

God is still speaking,
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**



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United Church of Christ General Minister and President announces retirement

The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black will step down as leader of the church in June 2015.

CLEVELAND (Aug. 18, 2014) – The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black, general minister and president of the United Church of Christ, has announced his decision to retire early at the conclusion of the UCC's 30th General Synod, the denomination's biennial gathering, in June 2015.

In a letter to colleagues, Black described his experience as general minister and president for the past five years as one of "challenge and privilege." His decision to retire at the end of General Synod 2015 is in part because of his belief that, at that time, the church will reach an intersection where the transition to a unified body of governance, the scope of work among its ministries, and the missional priorities of the national setting will be in alignment.

"Over the years that I have served, the United Church of Christ has experienced significant changes in its national setting," Black wrote. "It has been a challenge and a privilege to lead and guide through this time of transition. However, I believe that we will soon arrive at a juncture where the transition in governance, ministry alignment, and missional direction will be complete."

Black made the announcement 11 months before he leaves plans to leave office so that the United Church Board will have ample time to identify and nominate his successor during its March 2015 meeting for election by the General Synod – the main deliberative body of the UCC – in June. The Rev. Bernard Wilson, chair of the United Church Board, said a search committee should be in place by the end of August and will be tasked with finalizing its recommendation by Feb. 2015.

"I want to express my gratitude to Geoffrey for his leadership during his time in office," Wilson said. "Geoffrey has been a kind, gentle and thoughtful manager of our affairs in the national setting of the church."

Black was re-elected to a second four-year term in June 2013. He was called to the leadership of the church five years ago, and confirmed by delegates during General Synod 2009.

Before arriving in Cleveland for his first term in 2009, Black was the conference minister for the New York Conference of the UCC from 2000 to 2009, and a pastor at the Congregational Church of South Hempstead (N.Y.) for almost 15 years (1980-1994). He also worked for the UCC's national setting from 1994 to 2000 in the office for Church Life and Leadership.

The UCC continued to live up to its billing as the "church of firsts" during Black's tenure. The church became the first national denomination to file a lawsuit against a state (North Carolina) challenging the constitutionality of its marriage laws, and also became the first denomination to vote to move toward divestment from fossil fuel companies, along with other strategies, as a way to combat climate change. The church also completed its transition to a single 52-member board of governance from five different boards, marking the first time that one board was responsible for all the church's affairs.

"I have reached the conclusion that this will be the appropriate time for me to retire, making way for new leadership to begin to serve," Black said. "Given the fact that God has blessed the United Church of Christ with such a rich and diverse array of very capable and inspired leaders, I am confident that there is someone in our midst who will answer to God's call to serve as our next general minister and president."

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About the United Church of Christ:

The United Church of Christ is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,100 congregations nationwide. Headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, the UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline denomination to ordain a woman, the first to ordain an openly-gay man and the first predominantly white denomination to ordain an African American.

The UCC's motto ("That they may all be one") and tagline (God is still speaking,) supports the Church's long-standing commitment to social justice issues and its extravagant welcome to all, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.