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• C O N F E R E N C E •  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Dear pastors and lay leaders,

Grace and peace to you from the Eastern Iowa Association Committee on Ministry. Enclosed you will find a copy of “A Sure Foundation: resources for the relationship between pastors and congregations,” as well as a study guide. It is our hope that this summer, each of our churches will gather a group of leaders to read and discuss it, using the study guide we have provided.

The resource includes sections on Ethical Codes, Pastoral Relations Committees, Assessment of Ministry, Social Media Guidelines, Sabbatical Leave, Ethical Departure Guidelines, and Behavior Covenants for Congregations.

We suggest that you choose the appropriate committee or board within your church (Church Council/ Consistory, Board of Deacons, Pastoral Relations Committee, etc.) to address these topics and create a plan of action to take the next faithful steps towards implementing these practices in your church. All of these resources are also available for you to download or share digitally with other leaders at [www.ucctcm.org/asurefoundation](http://www.ucctcm.org/asurefoundation).

We realize that some of these materials or concepts may feel new, but experience has taught us that they are essential. Behavioral Covenants foster stronger relationships. Pastoral Relations Committees nurture support and growth. Assessments of Ministry allow feedback to focus on transformative mission and ministry. Clear guidelines and good communication between congregations and their pastor(s) build healthier congregations.

Conference staff and members of the Committee on Ministry are ready to join with you and your church in this work. Stay tuned for the Association’s Annual Meeting this September for workshops and check out the online learning opportunities available now at [www.ucctcm.org/asurefoundation](http://www.ucctcm.org/asurefoundation).

We pray that your Lenten Season has been full of sacred moments, and we wish you all the best as we enter this Easter season.

Blessings in the year ahead,

The Eastern Iowa Association Committee on Ministry

Jacqueline Burnett, Chairperson, First Congregational UCC, Dubuque, IA  
Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel, First Congregational UCC, Dubuque, IA  
Nancy Hipple, First UCC, Tipton, IA  
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# A SURE FOUNDATION

resources for the relationship between pastors and congregations

Discussion Guide written by Rev. Dr. Lillian Daniel

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## **starting the conversation**

*After your group has read “A Sure Foundation,” use these questions to get the conversation going.*

### **PASTORAL RELATIONS COMMITTEES**

Pastoral Relations Committees (pg. 13-21) come highly recommended in this resource yet some churches say they do not need a PRC because another existing board or group already plays that role. On pg. 14-16, a PRC is defined as being its own standing committee that keeps confidentiality, does not meet without the pastor, does not discuss anonymous feedback and does not play any role in the evaluation or compensation of the pastor. Given that definition, does your church have a PRC? Have you ever? Why or why not?

### **ASSESSMENT OF MINISTRY**

The section on Assessment of Ministry suggests that it is not enough to simply “evaluate the job performance” of the pastor (pg. 22) but recommends assessing the ministry of the pastor and congregation together. On pg. 25, you can find examples of the type of feedback and questions that are most helpful. Notice that anonymous feedback does not appear on the list (pg. 26). Do you agree? How does your church currently assess or evaluate the ministry and which group is responsible for it?

### **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

Does it surprise you to see that there is a full section on Social Media Guidelines for pastors and church members? Take a moment to review the Guidance for Pastors section on pg. 29-30 and read out loud the Boundaries for Departure on pg. 32. Have any of these issues ever come up in your church life?

## UCC MINISTERIAL CODE

Our pastors are expected to hold to the UCC Ministerial Code, which you can find in “Ethical Codes” on pg. 4-6. It’s a long list! Was there anything there that surprised you? Anything you were surprised to see left out?

## BEHAVIORAL COVENANTS FOR CONGREGATIONS

Behavioral Covenants for Congregations (pg. 9-12) are like “rules for the road” as we go about church life. They are guidelines for how to treat each other in gatherings like the one we are having right now. Has your church ever had a behavior covenant? Looking back, are there times when it could have helped?



**process**

### BEFORE YOUR MEET:

- Send everyone the document.
- At the meeting, bring extra copies or have a digital copy to share by email or zoom if you are meeting remotely.

### AT THE MEETING:

- Choose a Facilitator to ask the discussion questions and call on people
- Choose a Next Steps Notetaker to write down next steps as they come up.
- Check in to see if everyone in the group has read the document and offer extra copies to any who need them.

### AT THE END OF THE MEETING:

- Ask the notetaker to read out loud the list of next steps and who will do them.