote at meetings of the Conference. Members representing the
37 Conference on a governing board of the Covenanted Ministries of the United
38 Church of Christ shall have voice and vote at meetings of the Conference.

39
40 The Conference meeting may grant the privilege of either voice and/or vote to other
41 persons as it may determine appropriate and helpful in the conduct of its meeting.

42
43 Each delegate shall have one vote on all matters before the Conference. Such
44 vote must be cast in-person or through concurrent online voting. However,
45 delegates under the age of eighteen (18) shall not have vote in contractual property
46 or fiscal matters. No votes shall be received by proxy.

1 CONDUCT OF CONFERENCE MEETINGS

2
3 The Conference Council shall act as the business committee for the annual or
4 special meetings, and shall propose Standing Rules for the Conference meeting
5 for consideration and adoption by the delegates. The Standing Rules shall govern
6 until the next Conference meeting.

7
8 The quorum for conduct of business shall consist of one-fifth (1/5) of the total
9 registered delegates, providing that one-fifth of the local churches are represented
10 by at least one lay delegate in attendance.

11
12 Except as may be outlined in the Standing Rules, conduct of business shall be
13 governed by the Roberts Rules of Order. The Conference Moderator shall appoint
14 a person to serve as parliamentarian to advise the Moderator and assist the
15 delegates.

16
17 MEETING NOTICES

18
19 Notice of the time, place, agenda, and purpose of annual or special meetings of
20 the Conference shall be sent to each local church, ministerial member, Conference
21 officer and member of Conference Standing Committees, The notice of meeting
22 shall be mailed or emailed at least forty-five (45) days prior to the meeting to the
23 address of record in the Conference office. For electronic meetings, notice of the
24 meeting must be given to each member entitled to vote. If the notice of meeting is
25 electronic, it must be by a form of communication to which the member has
26 consented, which may include fax, email, posting on an electronic network with
27 separate notice of the posting to the member. Such consent may be given in writing
28 or by authenticated electronic communication. Participation in an electronic
29 meeting is a waiver of notice of that meeting except where provided by law.

30
31
32 **ARTICLE IV – Conference Council & Conference Standing Committees**

33
34 CONFERENCE COUNCIL

35
36 The Conference Council shall be the governing body of the Conference between
37 annual or special meetings of the Conference. It shall be responsible for
38 implementing and coordinating the work and activities of the Conference in
39 accordance with the directions established at the meetings of the Conference.

40
41 The Conference Council shall consist of the Conference Chairperson, Moderator,
42 Secretary, Treasurer, one representative from each Standing Committee and two
43 at-large members for a total of nine Council members. It shall meet at least three
44 times per year. A quorum for the conduct of business shall be a majority of those
45 entitled to vote at a council meeting. No proxy votes shall be accepted.

1 The Conference Council shall provide a report of its actions to the meetings of the
2 Conference. It shall provide for an audit of the financial records of the Conference
3 by an independent qualified auditor at least every five years, or as deemed
4 necessary by the Conference Council, and report the findings to the Annual
5 Meeting of the Conference.
6

7 Members representing the Conference on the United Church of Christ Board shall
8 be ex-officio members of the Council and the related Standing Conference
9 Committee, with voice and vote on matters related to coordination of the
10 Conference and the United Church of Christ Board.
11

12 The Conference Council shall establish written policies and procedures for the
13 operation, administration and staffing of the Conference, and shall review and
14 coordinate the work of the Conference Standing Committees. Except as may be
15 provided in the council's written procedures and policies, Roberts Rules of Order
16 shall govern the work of the Conference Council and the Standing Committees.
17

18 The Conference Council may delegate responsibilities and activities to Conference
19 Standing Committees. It may establish and appoint committees, and task groups
20 as it may determine to be necessary and useful.
21

22 CONFERENCE STANDING COMMITTEES

23
24 There shall be three Conference Standing Committees:
25

26 Committee on Ministry
27 Faith and Nurture Committee
28 Mission and Outreach Committee
29

30 Each Standing Committee shall consist of five members elected by the Conference
31 Annual Meeting.
32

33 Each Standing Committee at its initial meeting, following the Annual Meeting of the
34 Conference, shall organize itself and elect a chairperson of the committee.
35

36 Each Standing Committee shall recommend to the Conference Council policies
37 and procedures for the carrying out of its responsibilities for adoption.
38

39 Each Standing Committee shall report its activities to the regular meetings of the
40 Conference Council and shall make a report to the annual meeting of the
41 Conference.
42

43 The Committee on Ministry shall be responsible for the standing of the churches
44 and for the authorization of ministry in the Conference, following the faith and order
45 of the United Church of Christ. It shall administer those tasks which support
46 ministers, local churches, and specialized ministries within the Conference. It shall

