

LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY IN THE UNITED
CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES (UCCP):
ITS MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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DUMAGUETE CITY
APRIL 2019

THE DIVINITY SCHOOL
In coordination with the
UNIVERSITY GRADUATE PROGRAMS
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
DUMAGUETE CITY

Appraisal Sheet

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entitled

**LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
IN THE PHILIPPINES (UCCP): ITS MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF THEOLOGY IN MISSION STUDIES

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To Mama and Papa

in whose nurturing love I experienced the grace and love of God.

I thank my God every time I remember you (Phil. 1:3).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Hallelujah! Words are not enough to express my joy and thanksgiving for this opportunity God has given me to pursue and finish this study. To God, I am truly grateful and to the people whom God has sent me to help make the completion of this undertaking possible. I would like to acknowledge the following people and institutions who in one way or another have helped me and journeyed with me since the beginning of this study until I finished.

To Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin, my thesis adviser, who patiently guided me in the preparation and completion of this thesis. To the members of the panel, chaired by Dr. Margaret Helen U. Alvarez, Dean of the Graduate School; Rev. Dr. Jeaneth H. Faller, Dean of the Divinity School; Rev. Dr. Josephat Rweyemamu, UEM Mission Co-Worker; Bishop Erme R. Camba, UCCP Bishop Emeritus; and Dr. Victor Aguilan, Coordinator of the Divinity School Graduate Program for generously sharing their brilliance and expertise for the improvement of this thesis through their suggestions and contributions.

I am also grateful to the Conference Council of Negros District Conference (NDC) for allowing me to conduct the study in some of its local churches. To Rev. Ed Samson, NDC Conference Minister for facilitating my approach to the participant Local Churches. To Rev. Neminda E. Esquierdo of Dumaguete City Church; Rev. Vengee E. Gumalo of UCCP Valencia, Negros Oriental; Rev. Marcelina Francisco of UCCP Don Graciano Lozada Memorial Church, Polo, Tanjay; and Rev. Dr. Noriel C. Capulong of Silliman University Church, for graciously helping me through the materials I needed to complete my thesis. Acknowledgement is also due to our Theological Librarian, Rev. Arnel S. Faller who willingly lend a hand in securing the documents I needed; and to my interview respondents

for their invaluable inputs, among others Bishop Benito Dominguez, and Dr. Valentino Sitoy (although the actual interview did not happen due to health reason) whose written materials were very helpful in this study.

I am also indebted to SU Graduate School for the Graduate Fellowship I received at the start of my studies; and to the United Evangelical Mission (UEM) through Rev. Dr. Andar Parlindungan and Claudia Schletter whose scholarship support enables me to continue and finish my studies. Without these supports this accomplishment would not be made possible.

I also thank my home conference, the Southern-Western Leyte Conference of the UCCP, through Rev. Jennie B. Escabal and Rev. Eutropio E. Delvo, previous and current Conference Ministers respectively for granting me the three-year-study leave and for supporting me in this endeavor. To Bishop Jaime and Mrs. Dohert Moriles, Rev. Dr. Dennis Solon, and friends too many to mention for their support and encouragement. To my friends, Tiarma, Jeremias and Dizza, my inspiring companions throughout the course of my studies; to the Chapel of the Evangel Fellowship, my local faith community in Dumaguete City; and to Rev. Dr. Everret L. Mendoza, for prodding me to think deeply of my faith and commitment through his theological treatises.

Finally, I am grateful to my family: to my sisters and brothers for being just a call away every time I needed them; To my sister Ednabil who supported me all the way. Most of all, I am grateful to my supportive and loving husband, Domingo Capilitan, Jr. and my wonderful children, Barth, Jobelle and Jed, for the small and big sacrifices they willingly undertook in support of this study for me. To God be all the glory.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to examine UCCP's understanding of the church and its relation to the mission by which the church is called to participate into. As such the researcher made an in-depth study and analysis of local church autonomy in the UCCP and its missional implications. This is done to address a gap in the understanding of the nature and mission of the local church. A misunderstanding in the nature of the local church causes the church to lose track of its purpose and meaning, and its relevance in the community. Consequently, it weakens the church and stunts its growth. It is therefore crucial that the local church understands its very nature, and from there, orders its life and lives out its mission.

Firstly, the study traces the Biblical and Theological basis of UCCP's understanding of local autonomy; secondly, it examines how local church autonomy operates in the UCCP; and thirdly, it discusses the implications of local church autonomy to the mission work of the church. Through the study of the official documents of the UCCP, case studies in selected local churches and interviews with some leading personalities in the UCCP, the findings arrived at show that UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy cannot be separated from its Reformation heritage coming from the various Constituent Churches which gave birth to the United Church in 1948. It came from the conviction that the *local church* is the basic unit of the church and the locus of mission. Whatever mission or ministry the local church has, becomes the corporate mission of the whole church, demonstrating a democratic process from the bottoms-up, and not a hierarchy from the top-down.

