



**Christina Villa**  
Director of Communication  
United Church of Christ  
(216) 736-2173  
villac@ucc.org

**Connie Larkman**  
News Director  
United Church of Christ  
(216) 736-2196  
larkmanc@ucc.org

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**Congregations:** Approximately 5,100

**Members:** More than 1 million

**Ministers:** 10,058 total; 46.3 percent women

## National Officers:

General Minister and President: The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black; Executive Minister, Justice and Witness Ministries: The Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo; Executive Minister, Local Church Ministries: The Rev. J. Bennett Guess; Executive Minister, Wider Church Ministries: The Rev. Jim Moos.

## Origins:

The historical roots of The United Church of Christ reach back to some of the first Christian communities in the United States – Pilgrims, Puritans and German settlers. Two churches, each the product of an earlier union, joined together in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ – the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

Since 1957, the denomination has grown to more fully realize its goal of becoming a multiracial, multicultural church that is inclusive of all, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation or differing ability. Our congregations today include an increasing number of African-American, Latino/a, Native American, Asian-American, Pacific Islander and biracial communities. We are a bold, public, progressive voice in the religious landscape.

The United Church of Christ (UCC) has a fierce commitment for the equal rights of all, including its clergy. In 1972, the UCC became the first Protestant denomination to ordain an openly gay man, and in 2005, the Church formally affirmed “Equal Marriage Rights for All,” becoming the first mainline Christian denomination to support same-gender marriage. The UCC is also active on issues related to immigration reform, climate care, literacy, and racial justice.

*(continued)*



**FREQUENTLY  
ASKED  
QUESTIONS**

**Organization:**

“Congregational” and “free church” best describe the United Church of Christ’s form of governance. The denomination’s Constitution says Jesus Christ is the “sole Head” of the church and the local congregation is its “basic unit.” Local churches call their own pastors and make their own decisions about membership, worship, budget, programs and other matters. UCC congregations cooperate in “conferences,” many of them encompassing one or more U.S. states.

**Governance:**

The main deliberative body of the UCC is its General Synod, whose 800-plus delegates meet every two years. In between the Synod, the 52-member United Church of Christ Board conducts the business of the denomination. The Rev. Bernard Wilson is chair of the UCC Board; Ms. Dale Bonds is vice-chair.

**What we believe:**

**We believe in God’s continuing testament.** We are committed to hearing God’s ancient story anew and afresh in our lives and in the world today. We try to remain attentive to God’s creative movement in the world. Religion and science are not mutually exclusive, and your head and heart are both welcomed into our places of worship. We prepare our members and leaders to be engaged in ministry in the present and future church, and we embrace all kinds of communities and new modes of thinking. Why? Because God is still speaking,

**We believe in extravagant welcome.** This is why we insist that God’s communion table is open, not closed, and God’s gift and claim in baptism are irrevocable. Our perspective is global, not provincial. We work with — not against — people of other faiths. **No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.** Why? Because **God is still speaking,**

**We believe the church’s mission is to change lives** — individually, systemically and globally. We work to make transformation possible, but trust in God’s grace. This is why we insist that churches must be places of vitality in worship, learning and advocacy. We are committed to working for justice, and we believe that lives are changed through global experiences and friendships. Why? Because God is still speaking,



# AT A GLANCE



## The United Church of Christ and ... **Marriage Equality & LGBTQ Rights**

The United Church of Christ has a history of supporting equality and justice for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community that spans back more than 40 years. In 1972, The UCC was the first mainline Protestant denomination to ordain an openly gay minister, the Rev. William R. Johnson. The UCC was also the first denomination to affirm marriage equality for all people, regardless of gender, at its General Synod in 2005.

The resolution, adopted July 4, 2005, states that “the 25th General Synod of the United Church of Christ affirms equal marriage rights for couples, regardless of gender, and declares that the government should not interfere with couples, regardless of gender, who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of legally recognized marriage.” See <http://www.ucc.org/assets/pdfs/2005-Equal-Marriage-Rights-for-All.pdf>

In April 2014, the UCC filed suit against the state of North Carolina, arguing that the state’s marriage laws violate the First Amendment rights of clergy and the principle of “free exercise of religion.” The landmark lawsuit, *General Synod of the United Church of Christ v. Cooper*, is the first-ever challenge by a national Christian denomination of a state’s marriage laws. For the most recent information about this ongoing issue, visit <http://www.ucc.org/ido>.

The UCC stands with thousands of same-sex couples across the life the church, affirming their freedom to marry the person they love. UCC clergy have honored these commitments, officiating over covenantal vows or blessings, long before same-sex marriage was approved in 19 states and Washington, D.C. The UCC has active coalitions working for marriage equality in nearly every state in the United States.

The Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ (formerly known as the United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns) advocates for the LGTBQ community in the UCC, and equips UCC congregations to become welcoming and accepting of all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or identity. The Coalition’s core ministry is the growing movement of Open and Affirming (ONA) churches in the UCC. There are currently 1,200 Open and Affirming (ONA) UCC churches nationwide, comprising 23 percent of UCC congregations and 27 percent of the UCC’s membership. The UCC’s ONA movement grows by an average of 60-70 churches each year. See <http://ucccoalition.org/>



# AT A GLANCE



## The United Church of Christ and ... **Gun Violence**

The United Church of Christ supports sensible, reasonable approaches to reducing gun violence, including policies that would strengthen the universal background check system, ban military-style assault weapons, and ban high-capacity ammunition clips.

In 1995, delegates to the 20th General Synod of the UCC passed the resolution, “Violence in Our Society and World,” which recognized the complicated and interwoven layers at the root of violence. During that General Synod, delegates also passed a resolution -- “Guns and Violence” -- inviting UCC members and congregations to advocate for legislation to strengthen licensing and registration of gun sales, strengthen regulations of gun dealers, and ban semiautomatic assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition clips.

See:

<http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS-20-Violence-in-our-society.pdf>

<http://www.uccfiles.com/pdf/GS-20-Guns-and-violence.pdf>

UCC pastors and congregations have played an active role in the National Gun Violence Prevention Sabbath, an annual weekend to remember those who have lost their lives to gunfire, pray for those whose lives have been forever changed by the loss of a loved one, and to educate one another on proven strategies to reduce gun violence.

The UCC and other groups within the faith community have come together many times in the aftermath of gun tragedies to urge lawmakers to pass laws that prevent gun violence. Tested by grief, resolute in faith, the UCC remains committed to continuing this drumbeat.

Improving access to mental health services has been a prominent call in recent conversations and public dialogue about gun violence. The UCC’s General Synod strongly supports affordable, accessible health care access for all people, including mental health services. But it is important to ensure that people with mental illnesses not be stigmatized in the conversation around gun violence. Statistics show that people with mental illnesses are not more prone to violence, and, in fact, are more often victims of violence.

While recent, high-profile shootings have drawn renewed attention to the epidemic of gun violence in the United States, the UCC also recognizes the horrific and constant toll of gun violence that is a daily reality in so many communities, but often receives little visibility or attention.



# AT A GLANCE



## The United Church of Christ and ... **Immigration**

The United Church of Christ has a long history of affirming the dignity of immigrants and working for comprehensive U.S. immigration policy. Since 1995, the General Synod – the main deliberative body of the UCC – has repeatedly called for a fair and humane approach to U.S. immigration policy that protects families and respects the humanity of our immigrant brothers and sisters.

The UCC stands with a broad coalition of clergy and faith-based organizations in calling on the Obama Administration and Congress to champion legislative reforms of our broken immigration system.

The UCC believes that truly comprehensive reform must meet the following criteria:

- Reform must address the root causes of migration.
- Reform must create a process for undocumented immigrants to earn citizenship in a timely and fair way.
- Enforcement policies must be made to be consistent with humanitarian values and with the need to treat all individuals with respect.
- Family unity must be a central piece of humane immigration reform.
- This effort to unify immigrant families must include same-gender couples and members of the LGBTQ community.

The UCC's Collaborative on Immigration formed in the fall of 2012 to capitalize on momentum surrounding possible comprehensive immigration reform and work to make the new legislation a reality. Comprised of UCC pastors, executives and partners throughout the United States, the group works on a grassroots level to combine their time, passion and expertise to create a unified voice for hope and change.

At General Synod 29 in 2013, the UCC passed a resolution calling for the support of compassionate comprehensive immigration reform and the protection of the human rights of immigrants. The resolution urges the 113th Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform that addresses earned legalization with a path to citizenship; enactment of the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act; and protection of workers' rights, among other measures.

See <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-14.pdf>



# AT A GLANCE



## The United Church of Christ and ... **Environmental Justice**

The United Church of Christ has been a leader in the environmental justice movement for more than 30 years. In 1982, the UCC's Commission for Racial Justice accepted an invitation from Warren County, N.C., residents to oppose a PCB landfill in communities of color. There the terms "environmental racism" and "environmental justice" began to be used.

Environmental issues have spawned several dozen General Synod resolutions, addressing topics including farm workers' rights, climate change, energy resources, toxic dumps, mountaintop removal mining, fossil fuel divestment, and more.