1 encourage and assist ministers in participating in programs of continuing
2 education, and conduct periodic retreats and workshops. It shall prepare
3 recommended guidelines for ministerial covenants with pastors, including salary
4 and benefit packages and/or may adopt recommended guidelines wholly or
5 partially from North Dakota ecumenical partners. It shall encourage and facilitate
6 the ministry of all persons within the Conference.
7

8 The Faith and Nurture Committee shall be responsible for conference-level nurture
9 and education programs for youth, adults and recognized fellowship groups; local
10 church leadership development; outdoor ministry programs; and other learning
11 and faith experiences. It shall help provide resources for the education and nurture
12 of local churches. It shall serve as a coordinator for Conference participation in
13 regional, national, and ecumenical education and nurture activities and events.
14 The committee shall promote the growth of faith in local churches and encourage
15 the use of United Church of Christ resources and leadership.
16

17 The Mission and Outreach Committee shall call members and leaders of
18 local churches of the Conference to faithful engagement in service to God's world.
19 The committee shall keep the churches aware of the needs and opportunities of
20 mission arising out of circumstances and issues affecting God's people within the
21 Conference and throughout the world. It shall develop strategies by which
22 members of the Conference can join with others in seeking justice and in creating
23 caring communities to express the good news of God's love. The committee
24 shall be responsible for assisting and encouraging local churches in stewardship
25 development and participation in Our Church's Wider Mission.
26
27

28 **ARTICLE V – Officers of the Conference**

29
30 The officers of the Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ shall
31 be: Conference Chairperson, Moderator, Secretary, Treasurer and Conference
32 Minister.
33

34 **CONFERENCE CHAIRPERSON**

35 The Conference Chairperson shall preside at all the meetings of the Conference
36 Council. The Conference Chairperson shall serve as the corporate president of the
37 Conference and sign all documents on behalf of the Conference as may be
38 required by state, federal, or provincial law. The Conference Chairperson shall be
39 an ex-officio member of all the Conference Standing Committees and task groups
40 of the Conference Council.
41

42 **MODERATOR**

43
44 The Moderator shall preside at all Annual and Special meetings of the membership.
45 The Moderator shall serve as the corporate vice-president and as the vice-
46 chair of the Conference Council and fulfill the duties of the Conference Chairperson

1 when needed due to the absence of the Conference Chairperson. The
2 Moderator shall be an ex-officio member of the Nominating, Bylaws, and other
3 committees established by the meetings of the Conference.
4

5 SECRETARY

6

7 The Secretary shall be responsible for the recording of the minutes of all the
8 meetings of the Conference and the Conference Council. Together with the
9 Conference Chairperson, the Secretary shall sign all documents as may be
10 required by state, federal, or provincial law. The Secretary shall be responsible
11 for providing notices of meetings and communications as may be directed by the
12 Conference or the Conference Council. The Secretary shall be responsible for
13 forwarding proposed bylaws changes to the membership of the Conference and
14 forwarding resolutions to the meetings of the Conference.
15

16 TREASURER

17

18 The Treasurer shall be responsible for the financial accountability and reporting
19 system of the Conference to the membership of the Conference. The Treasurer
20 shall assist and advise the Conference Council and its committees in matters of
21 financial management. The Treasurer shall make a report of the financial condition
22 of the Conference to the Conference Annual Meeting, and shall make other such
23 reports as may be required or directed by the Conference Council.
24

25 CONFERENCE MINISTER

26

27 The Conference Minister shall be the Chief Executive officer of the Conference
28 and is authorized to hire, supervise, and terminate all other Conference positions.
29 They shall have supervisory responsibility for the employment and work of the
30 professional and support staff of the Conference in accord with policies and
31 procedures established by the Conference Council. They will provide leadership
32 and care, support and oversight to the Churches and Pastors of the Conference.
33

34 The Conference Minister shall be an ordained minister with standing in the United
35 Church of Christ and shall be a voting member of the Conference. The Conference
36 Minister shall be an ex-officio member, with voice but not vote, of the Conference
37 Council, and all its committees and task forces.
38

39 The Conference Minister shall be the liaison officer of the Conference in
40 relationship to the Officers and Ministries of the United Church of Christ,
41 associations, local churches and ministers, and ecumenical bodies.
42
43
44
45
46

1 **ARTICLE VI – Terms, Nominations, Elections, & Vacancies**

2
3 **TERMS AND ELECTIONS OF CONFERENCE OFFICERS AND CONFERENCE**
4 **STANDING COMMITTEES**

5
6 The Conference Chairperson and Conference Moderator shall be elected in even
7 numbered years for a two-year term.