Moreover, the study shows that UCCP produced a kind of autonomy that is hybridized, combining elements from the church governments of the uniting bodies, namely Congregationalism, Presbyterian and Episcopal. Each local church is autonomous to conduct

its own internal affairs, yet, it is conscious of a “covenant relationship” with the other judicatories of the church -- like the Conference and the National level.

Finally, the study shows that the church is essentially missional, that church and mission cannot be separated, for mission is the church’s reason for being. The way the local church understands its nature will have an impact as to the way it exercises its missional calling. Hence, a local church must be equipped with the needed understanding of the nature and mission of the church, and be empowered to embody and participate in God’s mission in the world. Understanding its nature would enable the church to discern God’s call to mission that would animate the church and make its presence and witness relevant in the community.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CSRD	Christian Stewardship and Resource Development
CUBC	Church of the United Brethren in Christ
ECP	Evangelical Church in the Philippines
EU	Evangelical Union
FEC	Federation of Evangelical Churches
IEMELIF	Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas
MEC	Methodist Episcopal Church
NCC	National Christian Council
NCCR	National Commission on Conflict Resolution
NDC	Negros District Conference
PFEC	Philippine Federation of Evangelical Churches
PMC	Philippine Methodist Church
UCCP	United Church of Christ in the Philippines
UCM	United Church of Manila
UECP	United Evangelical Church of the Philippines
UEM	United Evangelical Mission
UNIDA	Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo
WVJA	West Visayas Jurisdictional Area

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

It was a new assignment. I was familiarizing myself with the new environment – the local church, its members, their way of doing things, their relation to the community, among others. Then *Anna*¹ came to the church for her mother's funeral. *Anna* has left the local church for another denomination and has become critical of the church where she once belonged. We had a little conversation, when suddenly *Anna* declared to me, "This local church is dead!" Her words created a sting of sadness in my heart. But deep inside I understand the reason why *she* was able to utter those words.

Anna may have her point, but the local church has not ceased to be and is still holding on to dear life. The usual indicator of a local church is there to maintain the church -- regular Sunday service and Sunday school, midweek prayer, and cottage bible study although poorly attended. However, the missional dimension has been taken for granted which resulted to some members becoming inactive, some eventually stop coming to church, others transferred to other denominations, like *Anna*.

Yet, behind this reality, I could sense a longing and a potential for life and a livelier spirituality from the roll of members awaiting to be awakened. A glimmer of hope filled my heart as my thoughts turn towards our belief in the resurrection. So I answered *Anna* saying: "Yes, this congregation may be dead, but the dead will be raised to new life by the power of God."

¹ Not her real name to protect the subject.

As a Pastor's kid and a Pastor for 20 years, I have witnessed some local churches which are into maintenance ministry. The life of the church is maintained by a regular Sunday service and Sunday school, midweek prayer, and cottage bible study which are oftentimes poorly attended. There is no sense of excitement and urgency to participate in the life and mission of the church. Some think that mission is the work of the wider judicatories—Conference and National, others think it's the work of the minister, or of certain committee. As a result, the mission and vitality of the church suffer which led to some members leaving the church or being proselyted by other denominations.

Comparatively, what is happening in some local churches is no longer that surprising considering the fact that the same situation has been taking place in the traditional mainline denominations not only in the Philippines but also in the United States. Studies show that major traditional / mainline denominations² have declined, beginning in the mid-1960s.³

For serious members of the church, this is a dire situation! It reveals that some essentials are missing in the life of the local church that lead to the absence of excitement and the sense of urgency to participate in the life and mission of the church, and eventually rob the church of its purpose and meaning, as well as its relevance in the community. Why these are happening is important to look into, and find answers so that the church may truly become what it really is and ought to be. This is the situation that leads this researcher to make this study. I believe what's happening in some of our local churches has something to do with how the local church understands its nature, orders its life, and lives out its mission.

² Richard L. Hamm, *Recreating the Church: Leadership for the Post Modern Age* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2007). In his preface (viii) identified eight mainline denominations, namely: Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), United Church of Christ, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Reformed Church in America, American Baptist Convention, Presbyterian Church USA, United Methodists.

³ Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: Creating Christian Community in Postmodern Cultures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 19.

A brief background information of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines

The United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) is a product of the missionary zeal of the different Protestant denominations in the United States which entered the country in the beginning of the 20th century. It is a merger of various ecclesiastical traditions which were brought into the union by the constituent churches that formed the UCCP in 1948.⁴ “These traditions are those of the Presbyterians/Reformed, the Congregationalists, the United Brethren, the Methodists, and the Disciples.”⁵ These denominations traced their roots from the 16th century Reformation, although they have developed differently, practiced different forms of church government which reflected their historical circumstances in England, Scotland and other places in Europe until they finally reached the American soil.⁶

Moreover, these denominations brought into the union their various practices or faith expressions, as well as their styles of church government, bringing “variety and richness in the understanding of the Christian faith and in its expressions” in the UCCP.⁷ An article in the Basis of Union states, “We do preserve all of the heritage of faith brought into the Union by each of the constituent churches and hereby declare as our common faith and message: Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Savior” (Art. III, UCCP Basis of Union, 1948).⁸

⁴ The Historical Sketch of the UCCP recorded that unity of different denominations were already taking place prior to the 1948 merger, so there that there were only three major denominations named in the said merger: The United Evangelical Church, 1929 (United Brethren, Presbyterians and Congregational); The Evangelical Church in the Philippines, 1943 (Church of Christ [Disciples], other independent churches); and the Philippine Methodist Church.

