

# Exploring UCC History, Polity, and Theology

# introduction

Welcome to *Exploring UCC History, Polity, and Theology*, a curriculum resource for the church offered by the Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) Ministry Team of the United Church of Christ. This resource is for confirmation. It's for adult small groups. It's for retreats. It's for new member courses. It's for Committees on Ministry. It's for conference boards. It's for any gathering of folks who are curious about what it means to be a part of the UCC.

Within this resource, you will find learning sessions designed around several different themes. Each learning session includes a facilitator guide, video, resources, and activities to help you explore more fully the unique history, governance structure, and theological commitments of the UCC as well as how the story of this denomination is still unfolding. You are invited through this resource to enter into the story and to make it your own.

In the United Church of Christ, we believe in a still speaking God. Our prayer for you as you make use of this resource is that you will experience God's voice and presence in new and perhaps unexpected and surprising ways. Enjoy this journey!

## Overview of *Exploring UCC History, Polity, and Theology*

### Facilitator Guides

Facilitator guides constitute the central resource for leaders. Within each guide, facilitators will find a section titled "Prepare." It contains extensive background information on the area of focus for the session as well as lesson plan options that they may customize or adapt to fit the learning styles of their group.

### Structure of Each Session

Each session with participants follows a three-part sequence: encounter, engage, and wrap up. Participants begin encountering the topic for the day through a warmup activity and a short video, and then continue to engage the material through a variety of activities. Time wraps up with reflection, lingering questions, and prayer.

Please note that the "Engage" section in the facilitator guide contains multiple activities from which to choose. Depending on the duration of your time together, choose one or more activities that will best fit the needs and learning style of your group. As you plan, be sure to check the length of the videos, sketch out a rough timeline for your gathering, and determine how much time you plan to spend on the different aspects of the session. A timeline will help you keep on track during the gathering.

### Technology

This curriculum utilizes a wide variety of technology, including a video in each session. As you plan where the group will meet, consider meeting in a place that makes viewing video easy such as someone's home, a space in a local library, or a room in the church where people can gather around a screen, TV, or computer. The video for each session can be streamed from the internet during the session, or it can be downloaded ahead of time.

If you are not familiar with the technology needed, this is a great opportunity to get tech-inclined youth or adults involved who might not otherwise be engaged.

There are additional optional activities in some sessions that utilize other technology. Ask your tech person to help coordinate the logistics of those activities; the sessions often also include notes on how to adapt the optional activity if the technology is not available.

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## Using the UCC's Website

There are many places in the facilitator guides that will refer you to material on [ucc.org](http://ucc.org). The easiest way to navigate to the information you are looking for is to go to [ucc.org](http://ucc.org), click on the search box, type in the keywords or topic you are looking for, then click on the magnifying glass just to the right of the box where you typed the keywords. The next page that appears will be a listing of places on [ucc.org](http://ucc.org) where those keywords appear. Click on a link in that list to visit that page.

## Using the UCC's YouTube Channel

Some of the sessions utilize videos on the UCC's YouTube Channel. To access the videos, go to [www.youtube.com/user/uccvideos](http://www.youtube.com/user/uccvideos). On the menu directly under the title, "United Church of Christ," you will see a magnifying glass. Click the magnifying glass, then type the name of the video mentioned in the leader guide and hit enter to search. After it generates a list, click on the title to view the video.

## Lesson Plan Outline

### Introduction

- **The United Church of Christ:** Our faith is 2,000 years old. Our thinking is not.

