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No. 9337**Progress Report on the Implementation of the Mutual
Recognition and Reconciliation of Ordained Ministries of
the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United
Church of Christ****RECEIVED by the General Assembly****Background Information:**

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ have entered into a unique ecumenical partnership out of a commitment to the renewal of the church. This partnership seeks for creative ways to embody the unity of the church without necessarily anticipating or looking toward the merger of the two denominations. In 1989 the General Assembly and the General Synod took identical actions to establish "full communion" between our two denominations. The move toward the mutual recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries grows out of our theological understanding of the unity of the church and contributes to our historic identity as uniting churches. It offers concrete steps to overcome our separateness, selfishness, and pride. It seeks, in the language of the Consultation on Church Union, to "make possible an enrichment of the ordained ministry for each church, as well as provide a new and visible demonstration of our essential unity in faith, sacraments, ministry, and mission."

The mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries is, as the Vision Statement for Ecumenical Partnership points out, an attempt to "discover the means by which the ministries of one church will be able to function effectively as ministries to and on behalf of both churches." It recognizes that authentic ministry is first the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ before it is the ministry of a particular denomination. Through this process we open ourselves to the new places the spirit is leading us.

The Resolution on Ecumenical Partnership of the General Assembly and the General Synod in 1989 "declared and celebrated that a relationship of full communion now exists between both our churches, by which we mean that...ordained ministers of each partner church are truly ministers of word and sacrament." At that time the General Assembly and General Synod understood that the reconciliation of ordained ministries is "intended to refer to future actions by the church, both separately and together, whereby their ordained ministries become one ministry of Jesus Christ."

The mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries, as proposed by our two churches, are set in the context of the Consultation of Church Union and are consistent with the understandings set forth in the Churches in Covenant Communion. Mutual recognition and reconciliation of ministries are two related actions which have three fundamental implications: They affirm and celebrate the unity God has given, respect the polity cherished by our two traditions, and anticipate ongoing renewal and transformation.

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During 1992-1993 the Center for Leadership and Ministry, Division of Homeland Ministries, of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), along with the Office for Church Life and Leadership, United Church of Christ, offered a proposal for implementing the "Mutual Recognition and Reconciliation of Ordained Ministries" called for by the General Assembly and General Synod. A "Study and Discussion Paper" was distributed in December 1991 to all regional and area staff and commissions on the ministry, clergy, and local churches who requested it. A similar process was followed in the United Church of Christ. Feedback was received through January 1993. The volume of response received was modest, but affirmed the basic proposal regarding the reconciliation of ordained ministries. Among those who responded, however, there was a notable ambivalence about the Partnership, indicating there is a significant need to deepen understanding of, encourage appreciation for, and broaden participation in the Partnership across our two denominations. This data is being shared with the Ecumenical Partnership Committee as it gives guidance to the Partnership in both denominations.

Summary of Proposals Under Consideration to Implement Reconciliation of Ordained Ministries

On a practical level, the goal of reconciliation of ordained ministries is for each denomination to view, in terms of qualifications and authorization, the ordained ministries of the partner denomination as they do the ordained ministers of their own denomination. This, then, will enable the ordained ministers of both denominations to serve in either denomination and will facilitate their movement between the two denominations. These provisions embody both the corporate and individual nature of reconciliation.

The plan seeks to accomplish this through provisions like the following: Two new ministerial designations will be created within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of "ordained ministerial partner" and "ordained ministerial partner standing." "Ordained ministerial partner standing" will be the designation for those United Church of Christ ordained ministers who serve in Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ordained ministries. Comparable designations will be created in the United Church of Christ for Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ordained ministers.

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) ordained ministers who serve in a United Church of Christ ministry will continue to hold Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) pension, health benefits, and insurance programs. Denominational relationships and accountability of an ordained minister will be located primarily in the denomination where the person serves.

Ordained ministers of both denominations will be able to seek pastoral and other calls in either denomination. However, prior to seeking a call in the other denomination, ordained ministers will be expected to demonstrate a knowledge of and respect for the history, polity, theology, and practice of the other denomination.

Time Line

The Center for Leadership and Ministry, Division of Homeland Ministries will continue its work with the Office for Church Life and Leadership of the United Church of Christ to shape the specific ways in which the recognition and reconciliation of ordained ministries will be implemented. In 1995 the necessary actions, including proposed changes in the Policies and Criteria for the Order of Ministry, needed to implement the reconciliation of ordained ministries with the United Church of Christ will be offered to the General Board and the General Assembly. These changes would formally implement agreements reached between the two denominations. The Office for Church Life and Leadership (UCC) will offer proposed changes in the Constitution and Bylaws. If approved by the 20th General Synod in 1995, changes in the Constitution would go through the process of ratification by the Conferences during 1995-1996. If ratified, implementation would be phased in during 1996-1997, as would changes in the Policies and Criteria. This would culminate in liturgical acknowledgement of the full corporate reconciliation of the ordained ministries of the two denominations at the General Assembly and General Synod in 1997.