⁵ T. Valentino Sitoy Jr., “The Dynamic Heritage: Fifty Years of the UCCP, 1948-1998” (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1998), 1.

⁶ Sitoy, 3.

⁷ Sitoy, 3.

⁸ Cited in T. Valentino Sitoy Jr., *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, vol. Vol. 1 (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1992), 486.

Consequently, the governance of the UCCP is a combination of the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopal polities from the various uniting churches.⁹ Below is a short description of each polity:

The Congregational polity is brought into the union by the Congregationalists and the Disciples.¹⁰ This polity is based on an understanding of the church as a “gathered community,” or, a free association of believers in Christ, and places ecclesiastical authority in the local congregation. In this polity, the locus of responsibility for church order is the congregational meeting, where all members have the opportunity to discuss and vote on matters concerning the particular church.¹¹

The Presbyterian form of government is brought into the union by the Presbyterians/Reformed. Under this system of church order, local congregations governed themselves through an elected board called the session.¹² “Authority flows from both the congregation up and from the denomination down. Presbyters are elected by congregation members to serve on assemblies. Once elected assemblies are responsible to exercise authority over congregations. The typical judicatories are: local church, presbytery, synod, and general assembly.¹³

The Episcopal polity is brought into the union by the Philippine Methodist Church and the United Brethren.¹⁴ This polity is government by bishops, duly elected by

⁹ T. Valentino Sitoy Jr., *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, vol. Vol. 1 (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1992), 499.

¹⁰ Sitoy, “The Dynamic Heritage: Fifty Years of the UCCP, 1948-1998,” 6.

¹¹ Wallace M. Jr. Alston, *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 84.

¹² Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 1992, Vol. 1:5.

¹³ “The Presbyterian Polity,” accessed November 15, 2018, <http://fredericksburgpc.org/about-us/what-we-believe/presbyterian-polity>.

¹⁴ Sitoy, “The Dynamic Heritage: Fifty Years of the UCCP, 1948-1998,” 7–8.

representatives of the church and consecrated by their fellow bishops.¹⁵ In the *Institutes*, Calvin made mention that early in the history of the church the office of the bishop was a functional one, where the bishop acts as chief teacher and administrator. He further said that the office was created not by the Lord's decree but according to human customs to meet the needs of the time (4:4:2-3).¹⁶ Later, however, the episcopacy acquired new meaning. Many of the major decisions are made by or in the name of the bishop. These include assignment of pastors to local churches, the ordination of the clergy, the organization of the local churches and conferences, among others.¹⁷

The UCCP creatively weaves these different polities together in its government structure. UCCP's governmental structure consists of three distinct ecclesiastical bodies, namely: the General Assembly, the Conference, and the Local Church.¹⁸ Each body is autonomous with its own duties and functions and relates with each other in a mutual manner.

The General Assembly is "the highest policy-making body of the Church (Art. VII, Sec. 1), and was described as a delegated body composed of delegates from each Conference, the Bishops, all other General Officers, Conference Ministers, among others (Art. VII, Sec. 2).¹⁹ Currently, this body meets once in every quadrennial.

The Conference is an organized body of local churches in a defined area (Art. VI, Sec. 1). It is composed of the church workers in the conference, lay representatives from

¹⁵ Alston, *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective*, 84.

¹⁶ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), 658–59, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/institutes.html>.

¹⁷ J. B. Toews, "The Church Growth Theory and Mennonite Brethren Polity," *Direction* 20, no. 2 (1991): 102–13.

¹⁸ Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 1992, Vol. 1:499.

¹⁹ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 2nd Edition, 2008, 13. Succeeding quotations from the Constitution will be taken from the Amended Constitution and By-Laws.

local churches, heads of recognized organizations, among others and meet annually (Art VI, Sec.2, 5).²⁰

The Local Church is “the basic unit of the church” (Art. 5, Sec. 1).²¹ Its government is placed in the hands of the local church council composed of the officers, the chairpersons of the different Boards – Elders/ Christian Educators/ Trustees, presidents of recognized church organizations; and Pastors and other church workers, without vote.²² In the Basis of Union, it was stated that each local church be given freedom to continue, if it so wished, its practices before the union.²³ There was therefore allowed a great measure of diversity and freedom at the level of the local church. Moreover, “authority in the local church emanates from the congregation” (Art. 5, Sec. 6).²⁴

As inherited from the Reformation, the local church is considered by the UCCP as the concrete embodiment of the essence of the church. The Reformation adhered to the principle that “Where the Word is proclaimed rightly and the sacraments rightly administered, there is the church.”²⁵ Such activities took place primarily in a local church where believers gather to listen to the Word proclaimed and celebrate the sacraments. Additionally, the Reformation also stands for the “priesthood of all believers.” As such, the laity occupies a significant place in the ministry and processes of the church’s life. Hence, the importance of the local church, with *the autonomy* of the local church as an essential aspect in its organizational life.