### Part One: Our Heritage and Beginnings

- **The Beginnings of the United Church of Christ:** Our Roots in Four Traditions
- **More than Just Four Traditions:** Exploring Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ
- **The Statement of Faith:** A Testimony, Not Test
- **A Church of Firsts:** A Historic and Ongoing Commitment to Joining Faith and Action

### Part Two: Church Polity: Organization, Structures, and Relationships

- **The Local Church:** Membership, Organization, Freedoms, and Responsibilities
- **A Commitment to Covenant:** Connecting Congregations with the Wider Church
- **General Synod:** The Gathering of the Wider Church
- **Church Designations and Statements of Public Witness:** Responding to the General Synod
- **The Question of Authority:** Exploring Where Authority Resides in the UCC

### Part Three: Ministry: Local and Global

- **Worship in the UCC:** Diverse in Practice, United in Scripture, Song, and Sacrament
- **Ministers and Ministerial Authorization:** Members in Discernment, Ministerial Accountability, and Search and Call
- **Global Ministries:** Global and Local Partners to Work for Justice, Reconciliation, and Peace
- **The Future of the UCC:** Discerning Our Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Strategic Vision

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## Charting Your Path

The path through this curriculum is yours to chart. Maybe your crowd is super excited about all things history, polity, and theology, and you want to do all the lessons sequentially. Or maybe you are teaching confirmation or a new members course and want to narrow in your focus on only a few lessons. Go for it. Teach the whole thing or choose lessons a la carte, go from start to finish or switch up the order. Chart whatever path will help your folks learn best.

Here are examples of paths through the curriculum you might take:

### **Adult Small Group** (12 sessions)

- The United Church of Christ: “Our faith is 2,000 years old. Our thinking is not.”
- The Beginnings of the United Church of Christ: Our Roots in Four Traditions
- More Than Just Four Traditions: Exploring Hidden Histories of the United Church of Christ
- The Statement of Faith: A Testimony, Not Test
- A Church of Firsts: A Historic and Ongoing Commitment to Joining Faith and Action
- The Local Church: Membership, Organization, Freedoms, and Responsibilities
- A Commitment to Covenant: Connecting Congregations with the Wider Church
- General Synod: The Gathering of the Wider Church
- Church Designations and Statements of Public Witness: Responding to the General Synod
- Worship in the UCC: Diverse in Practice, United in Scripture, Song, and Sacrament
- Global Ministries: Global and Local Partners to Work for Justice, Reconciliation, and Peace
- The Future of the UCC: Discerning Our Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Strategic Vision

### **Church Governing Body** (8 sessions)

- The United Church of Christ: Our faith is 2,000 years old. Our thinking is not.
- The Statement of Faith: A Testimony, Not Test
- A Church of Firsts: A Historic and Ongoing Commitment to Joining Faith and Action
- The Local Church: Membership, Organization, Freedoms, and Responsibilities
- A Commitment to Covenant: Connecting Congregations with the Wider Church
- Church Designations and Statements of Public Witness: Responding to the General Synod
- Ministers and Ministerial Authorization: Members in Discernment, Ministerial Accountability, and Search and Call
- The Future of the UCC: Discerning Our Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Strategic Vision

### **Confirmation** (6 sessions)

- The United Church of Christ: “Our faith is 2,000 years old. Our thinking is not.”
- The Statement of Faith: A Testimony, Not Test
- A Church of Firsts: A Historic and Ongoing Commitment to Joining Faith and Action
- The Local Church: Membership, Organization, Freedoms, and Responsibilities
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## **Search and Call Committee** (6 sessions)

- The United Church of Christ: Our faith is 2,000 years old. Our thinking is not.
- The Statement of Faith: A Testimony, Not Test
- A Commitment to Covenant: Connecting Congregations with the Wider Church
- Worship in the UCC: Diverse in Practice, United in Scripture, Song, and Sacrament
- Ministers and Ministerial Authorization: Members in Discernment, Ministerial Accountability, and Search and Call
- The Future of the UCC: Discerning Our Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Strategic Vision

## **Committee on Ministry** (4 sessions)

- The United Church of Christ: “Our faith is 2,000 years old. Our thinking is not.”
- A Commitment to Covenant: Connecting Congregations with the Wider Church
- The Question of Authority: Exploring Where Authority Resides in the UCC
- Ministers and Ministerial Authorization: Members in Discernment, Ministerial Accountability, and Search and Call

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Blessings on your journey!

-The MESA Team

For more information on the ministry  
of the MESA Team, please visit our website at  
[www.ucc.org/ministers](http://www.ucc.org/ministers)