ARTICLE I – Membership: Authorization and Standing of Churches and Ministers

A. Standing of Churches

1. Those churches initially having full standing in this Association are those churches who were designated as members of the Western Association at the 29th Annual Meeting of the Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ on May 30, 1992. Such action was subsequently affirmed at the organizational meeting of the Association, and at meetings of the Association Church and Ministry Committee and the Association organizing Council.

2. Any church which desires standing in the Association and which votes to covenant with the Association to assume and faithfully fulfill the obligation of a church of the Association shall present evidence of such a vote. The Church and Ministry Committee shall examine the request of the church and shall ensure that the statements of faith of the church are in essential agreement with that of the Association. The church shall be received into the Association upon a two-thirds affirmative vote of those present and voting at such Association meetings.

3. A church desiring to terminate its standing in the Association shall present its request to the Association. On recommendation of the Church and Ministry Committee, the Association may terminate the church’s standing by a majority vote of those present and voting at a regular or special meeting.

4. The Association may initiate action to terminate the standing of a local church, when that church gives evidence that it is no longer in sympathy with the purposes and program of the United Church of Christ, or when that congregation ceases to continue as a church.

5. When the standing of a local church of the Association is in question, the Association’s Church and Ministry Committee shall make inquiry. If the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved, the Committee, or the church, may submit the concern to the Association Council for discernment.

B. Standing of Individuals

1. Individuals initially having full standing in the Association are those United Church of Christ ordained, commissioned, and licensed ministers who serve ministries within the geographical area of the Western Association, as defined at the 29th Annual Meeting of the Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ, on May 30, 1992, and who were members in full standing of the Association’s predecessor Associations at the time of said meeting. The standing of all such persons was subsequently affirmed at the organizational meetings of the Western Association Church and Ministry Committee and the Western Association Organizing Council.

2. An ordained minister of the United Church of Christ may hold standing in the Association only when serving ministries within the geographic area of the Association, except in the following instances:

a. A minister of the United Church of Christ, engaged in a ministry requiring a prolonged absence from the United States, or one that does not permit a fixed residence, may hold standing in the Association, as long as membership is maintained in a local church of the Association.

b. A minister of the United Church of Christ, who retires from active service may hold standing in the Association without being required to reside within the geographic area of the Association.
3. An ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, who has full standing in the Association, and who withdraws from active service in the ministry to enter a secular occupation, must apply to the Association for a leave of absence, unless said minister has previously retired from active service in the ministry. Such a leave-of-absence shall be granted for a period of one year. Except in special cases, leave-of-absence status shall not be granted for more than five years in succession. Standing will be dropped if an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ withdraws from active service in the ministry to enter a secular occupation, without retiring or requesting a leave-of-absence.

4. “Member in Discernment” Status

A person desiring to prepare for ordained, commissioned, or licensed ministry may be received as a “Member in Discernment” of the Association by action of the Church and Ministry Committee. Request for “Member in Discernment” status shall be made to the Church and Ministry Committee through the local church of which the applicant is a member.

5. Ordained Ministerial Standing

a. Ordained ministerial standing may be granted by the Association through ordination, transfer or reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing.

b. Ordination

1) Application for ordination shall be made to the Church and Ministry Committee through the local church of which the candidate is a member.
2) Upon the recommendation and request of the Church and Ministry Committee, the Association Council shall issue a call for the Association to meet as an ecclesiastical council at least 30 days before the proposed ordination of the candidate.
3) A person may be approved as a candidate for ordination upon the recommendation of the Church and Ministry Committee and by a simple majority vote of the voting delegates at an ecclesiastical council.
4) The Association, in cooperation with the candidate, the candidate’s local church and calling body, shall ordain the candidate after the candidate has received a call recognized by the Association.

6. Transfer of Ordained Ministerial Standing

a. Application for transfer of standing shall be made to the Church and Ministry Committee by the ordained minister and the calling body.

b. The standing of a minister of the United Church of Christ may be transferred into the Association by action of the Church and Ministry Committee and affirmed by the Association Council.

c. The Association, in cooperation with the ordained minister, local church and calling body, shall install or recognize the ordained minister as deemed appropriate.