²⁰ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 10--12.

²¹ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 8.

²² *Amended Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 9.

²³ Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 1992, Vol. 1:500.

²⁴ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 8.

²⁵ “The Augsburg Confession” (LCMS), accessed October 18, 2018, <https://www.lcms.org/document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=956>.

Moreover, the local church is the *locus of mission*. Looking through the pages of Dr. Sitoy's book, "Several Springs, One Stream," we can see that the UCCP started its new life with the affirmation that doing mission is the main business of the church. As early as 1952, Bishop Leonardo G. Dia had this to say,

A well-planned program will enlist very many members of the church...and so make the church truly alive and fruitful... There is need for our local Church Councils to know that it is the church with a program **touching all needs of life** that makes for spiritual growth of the members, and makes many friends for the church and finds in these friendships the avenue to make the Gospel of Jesus Christ known to them in a very living way.²⁶

Article III, Section 28 of the Amended By-Laws recognizes the Local Church as the primary *locus of mission*. It thus "upholds the autonomy of the local church particularly as to its right and power to conduct its ministry..."²⁷ But given the tendency of the local churches towards "maintaining" the church rather than engaging in mission, somehow reveals a gap in the understanding of the nature and mission of the church, more so of the local church's autonomy in the conduct of its mission.

What is the importance of local church autonomy as the local church lives its life in this changing times and carry out God's mission in the world? This calls for a deeper understanding of the nature of the local church, as it is said, "The more the church understands its own nature, the more it gets hold of its vocation."

Statement of the Problem

This research aims to undertake an in-depth study and analysis of Local Church autonomy in the UCCP and its implications for the missionary work of the church. It proceeds

²⁶ Cited in T. Valentino Sitoy Jr., *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, vol. 2 (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Phillipnes, 1997), 863.

²⁷ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 35.

from the conviction that ecclesiology and mission go together and cannot be separated -- that the autonomy of the local church will have an impact as to how the church exercises its missional nature.

This research will be guided by the following questions:

1. What are the biblical and theological bases of UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy?
2. How does local church autonomy operate in the UCCP?
3. What are the implications of local church autonomy to the mission of the church?

Significance of the Study

The following will benefit from this study:

The Divinity School and other UCCP Formation Centers. This study is especially helpful for students in the seminaries who are preparing and looking forward to have a local church assignment as this study is about the local church. This can serve as their source of information, and learning material as they engage in the actual work of ministering a local church. This can also be a source of further reflection, or debate and can serve as a basis for future exploration on the subject.

The UCCP Church, its minister, lay leaders and members. As this is a study about the local church, its nature and mission, this will bring a helpful contribution as to how the constituents of the UCCP look at the local church. It may refresh, or inform their understanding of the nature and mission of the church, challenge them to search within what resources/gifts God has given them, and ponder how they can contribute to the building up of the body of Christ and the furtherance of God's mission in the world.

The Graduate School of Silliman University. This study may also be helpful to any student of the graduate school who is interested or making research on the subject.

United Evangelical Mission (UEM) and other ecumenical partners. This study can give UCCP partners like United Evangelical Mission a better understanding of UCCP, and some issues UCCP local churches are facing. Other partners/UEM member churches may have the same experience/challenge in their own local churches. This may encourage a kind of cooperation /sharing on how to face the present challenges local churches are experiencing within UEM member churches.

Scope and Limitations

This study is limited to the concept of local church autonomy in the UCCP as enshrined in its Constitution and By-Laws and other official documents of the church and put into practice in the local churches. It will thus look into the official documents from selected local churches in Negros District Conference as to how these local churches understand and practice the autonomy provided in the Constitution and By-Laws to each local church. It will also solicit the opinion and understanding of some personalities in the leadership of the UCCP, and church historians regarding the topic. What will be gathered will be analyzed to see how local church autonomy relates to the missionary nature of the church.

Methodology

Research Design

This is a qualitative research that seeks to examine the autonomy of the local church in the UCCP and how it relates to the missional nature of the church. Documents were gathered from the following sources, namely: The Basis of Union in 1948, the Amended Constitution and By-Laws of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, and other official documents, such as proceedings, manuals, and actions and programs from participant local churches within Negros District Conference that exhibits how local church autonomy operates in the UCCP. Those documents were used as basis for understanding how local church autonomy is being understood and put into practice in the UCCP.

