**Penn West Academy for Ministry**

**Covenant and Polity Course**

**Year 1- 4**

Instructor: Rev. Dr. Bonnie Bates, conference minister

Penn Northeast Conference

Cell: 484-705-3438

Email: revdrbbates@gmail.com

**Course Objectives:**

1. To understand the history and polity of the United Church of Christ.
2. To understand and reflect on the five strains of church that resulted in the formation of the United Church of Christ.
3. To engage in conversation about how the covenantal nature of the United Church of Christ impacts and influences decision-making and relationships across the settings of the Church.
4. To build understanding about the covenantal interrelationships of the various settings of the United Church of Christ.
5. To engage the covenantal commitments in documents such as the Manual on Ministry and the Manual on Church.
6. To help students prepare for ecclesiastical authorization through the Member in Discernment process

**Texts:**

Delk, Yvonne V., *Afro-Christian Convention: The Fifth Stream of the United Church of Christ*, United Church Press, 2023

Drummond, Sarah B., *Sharing Leadership*: *A United Church of Christ Way of Being in Community*, The Pilgrim Press, 2021

*Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, Vol. 1*, [Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ - Volume I](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/1254/hiddenhistoriesi.pdf?1418424724)

*Hidden Histories in the United Church of Christ, Vol. 2*, [hidden-histories-2-1.pdf](https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/unitedchurchofchrist/legacy_url/1278/hidden-histories-2-1.pdf?1418424744)

*Manual on Local Church*, [Manual on Local Church - United Church of Christ](https://www.ucc.org/manual-on-church/)

Marks of Faithful and Effective Churches in the UCC

*Manual on Ministry*, [ManualonMinistry-2018.pdf](https://www.ucc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ManualonMinistry-2018.pdf)

Review and become familiar with Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry

*UCC Constitution and Bylaws*, [Constitution and Bylaws - United Church of Christ](https://www.ucc.org/who-we-are/constitution-and-bylaws/)

**Year 1 –** *In the Academy, we are on a four-year cycle. 2025-2026 is year ONE for me, but we may amend the content based on where the students are in the process.*

**Weekend ONE:**

**September 13, 2025: Covenant Defined and Applied**

Readings for Sept: Drummond, Sarah, *Sharing Leadership: A united Church of Christ Way of Being in Community*, Introduction pg. 3-5, History, pg. 19-33

*UCC Constitution and Bylaws*, Articles I - V

Assignment for September:

1. Develop an individual definition for Covenant, one you could share with a local church or confirmation class.
2. Prepare a two-minute presentation on one of the readings, which reflects your understanding of covenant and its application.
3. Be prepared to have a conversation about the Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry and the Marks of Faithful and Effective Churches and how they impact your understanding of covenant.

**Weekend TWO:**

**October 11, 2025: Covenant Lived out in Denominational Development**

Readings for Oct: *Hidden Histories of the UCC, Vol 2*, Chapters 1 -3

Assignment for October:

1. Explore the unification of the Evangelical and Reformed Churches into the birthing of the UCC. Pay special attention to the 300th anniversary of the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania.
2. Write a 3-page reflection on the unification of the denomination, reflecting an understanding of the E&R and Congregational Christian Church (including the Afro-Christian Convention).
3. Be prepared to share reflections on the antecedent denominations and how they affect the liturgy, ministry, and mission of your local church.

**Fall Assignment: Attend the Fall meetings of the Penn West Conference and the Keystone Conference**

**Weekend THREE:**

**March 14, 2025: Impact of Covenant on UCC Ministry and Authorization**

Readings for March:  *Manual on Ministry*, Section 1 & 2

Assignment for March:

1. Review the Manual on Ministry section and be prepared to share your understanding of covenant in the discernment and authorization processes.
2. Prepare a 5-minute presentation on how you have experienced, or not experienced, covenant in your discernment process.
3. Share information about one of your steps in the discernment and authorization process, thoughts, reflections, requirements.

**Weekend FOUR:**

**May 9, 2026: Impact of Covenant on the Local Church**

Readings for May: *Manual on Local Church*, Sections 1-3

Assignment for May:

1. Review the Manual on Local Church section and be prepared to share your understanding of covenant in the relationship between and among the various settings of the UCC.
2. Prepare a case study or problem reflection about challenges of covenant that you have seen or experienced in the local church.
3. Review your local church constitution and bylaws. How does it support the information in the Manual on Local Church.

**Year Four students: Due 2 weeks before the May class.**

Draft a paper reflecting on covenant within and among the authorized ministers, local churches and the various settings of the church. You may want to utilize the Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministry and the Marks of Faithful and Vital Local Churches