7. Reinstatement of Ordained Ministerial Standing

a. Requests for reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing shall be made to the Church and Ministry Committee by the ordained minister and the local church of which the ordained minister is a member.

b. The standing of an ordained minister may be reinstated upon the recommendation of the Church and Ministry Committee and by a simple majority vote of those present and voting at an ecclesiastical council.

c. The Association, in cooperation with the ordained minister, local church and calling body, shall install or recognize the ordained minister as deemed appropriate.
8. Privilege of Call
   a. An ordained minister of another denomination who desires to enter the ordained ministry of the United Church of Christ may make application for privilege of call to the Church and Ministry Committee.

   b. If the applicant is found to be qualified, privilege of call is granted upon the recommendation of the Church and Ministry Committee and by a simple majority vote of those present and voting at an ecclesiastical council.

   c. Privilege of call shall be granted for a period of one year and may be renewed annually by the Church and Ministry Committee.

9. Commissioned Minister
   a. A person who desires to be authorized as a commissioned minister shall make application to the Church and Ministry Committee through the local church of which the applicant is a member.

   b. The applicant may be authorized as a commissioned minister upon the recommendation of the Church and Ministry Committee and by a simple majority vote of those present and voting at an ecclesiastical council.

   c. The Association, in cooperation with the applicant and the applicant’s local church, shall recognize the commissioned minister as deemed appropriate.

10. Licensed Minister
    a. A person who desires to be authorized as a licensed minister shall make application to the Church and Ministry Committee through the local church of which the applicant is a member.

    b. The applicant may be authorized as a licensed minister by action of the Church and Ministry Committee upon the receipt of a call to a local congregation of the Association.

    c. The licensed minister’s standing shall be granted for a period of one year and may be renewed annually by the Church and Ministry Committee.

    d. The Association, in cooperation with the applicant and local church, shall recognize the licensed minister as deemed appropriate.

11. Ministerial Discipline
    a. Questions related to ministerial discipline, reinstatement and absenteeism are to be dealt with by the Church and Ministry Committee as guided by the Committee’s most current policies and procedures in this area. Such policies and procedures should be taken into consideration through the provisions outlined in the Manual on Ministry, and should reflect current legal and ecclesiastical insights regarding this subject.

    b. Ministerial standing shall be reviewed periodically according to the most up-to-date UCC Bylaws and the Manual on Ministry.

    c. If the minister, who is being disciplined, reviewed, or reinstated, disagrees with the decision made by the Church and Ministry Committee, he/she may request that the Association Council decide the matter. Such an appeal may only consider the process and procedure used by the Church and Ministry Committee as it deliberated its final decision. Such a request must be
made, in writing, within 30 days after the Church and Ministry Committee’s decision. Upon receipt of the minister’s request, the Association Council shall designate a time to gather and solely hear and decide the matter. The Association Council shall gather no later than 60 days after receiving the minister’s request. The decision of the Association Council shall be considered final and not subject to further appeal.

12. Termination of Standing

An ordained, commissioned or licensed minister’s standing shall be terminated by the Association at the minister’s own written request. Such standing may also be terminated by the Association upon decision of the Church and Ministry Committee in the following instances:

a. After the minister has relocated outside the geographical area for three or more years without giving good reason for continuing good standing, or requesting transfer to another Association.

b. As the result of disciplinary action.

13. Standing in Question

If there is a question concerning whether or not, any ordained, commissioned or licensed minister or person as “Member in Discernment” has standing in the Association, the Church and Ministry Committee shall make inquiry. If the matter cannot be satisfactorily resolved, either the Committee or the person in question, shall next submit their concern to the Association Council for final action.