Library work was done to review the biblical and theological themes as well as other sources relating to the study. An interview with selected personalities of the church was also conducted to supplement understanding on the subject.

The Research Environment

The research documents were accessed from the UCCP Official website and from Silliman University Library UCCP archive. The study as to how local church autonomy operates in the UCCP, and in terms of how local church relate with the wider judicatories was conducted in selected local churches in Negros District Conference. The Negros District Conference is in Central Visayas and is part of the West Visayas Jurisdictional Area (WVJA) of the UCCP.

A face-to-face interview with leading church personalities who work or reside in Dumaguete City and within Negros Oriental was also conducted to supplement the data being gathered.

Participants of the Study

The target Conference for the study is Negros District Conference led by its Conference Minister, Rev. Ed Samson, involving four of its local churches, namely: Dumaguete City Church; Valencia UCCP; Polo, Tanjay UCCP; and Silliman University Church. The basis for choosing these local churches is the fact that they represented four types of UCCP local churches: a big city church (Dumaguete City Church); a regular town church (UCCP Valencia); a small rural/barangay church (UCCP Don Graciano Lozada Memorial Church); and a big University Church (the Silliman University Church). Though the study is not exhaustive, the purpose of the researcher is to see how local church autonomy is practice in each participant local church in order to have a glimpse of how local autonomy operates in the UCCP.

The face-to face interview was participated in by only three personalities regarding their views and understanding on the subject, as one interview session did not materialize for reason of physical health of one of the respondents. The respondents were chosen based on their knowledge and experience either as church leader, historian and theologian of the UCCP.

Research Instrument

With the consent of the Conference Minister of Negros District Conference and the specified participant Local Churches, the researcher conducted the study with a checklist of what data and documents to gather. Among others, the checklist of documents gathered were: a profile of the Local Church (e.g. location, number of households/members, average attendance in regular worship, etc.; history of the Local Church; actions of the Local Church exhibiting the following: a) exercise of local church autonomy, b) its relationship with wider

judicatories like the Conference and General Assembly; its mission understanding and programs. A notebook and a pen to record data and findings, and a photo camera was used to obtain copies of some documents for study.

The interview, was done either in English, or in Cebuano, the language spoken in Central Visayas area. With the permission of the respondent, an audio recorder was also used to record the actual interviews.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher addressed a letter to the Conference Minister of Negros District Conference of the UCCP to seek permission to conduct a study on “Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP: Its Missional Implications.” After the approval of the Conference Minister, the researcher also wrote to the specified Local Church through the Local Church Pastor and the Chairperson of the local church council for permission. After approval was granted, the researcher personally visited the identified local churches to conduct the study. An informed letter of consent was presented to the respondent concerned to be duly signed before the actual document study happens. As long as it is permitted, the documents were copied through a photo camera.

The same procedure applies to the interviews. The researcher personally visited the home or office of the identified church leader or historian to conduct the interview. An informed letter of consent was presented to the interviewee to be duly signed before the actual interview happens. As long as it is permitted, the interview was recorded by audio recorder tools.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data gathered from the official church documents (e.g. Constitution and By-Laws, Basis of Union, Proceedings, Local Church documents), were used to analyze and interpret the relationship between the autonomy of the local church in the UCCP and its missional nature. These data were analyzed in the light of the Church faith heritage/tradition, theology and mission mandate.

It uses critical thinking to synthesize the data, examine the interview for insights, utilizing the data from the interviews to corroborate with the findings with other data sources. It also uses both historical and theological method of analyzing the autonomy of the local church and its implication to the missionary task of the UCCP.

This study used hermeneutics approach to serve as a procedure in the interpretation and analysis of the documents. Hermeneutics is a theory on interpretation used as “a strategy to address a broad range of research questions like interpreting human practices, events and situations.”²⁸

Ethical Considerations

This research requires gathering of documents for study. In gathering documents from the participant local churches for the study, first the researcher wrote a letter to the Conference Minister of NDC for permission to conduct the study within his conference area. After the permission was granted from the NDC office, the researcher wrote to the Local Church Ministers and Chairpersons of the Church Council of the identified local churches for permission to conduct a study in their local church. After the approval was granted, the

²⁸ ATLAS.ti, *Qualitative Research Methods*, accessed November 20, 2018, <https://atlasti.com/qualitative-research-methods/#paragraph1>.

researcher personally visited the identified local churches to conduct the study. The actual visit ranges from one to four hours.

The latter explained the purpose of the study, strict observance of confidentiality and the assurance that the study would not cause any harm. It was also explained to them that no information will be released or published without the latter's specific consent; that the nature of their participation is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw should they feel they needed to for whatever reason. An informed letter of consent was presented to the respondent concerned to be duly signed before the actual document study happens.

