

Commissioned Ministers Are Still Speaking

By Deborah Gline Allen, C.M.C.E.

Commissioned ministry is an authorized form of ministry that emerged from the category of Commissioned Worker when it became a recognized form of ministry in the United Church of Christ in 1984. The *United Church of Christ Manual On Ministry* lists several areas in which a person may be commissioned: Christian education, church administration, church music, missionary work related to the United Church of Christ, conference and denominational staff work, certain ministries of advocacy or community change. There are currently 127 commissioned ministers in the United Church of Christ; 45 of them are commissioned in Christian education.

“I was encouraged to seek commissioning by my conference minister,” says **Mary Sicher**, Minister of Christian Education for the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, and a member of AUCE. “He wanted me to go among the congregations in the conference to preach and teach with the authority of the Church behind me. For me, commissioning makes every task more sacred, more (w)holy.”

Christy Trudo, of the Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team of the United Church of Christ, reminds us that the ministries of word and sacrament require ordination. “But if one’s sense of call does not clearly lead in that direction at the outset of the discernment process, it is important to consider commissioning as a possibility for authorization.”

Carol Wilson, a Commissioned Minister of Christian Education in the Southwest Conference, says that her work as a commissioned minister has been to help local congregations that have no volunteer or paid Christian education staff. As an authorized minister in the United Church of Christ, it has been important for her to live out the covenantal relationship within the various settings of the UCC. One way is by providing needed support for Christian education in the churches of

the Southwest Conference. Another way that she lives out this covenantal relationship is in her work throughout the UCC as a United Church Education Consultant with the Partners In Education.

For **Timothy Brown** of the UCC Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns, “Commissioning was a natural response to my call to work for the Coalition. I needed to respond to God’s tapping on my shoulder with ministerial acknowledgment from my denomination.”

When **Elsa Marshall**, Commissioned Minister for Christian Education and Youth Ministry at Maple Street Congregational Church in Danvers, Massachusetts, was asked why she became commissioned, she said, “That is simple. God called me to this unique and blessed ministry and that has formed and transformed my life. God did not call me to word and sacrament and if I had decided to go to seminary and be ordained, that would have been unfaithful to the discernment of my call. I am indeed fortunate to be in a denomination that recognizes and authorizes many different calls to ministry.”

Clearly, the commissioning process provides an opportunity for those called to specific forms of ministry to bring together their faith, their passions, and God’s presence in it all. Commissioned ministers are then affirmed by the various settings in the United Church of Christ, validating what these people have always known to be God’s work through them.

More information about commissioned ministry is found in the Commissioned Ministry section of the *United Church of Christ Manual On Ministry*, which is available at <http://www.ucc.org/ministers/manual> or by calling United Church Resources at 800.537.3394.

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