C. Ecclesiastical Councils

1. When a person, who is a “Member in Discernment” for ordained or commissioned ministry, a candidate for privilege of call or reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing, has completed all requirements for authorization, or when such person is expected to complete said requirements in the very near future, such candidate shall be examined by the Church and Ministry Committee of the Association as to their readiness to enter the ministry of the United Church of Christ.

2. The Church and Ministry Committee shall vote upon an appropriate recommendation to make to the Ecclesiastical Council. This recommendation shall be shared with the candidate prior to the calling of an Ecclesiastical Council. The Church & Ministry Committee shall request the Association Council call an Ecclesiastical Council based upon their recommendation.

3. An Ecclesiastical Council is an official meeting of the Association for the purpose of authorizing a ministry and acting on questions of discipline.

4. An Ecclesiastical Council shall be held at a place and time which is most suitable for the candidate as determined by the Church and Ministry Committee and approved by the Association Council or its executive Committee. The official written “call” (or invitation) for the ecclesiastical Council and a copy of the candidate’s written statement on ministry presented to the Church and Ministry Committee shall be mailed to all of the churches and members of this Association no less than 30 days prior to the Ecclesiastical Council.

5. Representatives from a minimum of eight congregations of this Association shall constitute a quorum for an Ecclesiastical Council. Each authorized minister of the Association and voting delegate(s) from each church must sign in as eligible voters prior to the start of the Ecclesiastical Council. The candidate, the congregation in which he/she holds membership, the Mission Cluster of
which that congregation is a member and the Church and Ministry Committee, share an equal responsibility for insuring that a quorum is present.

6. All persons present at an Ecclesiastical Council may examine the candidate, provided that they are members of a congregation of the Association. Voting shall be according to the procedures described in the Constitution, Article VII E.

7. The Moderator of the Association, or his/her designee, shall be the presiding officer at the Ecclesiastical Council.

8. The Ecclesiastical Council shall be called to order by the presiding officer, and an appropriate prayer shall be offered. The purpose of an Ecclesiastical Council shall be explained to all those who are present. The candidate shall be briefly introduced, and then the Church and Ministry Committee shall present its recommendation regarding the candidate's readiness to enter the ordained or commissioned ministry of the United Church of Christ. The candidate shall then be invited to present brief comments regarding his/her faith journey, call to ministry, theology, understanding of ministry and/or other appropriate subjects. The floor will then be open to questions from eligible persons present. At the conclusion of the questioning, the candidate shall be dismissed. There shall be an opportunity for those present to discuss the candidate's readiness to enter the ministry. A motion shall then be made concerning whether or not the Ecclesiastical Council approves of the candidate being authorized for ministry. A vote shall be taken regarding the motion. A simple majority of the votes cast is necessary for the passage of the motion. The candidate shall be invited back into the room and he/she shall be informed of the decision of the Ecclesiastical Council. The meeting shall conclude with an appropriate prayer.

9. The decision of the Ecclesiastical Council shall be similar to one of the following four options:

a. The candidate is approved for ordination, commissioning, privilege of call or reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing (or approved for ordination pending receiving a call to an authorized position within the United Church of Christ).

b. The Candidate is approved for ordination, commissioning, privilege of call or reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing, but first the candidate must meet certain requirements or stipulations. (If the candidate meets the requirements or stipulations as judged by the Church and Ministry Committee, the candidate shall be considered ready for authorization without further vote of the Ecclesiastical Council.)

c. The candidate is not approved for ordination, commissioning, privilege of call or reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing but the Ecclesiastical Council feels that the candidate may be ready at a later date if certain requirements or stipulations are met. However, the candidate's readiness would again have to be determined at a later date by the Church and Ministry Committee and an Ecclesiastical Council.

d. The candidate is not approved for ordination, commissioning, privilege of call or reinstatement of ordained ministerial standing.

D. Except where modified, or further defined by the Association’s Constitution or Bylaws, the United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry (most recent edition) shall serve as the Association’s guidelines for its actions in all issues pertaining to:

1. Ordination, commissioning, and/or licensing of ministers.

2. Granting standing to churches and ministers within the Association.
3. Termination or transfer of standing for churches and ministers. This shall include leaves of absence and/or retirement.