In 2013, the UCC became the first mainline religious denomination to vote to divest from fossil fuel companies as one strategy to combat climate change. The resolution, passed July 1, 2013, at General Synod 29, calls for enhanced shareholder engagement in fossil fuel companies, an intensive search for fossil-fuel-free investment vehicles, and the identification of "best in class" fossil fuel companies by General Synod 30, which takes place June 26-30, 2015.

See: <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-6.pdf>

Since the resolution's passage, The Pension Boards of the UCC and United Church Funds, the main investment vehicles of the UCC, have been actively engaged in various levels of shareholder activism, using the process of shareholder engagement to work toward the goals of the UCC's Synod resolution. United Church Funds has also announced the formation of a new equity fund that will be free of investments in U.S. companies extracting or producing fossil fuels. The Beyond Fossil Fuels Fund is targeted to open for investment on Oct. 1, 2014.

In 2013, thousands of UCC members across the country participated in Mission 4/1 Earth, the UCC's 50-day church-wide earth care initiative that took place from April 1 to May 19. Together as one church, UCC congregations generated nearly 615,000 earth care hours, planted more than 140,000 trees worldwide, and wrote almost 53,000 environmental advocacy letters.

The UCC's Environmental Justice Trainings, launched in 2011, promote personal and community transformation and equip participants to lead workshops in their home communities. The retreats, which take place throughout the United States, also include an immersion experience where participants learn more about environmental justice issues specific to their setting. Trainings for 2014 have taken place in Port Orchard, Wash., Silver Springs, Fla., and Alexandria, Minn.



# AT A GLANCE



## The United Church of Christ and ... **Economic Justice**

Unemployment, low wages, unsafe jobs, globalization, the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, taxes, the right to form a union, imports from China, closed factories in the United States – these are all issues of economic justice. Since 1969, the United Church of Christ’s General Synod has spoken repeatedly on issues of economic justice, reaffirming time and again the church’s commitment to raising and keeping people out of poverty.

Economic inequality is one of the UCC’s three legislative priorities for 2014. Jobs should lift people out of poverty, not keep them there. Unfortunately, poor public policies often make it impossible for working people to raise themselves out of poverty, as many Americans who work full time are not given benefits or paid time off, and are unable to provide for their families. UCC legislative actions for 2014 include asking the United States Congress to reinstate emergency unemployment compensation to long-term unemployed persons and to raise the minimum wage for all Americans.

In 2013, General Synod 29 delegates passed a resolution calling for a number of tax reforms to corporate, financial transaction, capital gains, and estate taxes; as well as calling for an examination of carbon taxes. At that General Synod, delegates passed another resolution calling upon all UCC conferences, congregations, members, and friends to urge the Obama Administration and Congress to support restoration of ongoing and robust funding for new construction of quality affordable housing under HUD Section 202 and Section 811, and for the continuation and strengthening of the low-income housing tax credit program.

See:

<http://uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-7.pdf>

<http://uccfiles.com/pdf/gs29-8.pdf>

In 2009, General Synod 27 delegates approved a resolution that established the Economic Justice Covenant Program. The resolution encourages all congregations and other settings of the UCC to become Economic Justice Churches by studying economic injustices, praying and discerning God’s will for their economic justice ministry, drafting and adopting an Economic Justice Covenant, and engaging in actions to promote economic justice. See: <http://uccfiles.com/synod/resolutions/economic-justice.pdf>



# AT A GLANCE



## The United Church of Christ and ... **the State of the Church**

The United Church of Christ, headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio, is a mainline Protestant denomination with nearly 1 million members and more than 5,100 congregations nationwide. The UCC is a church of many firsts, including the first mainline Protestant 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," [John 17:21]) 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.

The UCC is similar to other mainline Protestant denominations in that it continues to steadily decline in numbers of both churches and members. From 2005 to 2010, the number of UCC churches decreased by more than 7 percent. However, from 2010 to 2011, the number of churches decreased by less than 1 percent, which demonstrates a slower decline rate than in the past 15 years. Part of this slow in decline can be attributed to the UCC's New & Renewing Churches Endowment Fund, created to secure and increase future funding for new churches and new church leadership in the UCC. Since 2000, Local Church Ministries of the UCC has funded 115 new congregations with \$4,973,266.

In addition, newer congregations are growing – more than half of all churches founded since 1993 are experiencing growth in numbers. Churches with younger members are growing, with 42 percent of churches with 41 percent or more of their participants under the age of 34 showing an increase in membership. Theologically liberal churches are also growing. Both mainline and evangelical churches that are more theologically liberal are growing in greater numbers than churches with other theological perspectives.

