

Covenant

of Shared Ministry

The churches of the Shenandoah Association of the United Church of Christ share a rich history and heritage of ministry. For over two centuries our church families have faithfully worshipped and served our communities and our world. In addition to our individual ministries, it is also our tradition as sister congregations to be in supportive relationship with one another.

Over the years we have worshipped together, pooled our resources for ministry and mission and befriended one another. Our fellowship constantly changes as we welcome new congregations into our family and say goodbye to others, but the ties that bind us together as brothers and sisters in the faith are unbroken.

Believing that we are called by God to be the body of Christ we, the churches of the Shenandoah Association, desire to refresh and strengthen our connectedness. We celebrate the blessings of the covenant we share: traditions of fellowship, service and a united witness of the faith. We benefit from one another's gifts, graces and talents and from the freedom we share to witness and practice according to the free church polity that is outlined for us in the Constitution and Bylaws of the United Church of Christ. We are a diverse communion, but we are a communion – a body united in Christ.

We take seriously our responsibility to continually recreate and sustain our fellowship, to strengthen our common witness, to share our resources and talents, and to hold one another accountable to the promises we have made to one another as an Association.

That we might be faithful to our intention to be the body of Christ here in the Shenandoah Association, we the member churches, ministers, and Association leaders willingly accept as standards for our shared ministry the responsibilities listed below. As faithfully as possible we covenant to fulfill these expectations, and we invite our other covenant partners to support us in our efforts and to hold us accountable to our promises.

Our Promises

As Churches, WE Promise to:

- send delegates and pastors to Association meetings and Ecclesiastical Councils;
- encourage lay members to serve on Association Commissions;
- encourage and support our pastor(s) to work in the wider church;
- call pastors who have, or will seek, standing in the United Church of Christ;
- participate in Ordinations and Installations within the Association;
- annually pay our Association dues;
- annually contribute to Our Churches Wider Mission or to find some way to show financial support of the Central Atlantic Conference and the United Church of Christ;
- send delegates and pastor(s) to the Annual Meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference;
- use Conference/Association resources for our search processes;
- offer just compensation for pastors and staff following as much as possible established Conference guidelines;
- seek the counsel of the Church and Ministry Commission whenever its services might be helpful, but certainly in times of transition, or in times of conflict and confusion, particularly if it involves the pastor; and
- offer support, encouragement and guidance to the pastors and leaders of our Association.

As Ministers, WE Promise to:

- participate in the life of the Association by being present at Association Meetings, Ecclesiastical Councils, Ordinations and Installations;
- attend the Annual Meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference;
- join in the regular meetings of the Ministerium;
- encourage our churches to pay their Association Dues and to find some way to show financial support of the Central Atlantic Conference and the United Church of Christ by contributing to OCWM or by giving directed gifts for their ministries;
- encourage participation in special offerings of the larger church;
- use established procedures of search and call;
- take part in the Periodic Support Consultations provided by the Church and Ministry Commission as outlined in the Manual on Ministry;
- seek the counsel of the Church and Ministry Commission whenever its services might be helpful, but certainly in times of transition, or in times of conflict and confusion; and
- offer support, encouragement and guidance to the churches and leaders of our Association.

As Association Leaders, WE Promise to:

- prepare persons for ministry in and on behalf of the whole United Church of Christ;
- determine fitness for ministry for all authorized ministerial members;
- provide program resources through regular meetings and the work of the task forces;
- provide financial resources for shared ministry through task forces and council action; provide assistance for churches in the search process; to hold an annual meeting where the business of the Association is conducted;
- be available for assistance through the Church and Ministry Commission;
- call Ecclesiastical Councils to examine candidates for ministry;
- conduct services of ordination and installation; and
- offer support, encouragement and guidance to the churches and pastors of our Association.