4. Granting continuation or termination of “Member in Discernment” status.

5. “Dual Standing” and/or privilege of call for ministers of other denominations who are employed, or seek employment within the United Church of Christ.

6. Review and discipline of persons authorized for ministry.

7. Ecclesiastical endorsement and approval of persons seeking certification for professional organization, United States government chaplaincies, and other chaplaincy programs.

ARTICLE II – Elections

A. The election of officers and committees shall be held at the Annual Meeting of the Association except as otherwise provided. Candidates for elected offices and committees shall be selected by the Nominating Committee, unless otherwise provided in these Bylaws.

B. Nominees for election by the Illinois Conference for delegates and alternatives to General Synod shall be selected by ballot at the Annual Meeting in even numbered years.

C. Additional nominations may be made from the floor of the Association with prior consent of the nominee.

ARTICLE III – Officers and Administration

A. The positions of Moderator and Vice Moderator shall alternate in successive years between a lay person and an authorized minister. If the Moderator is an authorized minister, the Vice Moderator shall be a lay person. If the Moderator is a lay person, the Vice Moderator shall be an authorized minister.

B. The Moderator, Vice Moderator, and Secretary shall be elected at the Annual Meeting for terms of one year. Only the Secretary shall be eligible for election to two successive terms.

C. All vacancies in elected offices shall be filled by the Association Council until the next Annual Meeting of the Association.

D. The Associate Conference Minister (s) and all professional staff shall be ordained ministers of the United Church of Christ.

1. All professional staff will be elected in keeping with the provisions of the Constitutions and Bylaws of the Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ.

2. In the event of a vacancy, the Association Council, in consultation with the Conference Minister, shall designate a person to discharge the duties of that office until a new Associate Conference Minister (s) shall take office.

3. In considering election or dismissal of professional staff, the recommendation of the Association Council shall be forwarded by the Moderator to the Personnel Committee of the Conference. Such
recommendation may be based upon a recommendation of this Association’s representatives to the Conference Personnel Committee.

E. The elected representatives of the Association to the Conference Personnel Committee shall constitute a Staff Relations Committee which shall:

1. Be organized with the senior member as presiding member.

2. Meet quarterly with professional staff and support staff to review job performance, discuss and seek solutions for the concerns of the professional and support staff and committee.

3. Provide, in consultation with the Conference Personnel Committee, for an annual review of the performance of professional and support staff and provide an appropriate report of such review to the Association Council and Personnel Committee.

4. Be the point of first contact of professional and support staff in matters of working conditions and grievances. The Committee shall seek resolution to such issues and, as needed, bring them to the Association Council for advice and to the Conference Personnel Committee for action.

F. DUTIES OF STAFF, OFFICERS AND ASSOCIATION COUNCIL

1. The Associate Conference Minister(s) serving the Western Association shall be an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, who has been elected to the position of Associate Conference Minister by a simple majority of the delegates present and voting, at an annual or special meeting of the Association. The Associate Conference Minister(s) shall:

a. Be a pastor to pastors, a counselor to churches, a leader and interpreter of contemporary theological thought and social concerns, and be skilled in church programming and human relations tools and techniques.

b. Be accountable to the Minister of the Illinois Conference for the execution of Conference policy and program.

c. Be responsible to the Association and the Association Council and report to the Annual Meeting of the Association.

d. Be responsible for the official correspondence, and serve as Registrar (s) of the Association.

e. Issue, with the approval of the Church and Ministry Committee, a Certificate of Transfer to any minister leaving the Association.

f. Keep a complete record of the ministers of the Association, their ordination, reception, transfer, and other related items, and shall submit such information to the Minister of the Illinois Conference and to the Secretary of the United Church of Christ.

g. Sign all Certificates of Ordination, Installation, Privilege of Call, Commissioned Minister, Licensed Minister and all other certificates as provided for in this Constitution and Bylaws, and forward records of these to proper individuals and agencies of the United Church of Christ.