The UCC's Open and Affirming movement, which equips UCC congregations to become welcoming and accepting of all persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or identity, is also growing, at a rate of 60-70 churches per year. There are currently 1,200 Open and Affirming (ONA) UCC churches nationwide, comprising 23 percent of UCC congregations and 27 percent of UCC membership.



# AT A GLANCE



## The United Church of Christ and ... **Governance**

Twice in the history of the United Church of Christ, the denomination has restructured to adapt the denomination's various ministries to better serve the members of the church. The first restructure came in 2000, and the most recent restructure took effect in 2013 at the conclusion of General Synod 29 in Long Beach, Calif.

The latest structure combined five existing governance boards into a unified governing structure, the 52-member United Church of Christ Board. The board members represent people from across the life of the church and are called to serve the church with principles of good governance. The members of the board come from a variety of settings of the church and from different backgrounds.

Having one decision-making body opens the possibility for more effective and faithful discernment and promotes transparency, a core value of the church, with appropriate lines of responsibility and accountability.

Here is a current list of the United Church of Christ Board members.

See: <http://www.ucc.org/about-us/united-church-of-christ-board.html>

Nominations for UCC Board members take place every two years and are open to anyone in the denomination. Nominations for the six-year terms can be submitted by conferences of the UCC, ministers, members of historically underrepresented groups, and even self-nominations by people hoping to serve the church. Through Sept. 30, 2014, the General Synod Nominating Committee is seeking to fill 12 of the 36 at-large seats to serve from 2015 through 2021.



# BIOGRAPHIES

## Rev. Geoffrey A. Black

General Minister and President  
The United Church of Christ

The Rev. Geoffrey A. Black was elected General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ in June 2009. Prior to that, he was Conference Minister of the UCC's New York Conference (2000-2009).

Black was previously a program staff member in the UCC's Office for Church Life and Leadership. During his career he has served as assistant chaplain at Brown University, associate minister at St. Albans (N.Y.) Congregational UCC, pastor of Congregational UCC of Hempstead, N.Y., lecturer in the Field Education Department of Union Theological Seminary in New York and protestant chaplain at Adelphi University.

In his capacity as Minister for Church Life and Leadership, Black was active in several key aspects of the ministry. In addition to engaging in the work common to all OCLL staff such as ministerial authorization and search and call, he devoted special attention to ecclesiastical endorsement, ministerial formation, congregational life and the development of resources for the multiracial/multicultural church.

During his tenure as a local church pastor, Black also was active in Association and Conference life, serving on several committees and holding a number of elected offices. He served on the Ordination and Standing Committee and the Committee on Church in the Metropolitan Community of the New York Metropolitan Association. He was chairperson of the New York Conference Commission on Mission Priorities and he served as moderator of the Conference.

Ecumenical commitment, concern for equal justice, African-American empowerment and community improvement have shaped Black's ministry in the church and the communities in which he has lived. He has worked for the Nassau Coalition for Safety and Justice, the Long Island Interracial Alliance for a Common Future, and the Amistad Cultural Center of Long Island, which he co-founded. While living in Ohio, he has been an active member of Caring Communities of Shaker Heights, Ohio, and Partnership 2000 of the Shaker Public schools.

Black earned a B.A. degree from Lincoln University in 1969 and an M.A.R. degree from Yale Divinity School in 1972. He is married to Patricia Williams-Black. They have one daughter, Makeda Black, who resides in Hyattsville, Md.



**BIOGRAPHIES****Rev. J. Bennett Guess**

National Officer  
The United Church of Christ

Executive Minister,  
Local Church Ministries, the United Church of Christ

The Rev. J. Bennett Guess is Executive Minister of the United Church of Christ's Local Church Ministries and a member of the UCC's four-person Collegium of Officers. Guess was elected by General Synod delegates in July 2011. He is the first openly gay person to serve as a national officer of the church.

Local Church Ministries encourages and supports congregations in the fulfillment of God's mission, especially in parish life and leadership; congregational vitality and discipleship, including evangelism, worship and education; and church buildings and loans.

Guess has worked for the UCC's national setting since 2000, first as Justice and Witness Ministries' communications minister and, later, as editor of United Church News and the UCC's news director. In 2007, he was named the UCC's communication director, where he helped steer the UCC's Stillspeaking Ministry and oversaw the creation of a new, cross-ministry department, Publishing, Identity and Communication, that successfully merged staff from the Office of General Ministries and Local Church Ministries.