The same process was observed in the interview of the respondents. The actual interviews ranges from thirty minutes to one and a half hour.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND RELATED STUDIES

The church is a human community called into being by God to realize God's purpose in history. Just like any social group, the church community requires certain form and order so that it can function effectively. "The church thus orders its life as an institution with a constitution, government, officers, finances, and administrative rules. [But] these are instruments of mission, not ends in themselves."²⁹ This quotation from *The Confessions of 1967* points to the truth that church order or governance, whatever form it takes, is at the service of the mission, an instrument to realize the church's calling and mission.

What is local church autonomy? How does local church autonomy relate to the missional nature of the church? These are the questions the researcher would like to answer and find theological themes that would determine the missional implications of UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy. This review then covers definition of the local church and its autonomy and its biblical and theological basis; some missional implications of local church autonomy; and a glimpse of how the different polities operate in different churches/denominations.

Review of Literature and Related Studies

The Local Church

To talk about local church autonomy is to talk about the local church -- the location where autonomy is practiced. The word "church" is derived from the Greek word "ekklesia" meaning, "assembly or gathering." The original usage of the term *Ekklesia* in ancient Greek

²⁹ Excerpt from The Confession of 1967 cited by Alston, *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective*, 83.

culture, is **an assembly of citizens** within a particular city. Thus there was an *ekklesia* “of” Athens, Ephesus, etc. where people gathered to meet with one another and discuss the things of the city.³⁰

Robertson Mitchell gives three meanings of the word church: (1) The church which is the universal, consisting of all believers in all times and all places, (2) A community of believers in a specific city or region, as in the church in Corinth; or (3) A specific local congregation. The first meaning speaks of a spiritual reality, or the invisible church. The second and the third are expressions of the empirical realities—the visible church.³¹

In contrast to the church universal, the local church has many distinguishing characteristics. The Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC) presented a convergence of these distinguishing features that must exist together, namely:

it confesses the apostolic faith, it proclaims the word of God in scripture, baptizes its members, celebrates the eucharist and other sacraments; it affirms and responds to the presence of the Holy Spirit and his gifts, announces and looks forward to the kingdom, and recognizes the ministry of authority within the community.³²

This somehow expands the Reformation principle of “Where the Word is proclaimed rightly and the sacraments rightly administered – there is the church”.³³ In both sense, the local church is the concrete embodiment of the essence of the church.

Autonomy Defined

Autonomy is defined as: “the quality or state of being self-governing; especially the right of self-government” (Meriam Webster online dictionary). Donald Dale Freeman

³⁰ Ernest Best, “Church,” *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1996), 183.

³¹ Robinson W. Mitchell, “Mission: A Mark of the Church? Toward a Missional Ecclesiology” (Reformed Theological Seminary, 2008), 73.

³² Faith and Order Paper No. 150, para. 13, “The Church: Local and Universal” (WCC Publications, Geneva, 1990), 7.

³³ The Augsburg Confession, Article VII, “The Augsburg Confession.”

connects autonomy with responsibility. He based his argument from Immanuel Kant, 18th century German philosopher of the Enlightenment, who challenged all humans to “dare to use your own reason.” According to Freeman, Kant’s ethics “calls for the highest sense of personal responsibility to define and manage oneself in the face of multitude of voices and opportunities calling for our attention and response.” Kant contrasted autonomy with heteronomy which is “governance by and dependence upon another outside of oneself.”³⁴

Within this framework, Freeman argued that autonomy in relation to persons refers to self-definition, self-mastery, and self-government. On civic levels, it is the self-governance of political units by their informed citizenry. It, therefore, entails a kind of freedom from the rule of others, but at the same time, it is freedom to listen, evaluate, decide and act for oneself through the highest exercise of rationality.³⁵

Local Church Autonomy

The autonomy of local church is based on the belief that the local church is God’s primary tool for his mission in the world, as such, ***firstly***, the local church has to be, self-governing in its own internal affairs.³⁶ Davida Foy Crabtree said, “every local church has the *obligation* to govern itself.” And “this *duty* to be self-governing stands in equality with the *right* to be self-governing.” Moreover, she argued that the responsibility aspect of autonomy obliges the church and its members “to know our heritage, to participate actively

³⁴ Donald Dale Freeman, “Autonomy: An Interpretation for the United Church of Christ,” *Prism* 11, no. 2 (1996): 19.

³⁵ Freeman, 19.

³⁶ Dwight Perry, “Autonomous, but Interdependent,” n.d., <http://www.convergegreatlakes.org/files/gl/resources/Autonomous%20but%20Interdependent%20FINAL.pdf>

in decision-making.”³⁷ Fundamental to these heritage is the principle that “The church is a Christian church because Christ alone is its foundation, head and end in view.”³⁸

Secondly, autonomy is the capacity to covenant. Freeman argued that “only persons and social units with a fairly clear sense of who they are (autonomy) have what it takes to own covenants and maintain mutuality.³⁹ In the same manner, Crabtree argues, based on the “authority of Christ over the church ... no local church can be understood to exist by itself, but always in organic relationship with the rest of the body of Christ.” Covenant therefore is not an option, but given in the nature of the church for a united witness to the world.⁴⁰ Hence, the need to maintain a balance and creative tension between local church autonomy and covenanting relationship.

