

A Pastoral Letter  
from the Conference Ministers

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We, the conference ministers of the United Church of Christ, joyfully anticipate and celebrate the signs of new covenant and promise that are bursting forth all around us. At the same time, we are mindful of continuing brokenness within the body of Christ. We recall Christ's broken body and shed blood – signs and seal of a new covenant for God's people.

We give thanks to God for the signs of resurrection and new life that abound within our Church; we grieve and lament the continuing pain and suffering we see as well.

*<sup>4</sup> Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God. <sup>5</sup>Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, <sup>6</sup>who has made us competent to be **ministers of a new covenant**, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Corinthians 3:4-6 NRSV)*

As “ministers of a new covenant,” we write to invite you to “rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15 NRSV). May this be a time for us to rejoice and weep as one people, united by God — one people of one God with one mission. Born of four historic denominations, we have grown to include numerous diverse expressions of Christ's body. We celebrate and affirm both our unity and our diversity as gifts of God.

In our most recent history we have been buoyed by signs of rebirth and hope, but distressed by discord and division experienced in some parts of Christ's body.

✠ We celebrate the growth and excitement in our church that has been generated by the Stillspeaking Initiative; we grieve that some in our midst have used the initiative to promote tension and division rather than rebirth and joy.

✠ We celebrate those many congregations who give generously to build up the mission of God through support for Our Church's Wider Mission; we are dismayed at those who encourage churches to withhold support in order to discredit and diminish the United Church of Christ.

✠ We celebrate the covenantal partnerships between local churches, clergy and conferences that engage in a mutual effort to discern God's call through Search and Call; we grieve when others in our midst encourage United Church of Christ churches and clergy to circumvent this covenantal system. Some have gone so far as to create the Pastoral Referral Network in violation of our church's Constitution and Bylaws.

God is still speaking,

[stillspeaking.com](http://stillspeaking.com)

This network has been designed to influence Search Committees to seek a pastor, often from beyond the United Church of Christ, with a particular ideological bent. Often these pastors come with an understanding of faith and ministry that is hostile to the traditions and understandings of the United Church of Christ. Some have a clear agenda to take churches out of the denomination.

✠ We celebrate the many congregations who are seeking to become part of the United Church of Christ and those who engage in self-reflection and exploration of our mutual covenant with denominational leaders; we grieve when persons and groups actively disseminate materials and provide consultation designed to alienate congregations from covenantal partners and actively coach congregations to break covenant and withdraw from the denomination.

✠ We celebrate those who see times of transition, turmoil and uncertainty as opportunities to give and provide mutual strength and support through mutual discernment of God's will; we grieve when others take advantage of these moments to foment discord and plant seeds of doubt about the United Church of Christ.

✠ We who have been called to serve you as conference ministers of the United Church of Christ invite you to join with us in a mutual time of discernment.

✠ We pledge ourselves to be companions and partners with you for a season of discernment and action. We seek to join with you in exploring our mutual role as "ministers of a new covenant."

✠ We pledge ourselves to walk with those congregations of the United Church of Christ who engage in study and discernment of the covenantal identity of our church. We invite all congregations to explore the meaning of covenant with us. We are grateful for the newly released Manual on Church ([www.ucc.org/ministers](http://www.ucc.org/ministers)) which promises to be a valuable resource for this effort.

✠ We pledge ourselves to walk with church councils, consistories, and governing bodies seeking to lead congregations toward a deeper knowledge and appreciation of our historic roots and traditions and a reaffirmation of our covenantal identity.

✠ We pledge ourselves to walk with pastors seeking to strengthen their own covenantal identity with the United Church of Christ and engaging in a ministry that builds up rather than tears down the Body of Christ. As clergy ourselves, we celebrate both the privileges and the responsibilities of our own covenantal identity.

✠ We pledge ourselves to walk with Committees on the Ministry seeking to uphold the covenantal relationship between Local Churches, Ministers, Calling Bodies and the United Church of Christ. We remember that in accepting standing as an ordained, licensed or commissioned minister, we have vowed to uphold our covenantal relationships within the United Church of Christ.

✠ We pledge ourselves to be your partners in open, respectful conversation; to walk with you even when we are in disagreement about social or other issues; and to uphold that covenant which allows many different people to be united by Christ.

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✠ We pledge ourselves to walk with United Church of Christ members and pastors of local churches and also with conference and national leaders who are criticized and demeaned for their loyalty to the faith and traditions of the United Church of Christ. We offer our loving and grateful support for the pain they bear on behalf of us all.

✠ We pledge to walk with all settings of the United Church of Christ to develop resources and continue to explore the meaning of covenant.

We pray God's blessing on you and your congregation and on all of us together in this season of discernment and covenant renewal.

In love and faith,

The Conference Ministers of the United Church of Christ

February 18, 2005

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Conference Ministers' Signatures attached to the Letter  
COVENANTAL IDENTITY  
Phoenix, Arizona  
February 19, 2005

The Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, Chair, Council of Conference Ministers, Connecticut  
The Rev. David Moyer, Vice Chair, Council of Conference Ministers, Wisconsin  
The Rev. Kent Ulery, Secretary Treasurer, Council of Conference Ministers, Michigan

The Rev. Mary Susan Gast, California – Nevada Northern  
The Rev. Daniel F. Romero, Southern California Nevada  
The Rev. Jane E. Heckles, Southern California Nevada  
The Rev. John R. Deckenback, Central Atlantic  
The Rev. Héctor E. López, Central Pacific  
The Rev. Eugene Ross, Central Pacific  
The Rev. C. Jack Richards, Florida  
The Rev. Charles Buck, Hawai'i  
The Rev. Jane Fisler Hoffman, Illinois  
The Rev. Gene Kraus, Illinois South  
The Rev. Stephen C. Gray, Indiana-Kentucky  
The Rev. Lark J. Hapke, Iowa  
The Rev. David Hansen, Kansas-Oklahoma  
The Rev. David R Gaewski, Maine  
The Rev. Stephen L. Sterner, Massachusetts  
The Rev. David R. McMahill, Minnesota  
The Rev. A. Gayle Engel, Missouri Mid-South  
The Rev. Lynne M. Simcox, Montana – Northern Wyoming  
The Rev. Roddy C. Dunkerson, Nebraska  
The Rev. Bill McConnell, New Hampshire  
The Rev. Susan Henderson, New Hampshire  
The Rev. Geoffrey Black, New York  
The Rev. Wade Schemmel, Northern Plains  
The Rev. Jack Seville, Ohio  
The Rev. Mark Miller, Pacific Northwest  
The Rev. Randall Hyvonen, Pacific Northwest  
The Rev. Marja L. Coons-Torn, Penn Central  
The Rev. Alan C. Miller, Penn Northeast  
The Rev. F. Russell Mitman, Pennsylvania Southeast  
The Rev. Alan McLarty, Penn West  
The Rev. Luis Rosario, Puerto Rico  
The Rev. Charles P. Barnes, Rhode Island  
The Rev. Tom Rehling, Rocky Mountain  
The Rev. Bill Royster, South Central  
The Rev. Gene E. Miller, South Dakota  
The Rev. Timothy C Downs, Southeast  
The Rev. Stephen W. Camp, Southern  
The Rev. Cally Rogers-Witte, Southwest  
The Rev. Arnold I. Thomas, Vermont