Prior to coming to the UCC's national offices, Guess was a local church pastor for 12 years, including eight years at Zion UCC in Henderson, Ky., a congregation that grew from 12 elderly members to a justice-focused, multiracial, open and affirming congregation of more than 300 people. He also helped create the Paff Haus Justice and Peace Center, a justice cooperative that housed offices for more than a dozen regional and statewide advocacy organizations in Kentucky and southern Indiana. In 1992, he co-founded the Kentucky Fairness Alliance, now the state's largest and most visible LGBT rights organization. Guess received the UCC's Just Peace Award at the 1997 General Synod in Columbus, Ohio, in recognition of his life-long commitment to justice advocacy.

Guess has written more than 500 articles on all aspects of the church, earning him more than 60 awards. He is a member of numerous ecumenical organizations.

Guess earned a B.A. degree in journalism from the University of Kentucky. He completed graduate studies in public administration and public policy at Murray State University, and earned his M.Div. degree in 1991 from Vanderbilt University Divinity School. He received his D.Min. degree in preaching from UCC-related Chicago Theological Seminary in 2001. Guess and his spouse, Jim Therrien, are members of Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Cleveland.



## BIOGRAPHIES

### **Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo**

National Officer  
The United Church of Christ

Executive Minister,  
Justice & Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ

The Rev. M. Linda Jaramillo is executive minister of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries, responsible for the church's work on human rights and social, racial and economic justice.

Jaramillo has been active in various UCC settings: as a member of the Commission for Racial Justice and the board of the Coordinating Center for Women; as a member and moderator of Ainsworth UCC in Portland, Ore.; as moderator, vice-moderator, treasurer and search committee chair in the Central Pacific Conference; as a member and committee chair of the Executive Council; and as assistant moderator of General Synod.

In 1998, she was a UCC delegate to the World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe. Jaramillo is a former president and vice-president of the UCC's Council for Hispanic Ministries and former co-convener of the Council of Racial and Ethnic Ministries.

Jaramillo has more than 30 years of management experience working with state, county, and federally funded programs in Oregon, including Head Start, migrant services, child welfare, violence prevention, HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention, and adult community-based education.

She received a B.S. in Business Administration from Portland (Ore.) State University and her M.Div. degree from UCC-related Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif. Fluent in both English and Spanish, she is the first Hispanic to serve as a member of the Collegium of Officers.



# BIOGRAPHIES

## Rev. James Moos

National Officer  
The United Church of Christ

Executive Minister,  
Wider Church Ministries, United Church of Christ

Co-Executive,  
Global Ministries, UCC and  
the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

The Rev. James Moos, Executive Minister, UCC Wider Church Ministries; Co-Executive, UCC/  
Disciples Global Ministries

The Rev. James Moos is Executive Minister of the UCC's Wider Church Ministries and Co-  
executive of UCC/Disciples' Global Ministries.

Following his ordination in 1986, Moos served Adams County Parish, UCC, in North Dakota. In  
1991, he became senior pastor at Bismarck (N.D.) UCC, where he served until 1991. After that, he  
served as senior pastor of Bismarck (N.D.) UCC for 15 years.

Moos' involvement at the Conference and national levels includes serving as chair and several  
other positions with the Northern Plains Conference council, and on the Wider Church Ministries/  
Common Global Ministries Board of Directors (1999-2005).

A Global Ministries short-term volunteer to East Timor in 2002, Moos also has served as president  
of the East Timor Education Foundation, a funding agency for Global Ministries.

In 2005, Moos began a six-year stint on the UCC Executive Council, including two years as its  
chair.

Moos enlisted in the U.S. Air Force in 1976 and was on active duty until 1980. Five years later, he  
became a reserve chaplain for the Air Force, and served for 18 years.

Growing up on a farm near Streeter, N.D., Moos earned his B.A. degree from Seattle Pacific  
University in 1983 before obtaining M.Div. (1986) and Ph.D. (1996) degrees from Princeton  
Theological Seminary.

Moos is married to Sharon Moos, a health care administration professional.



**BIOGRAPHIES**

## **Rev. Sandra Sorensen**

Director, Washington, D.C. Office, The United Church of Christ

Sandy Sorensen currently serves as Director of the Washington, D.C. office of the United Church of Christ's Justice and Witness Ministries.

Sorensen has served in a variety of capacities in her more than 20 years of experience in the national setting of the United Church of the Christ, including work in communications and policy advocacy on civil rights, justice for women and media access.

She received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Grinnell College and went on to earn her M.Div. degree from Yale University Divinity School in 1990.