Thirdly, autonomy means localized responsibility. Freeman argued that “only the local body stands in its place in its time,” and that is why “it cannot ask others to make its decision for it. Others may be able to do with, but they cannot do for...It would be wise to turn to others for counsel, critique and support, or in some cases collaborate, and that is the most that others could offer. For although others stand in the same time, they do not stand in exactly the same place.”⁴¹

Fourthly, autonomy entails discernment of timeliness. According to Freeman, “a correlative virtue of this localization of responsibility for ministry is the ability of autonomous ministries to be timely.”⁴² It is able to respond or to take initiative when the

³⁷ Davida Foy Crabtree, “The Vocation of Autonomy in the United Church of Christ,” *Prism* 12, no. 2 (1997): 59–69.

³⁸ Crabtree, 57.

³⁹ Freeman, “Autonomy: An Interpretation for the United Church of Christ,” 19–20.

⁴⁰ Crabtree, “The Vocation of Autonomy in the United Church of Christ,” 60.

⁴¹ Freeman, “Autonomy: An Interpretation for the United Church of Christ,” 20.

⁴² Freeman, 21.

time is ripe or when the need cries out, because it is not necessary to work through other channels for authorization.⁴³ Timeliness has a nature of discernment, to discern the moment and act/minister accordingly.

Biblical-Theological Basis of Local Church Autonomy

The Christian Church is depicted in most of the New Testament books as autonomous. From the NT accounts, these churches differed in many respects, such as, “in geographical location; in exposure to some of the cultural features; in their relation to Jewish observances; in attitudes to leading Christian figures such as Peter and Paul; in social composition (Jewish, Gentile, rich, poor); in the handling of moral problems,”⁴⁴ among others. The churches were also “a far closer network than any other organization of the time, held together by visits, letters, and a measure of responsibility felt by founders and leaders and by one church for another,” nevertheless, *these churches exercised independent decision-making*.⁴⁵

The Early Church in the Account of Luke (Acts 1-15)

From a small band of followers who gathered in Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, at Pentecost 3,000 people were being baptized and “added” to the followers of Jesus as a result to the Gospel proclamation (2:41). The life of the gathered followers (or the church) was characterized by being devoted to the “apostles’ teaching,” “fellowship,” and “breaking of bread,” and “prayer” (2:42). Growth continued daily to the local community of Jesus followers in Jerusalem (2:47). When issues and concerns crop up and threaten this

⁴³ Freeman, 21.

⁴⁴ Leslie Houlden, “Introduction to the New Testament,” in *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 836.

⁴⁵ Houlden, 836.

community, like the issue regarding the care for the widows, this church, through the leadership of the apostles were enabled to discern, by the power of the Holy Spirit, a good solution and bring consensus within the assembly to find a solution to their problem (6:1-6).

The persecutions of Jesus' followers sent many of them away from Jerusalem. However, this situation led to the spread of the Gospel to Samaria and beyond, for "those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word" (8:4). Jerusalem is represented as coordinating the ever-growing church (8:14), while Barnabas and Paul were responsible in founding new churches in Gentile territory, like in Antioch, in Cyprus, and in the southern regions of Asia Minor. New churches came into being as more Jewish and non-Jewish people responded to the Gospel. And Barnabas and Paul confirmed leaders (elders) within these new churches (14:23).

In these narratives Luke describes that the followers of Jesus emerged in diverse geographical regions, yet the commonality that bind them together is the Messiah and his Holy Spirit. The terminology used at 11:22 'the church in Jerusalem' and 13:1 'in the church at Antioch' suggests that while there is one Church, it convenes in various places. As Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, completing their first missionary journey, they see to it that "in each church" there was leadership (14:23). Here, the reality of autonomy is seen in the fact that elders were appointed in each local church.

The church as the body of Christ, Christ as the head of the body.

This image of the church as the body of Christ in I Corinthians 12 is central in the formation and practice of this polity. Paul uses the language of the church as Christ's body, composed of many and differing parts, working together in unity and harmony, in 1 Corinthians 12:12-20.

Moreover, in talking about the church as the Body of Christ, its immediate implication is that Christ is the Head. “He [Christ] is the head of the body, the church... in everything he might be pre-eminent” (Colossians 1:18, RSV); “...the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together ... grows with a growth that is from God” (Col. 2:19, RSV). This made Leslie Newbigin to say, “the church derives its character not from its membership, but from its head, not from those who join it but from him who call it into being.”⁴⁶

Additionally, the concept of the Body of Christ also points to the corporate unity of the church (I Cor. 12). Bishop Erme R. Camba commented, “The body and its many separate parts and varied functions speak of their inter-relatedness and inter-dependence.”⁴⁷ “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (I Cor. 12:12).