h. Keep a complete record of the local churches of the Association, showing the names and addresses of the ministers and officers of the local churches and shall upon request submit such information to the proper individuals and agencies of the United Church of Christ.
i. Receive the records of ministers transferred from other associations and shall report them as authorized by decision of the Church and Ministry Committee.

j. Serve as ex-officio member, without vote, of the Church and Ministry Committee, the Association Council and all other Association committees.

k. Aid the Association in the ordination of all properly approved candidates for ordination, commissioned ministry and licensed ministry and, together with representatives of local churches shall provide suitable services of recognition.

l. Upon the request of the local church and with the approval of the Church and Ministry Committee arrange for the Installation or Recognition of pastors called by the church.

m. Aid in the establishment and functioning of Mission Clusters.

2. Additional staff members may be employed according to the development and needs of the Association program, when authorized by the Illinois Conference.

3. The Moderator and Vice Moderator

   a. The Moderator shall preside at all meetings of the Association and Association Council, and shall be a member of the Association Council and Ex-officio member of all committees.

   b. The Moderator shall be a member ex-officio of the Conference Council and Conference executive Committee.

   c. The Vice Moderator shall perform the duties of the Moderator in cases of the Moderator’s absence or by request of the Moderator. The Vice Moderator shall serve with the Planning Committee on Association Meetings as its Chair.

4. The Secretary shall keep accurate and permanent minutes of the meetings of the Association and of the Association Council.

5. The Association Council shall:

   a. Administer the affairs of the Association between meetings of the Association and shall be the trustee of all Association assets.

   b. Concern itself with implementing the Mission Statement of the Association in cooperation with the Mission Clusters, committees, task forces, networks and other program units.

   c. Bring a report of its activities to the Annual Meeting of the Association.

ARTICLE IV – Mission Clusters

A. A Mission Cluster is composed of a group of local churches and church-related institutions from a specific geographical area, called together and recognized by the Association. All churches and ministers within the Association have a right to participation in a mission cluster.

B. The status and authority of the Mission Clusters are derived from the Association.
C. Function

The function of the Mission Cluster shall be:

1. To engage in research, planning, and implementation of mission in its community or area. Such efforts may be ecumenical.
2. To develop support structures for clergy and laity.
3. To promote fellowship among churches.
4. To be a vehicle of communication between the local church and the larger Church so that congregations may be more effective both in their local and wider witness.
5. To organize itself for its work and report to its local churches.
6. To elect representatives to the Association Council.
7. To propose nominees for Association, Conference and national UCC positions.

ARTICLE V – Standing Committees, Task Forces, Networks and other Program Units

A. Standing Committees

The Association shall provide for the standing Committees for Nominating, Church and Ministry, Planning Committee, and the Leonhart Committee as mandated in the Constitution. The composition of these committees shall take into consideration representation of all Mission Clusters, authorized ministers and laity, men and women. The Committees shall elect their own officers each year and name one of their members (usually the chairperson) to represent them on the Association Council. They shall submit reports to the Annual Meeting of the Association.

1. Standing Committee for Nominations
   a. This committee shall be composed of one lay person or one authorized minister from each Mission Cluster. Members of this committee shall serve one term of two years. In addition to one person from each Mission Cluster, an additional member will be elected as an At Large member. They shall be elected to this position by the Association in staggered terms so that three members are elected in each year.
   b. This Committee shall present at the Annual Meeting a slate of nominees for Moderator, Vice Moderator, Secretary, members of the Church and Ministry Committee and Nominating Committee, members-at-large of the Association Council, representatives from the Association to the Illinois Conference Council, to the Personnel Committee, to General Synod, and other Conference committees as requested by the Illinois Conference.

2. Standing Committee for Church and Ministry
   a. This committee shall be composed of one lay person and one authorized minister from each Mission Cluster plus two at-large representatives. Members shall be elected by the Association for a term of three years and may be re-elected for one additional term. Terms of the committee shall be staggered so that one third of the committee will be elected each year.
   b. This committee’s function shall be:
1. To monitor the standing of ministers and churches.