8
9 The Conference Secretary and Treasurer shall be elected in odd-numbered years
10 for a two–year term.

11
12 Each year, one at-large Council member shall be elected for a two-year term.

13
14 Five members shall be elected to each Conference Standing Committee for two-
15 year terms.

16
17 In even numbered years, three members will be elected to the Committee on
18 Ministry, two members to the Faith and Nurture Committee, and two members to
19 the Mission and Outreach Committee.

20
21 In odd-numbered years, two members will be elected to the Committee on Ministry
22 Committee, three members to the Faith and Nurture Committee, and three
23 members to the Mission and Outreach Committee.

24
25 The Conference Chairperson, the Conference Moderator, the at-large members
26 and the members of Conference Standing Committees shall be eligible to succeed
27 themselves in office for one additional term, having served one full term. The
28 Conference Secretary, and Conference Treasurer shall be eligible to succeed
29 themselves for two additional terms after serving a full term. The Annual Meeting
30 may vary these terms to meet the needs of the Conference.

31
32 Terms of office shall begin upon the adjournment of the Conference annual
33 meeting.

34
35 The Conference, acting through the Conference Council, may suspend or
36 terminate any person as a member of the Conference Council or a Standing
37 Committee for detrimental actions, which show consistent disregard for the
38 covenantal relationships within the United Church of Christ and which result in
39 injury to the ministry of local churches, authorized ministers, church members or
40 the Conference and its Council and/or Committees.

41
42 **VACANCIES**

43
44 The Conference Council may appoint a person to fill the remaining unexpired term
45 in case of a vacancy in an office or Conference Standing Committee.

1 CONFERENCE MINISTER

2
3 As is a custom of the United Church of Christ in the calling of a pastor, the
4 Conference Minister shall be elected to an indefinite term of office, or for an Interim,
5 Transitional or Designated Term according to the needs of the Conference.
6

7 Upon or pending a vacancy in the position of Conference Minister, the Conference
8 Council shall appoint a Search Committee to seek applications and to nominate a
9 person to fill the office. The Search Committee shall include one member from
10 each Conference Standing Committee and such other persons as may be deemed
11 appropriate by the Council to represent the diversity of the conference. The Search
12 Committee shall present the candidate to a duly called meeting of the membership
13 of the Conference. A two-thirds majority vote of those present and voting shall be
14 necessary to elect the Conference Minister.
15

16 The call of the Conference Minister may be terminated by a majority vote of those
17 present and voting at a duly-called meeting of the membership of the Conference.
18

19 NOMINATING COMMITTEE

20
21 A nominating committee, consisting of five members representative of the diversity
22 and geography of the churches of the Conference and including both lay person
23 and clergy, shall be elected for two-year terms at the annual meeting of the
24 Conference. Three members shall be elected in odd-numbered years, and two
25 members shall be elected in even-numbered years. The Moderator may appoint
26 up to two additional members for one-year terms to ensure the committee is
27 representative of the diversity and geography of the Conference.
28

29 The nominating committee shall seek out candidates for nomination to fill the
30 positions to be elected at the next Annual Meeting, including officers, and members
31 of the Conference Standing Committees and the Nominating Committee. The
32 Standing Rules shall outline timetables and procedures to be followed by the
33 Nominating Committee. In seeking candidates for positions, the Nominating
34 Committee shall consider the diversity and geography of the churches of the
35 Conference, seeking representation from both clergy and laity for the officers and
36 the members of each of the Conference Standing Committees.
37

38 The Nominating Committee shall report its nominations directly to the meetings of
39 the Conference. The committee shall be convened by the Conference Moderator,
40 at which time the committee shall elect one of its members to serve as chairperson
41 of the committee.
42

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

1 Ministries of the United Church of Christ.
2
3

4 **ARTILCE VII – Seal**
5

6 The Northern Plains Conference shall have a corporate seal, consisting of a circle
7 containing the words: “The Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ.”
8
9

10 **ARTICLE VIII – Dissolution**
11

12 Upon voluntary or involuntary dissolution of the Conference, the remaining assets of the
13 Northern Plains Conference of the United Church of Christ shall be distributed to such
14 organizations with exempt purposes under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue
15 Code, as an Annual or Special Meeting of the Conference shall designate.
16
17

18 **ARTICLE IX - Amendments**
19

20 Amendments to these bylaws shall be adopted upon a vote of two-thirds of those present
21 and voting at a meeting of the members of the Conference. Notice of any proposed
22 bylaw amendment, including the full text of the proposed amendment, shall be transmitted
23 electronically or mailed by the Conference Secretary to the membership of the
24 Conference at least forty-five (45) days prior to the Conference meeting at which such
25 amendment is to be considered.