2. To promote good relationships and mutual support among churches, ministers, and the Association as they work in covenant with each other.

3. To provide care, examination and certification for persons preparing for ordained, commissioned and licensed ministry.

4. To provide care and support for local churches.

5. To work with staff in the areas of placement, ecclesiastical councils, installations, ordinations, and services of recognition.

6. To evaluate and recommend persons seeking Privilege of Call in the United Church of Christ.

7. To review and certify persons seeking standing in specialized ministries such as military, industrial and institutional chaplaincies.

8. To offer training for licensed and commissioned ministry and leadership education for ministers and laity.

3. Standing Committee for Association Meetings

   a. The Association shall elect at the Annual Spring Association Meeting, a Planning Committee of one person from each Mission Cluster to serve with the Vice Moderator of the Association (for a term of two years). The terms of the committee members shall be staggered so that one half of the committee will be elected each year.

   b. This committee’s functions shall be:

      1. To plan the Annual (Spring) and Fall Association Meetings for two years in advance, if possible.

      2. To coordinate the Fall and Spring Association Meetings for the following year during their term of office.

      3. To invite persons from the meetings’ host sites and any other persons whose assistance they desire to work with the committee.

      4. To plan for any special meetings assigned to them by the Association Council.

4. Standing Committee for the Leonhart Endowment

   a. The Association Council shall appoint four persons plus the Moderator to serve as the Committee to evaluate and recommend funding of grant projects for Association churches who make application by the March 1 deadline each year. The terms of the committee members shall be for two years, with a potential of a second term. Terms of committee members will be staggered. Appointed members of the committee will be announced at the Spring Annual meeting of the Association.

   b. The Committee will distribute, through the Association office, the application for grants to all Association churches each January in order to receive grant requests by the March 1st deadline. After receipt of grant requests, the committee shall review, evaluate and recommend to the Association Council such grants that meet the criteria for funding. Grant
awards will be announced at the Spring Annual Association meeting each year, using the interest income of the Leonhart Trust which is available each year.

B. Task Forces
A Task Force is any group or committee formed and/or authorized by the Association to facilitate and monitor the implementation of General Synod priorities, to implement Conference and/or Association programs or to accept other short-term assignments. A Task Force shall cease to exist when the Association Council determines the task is complete. A Task Force shall be given one representative with voice, but without vote, on the Association Council. Task Forces shall report directly to the Association Council.

C. Networks
A Network is any group, duly recognized by the Association, brought together around a common interest, concern, or ministry. A duly recognized Network shall have one representative with voice, but without vote, on the Association Council. Networks shall report regularly to the Association Council. Networks may include, but shall not be limited to ministries in Christian Education, Church in Society, Evangelism, Spiritual Growth, Stewardship and Mission, Women’s Ministries, Men’s Ministries, Youth Ministries, Peace and Hunger.

D. Other Program Units
Any program unit or mission within the Association which is not accountable through a standing committee, task force or network may petition the Association for recognition and representation with voice, but without vote, on the Association Council.

ARTICLE VI – Rules of Order
Unless otherwise provided for, all proceedings of the Association shall be governed by Robert’s Rules of Order, most recent revision.

ARTICLE VII – Amendments
A. Amendments to these ByLaws may be proposed by any church of the Association or the Association Council. Notice of such amendments shall be transmitted, in writing, to the churches and ministers of the Association at least thirty (30) days prior to the regular or special meeting of the Association at which they are to be considered.

B. Adoption of Amendments to these ByLaws shall require a two-thirds affirmative vote of those present and voting.

Both Constitution and Bylaws approved April 1994
Changes to Article VI E of the Constitution and Article III, Section F 3 and Article V 3
Approved on April 26, 1997
Changes to Article I Section 11 and 13 in the Bylaws on April 25, 2009
Revision of Constitution and By-laws, Approved by the Association Action, April 23, 2016