In Ephesians 1, Paul uses the same language to remind Christians of the union they have in Christ. This image of the church as the Body of Christ leads organically into the concept of the church as ongoing incarnational presence which is spiritually joined with Christ and in its ministry. In the words of Alan Hirsch, the church is driven by an incarnational impulse which “draws its inspiration from the Incarnation and ...is energized by the mission of God.”⁴⁸

According to Mitchell, “this incarnational Christology is fundamental for Paul's understanding of Christ, church, and ministry” (1 Cor. 12:4, 27-31). There is one Lord, there is one body, and there is one ministry of the one Spirit, the coordinator of the activities in the

⁴⁶ Cited by Erme R. Camba, “The Church: The Household of God” in *Unless a Seed Falls and Dies* (Manila, Philippines: Faith and Order Commission, UCCP, 2010), p. 130.

⁴⁷ Erme R. Camba, “The Church: The Household of God,” in *Unless a Seed Falls and Dies* (Manila, Phil.: United Church of Christ in the Phillipines, 2010), 130.

⁴⁸ Alan Hirsch, “Defining Missional” (Christianity Today, 2008), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2008/fall/17.20.html>.

body (1 Cor. 12:4-13). The Spirit supplies the power for service in the church. Ranks of the old distinctions (Jew/Greek, slave/free; 1 Cor. 12:13) disappear as all are one in Christ for a variety of services (v. 4).⁴⁹ Indeed, Christ calls His church into a service that proclaims life in Christ. This work requires *all members* of Christ's body to function according to their various vocations under the headship of Christ.

David Foy Crabtree, on her part argued “that Christ is never so fully visible to the world as he is in the life of the local church as it seeks to be his body – in worship, sacrament, teaching, witness, and mission.”⁵⁰ Such claim leads her to say that the fundamental and central unit of the believers’ life is the local congregation. Similarly, Bryan L. Myers, stressing the importance of the local church, urged Christian agencies and para-church organization to be connected to the local church which he considers community on the ground. He says, “...the local churches are the body of Christ, present before agencies come and present long after they leave.... Christian agencies must recover from their pride and professionalism and find a way to become part of the Christian community on the ground.”⁵¹

The Priesthood of all Believers

This image of the church found in 1 Peter 2:9-10 was made popular during the Reformation. This image created an important shift in the understanding of the church. Timothy C. Tennent explained this shift by pointing out that in the Roman Catholic tradition salvation is link with the doctrine of the church, *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus* (outside the

⁴⁹ Mitchell, “Mission: A Mark of the Church? Toward a Missional Ecclesiology,” 76.

⁵⁰ Crabtree, “The Vocation of Autonomy in the United Church of Christ.”

⁵¹ Bryant L. Myers, “Holistic Mission: New Frontiers,” in *Holistic Mission: God’s Plan for God’s People*, Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2010), 122.

church there is no salvation), whereas, Reformation affirms that salvation is mediated directly to individual believer through this principle of the ‘priesthood of all believers’.⁵²

Tennent explained that as far back as Cyprian of Carthage, the church’s fathers interpreted the church’s unity as episcopal. In the Roman Catholic view, the apostolic authority of the church was conveyed and continues through the episcopal laying on of hands from St. Peter to the present pope.⁵³ However, Luther responded with a re-articulation of ecclesiology that was “not as tied to the structure of a particular church organization but rather to the mystical communion of the saints.”⁵⁴

The church is apostolic, not because of an episcopal chain of the laying on of hands, but when and only when, it teaches what the apostles taught – thus *sola scriptura*. If the apostolic message is proclaimed, then the church is apostolic, and it shares in the mystical oneness and catholicity, which are the marks of the true church.⁵⁵

This is the kind of ecclesiology espoused by the Reformation led by Martin Luther and the other Reformers who followed after him. It implies a call to freedom from the clutches of the Roman church. John Witte, writing about *The Legacy of Protestant Reformation in Modern Law*, states that Reformation was began with a loud call of freedom -- freedom of the church from the tyranny of the pope, freedom of the laity from dominance of the clergy, freedom of the conscience from the strictures of the canon law and human traditions.⁵⁶ This call to freedom is rooted in the principle of the “priesthood of all believers.”

Carl Raschke, in the *The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation...* said that “Martin Luther’s doctrine of the ‘priesthood of all believers’, transferred the mantle of spiritual

⁵² Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2010), 447.

⁵³ Tennent, 448.

⁵⁴ Tennent, 448.

⁵⁵ Tennent, 448.

⁵⁶ John Witte Jr, “The Legacy of the Protestant Reformation in Modern Law,” 2017, <https://politicaltheology.com/the-legacy-of-the-protestant-reformation-in-modern-law/>.

authority from the educated clergy to the most humble of Christians who read the Bible for themselves.”⁵⁷

Likewise, Jordan J. Ballor, in his article *The Political Implications of Luther’s “Priesthood of All Believers”* recalled Martin Luther arguing, “It is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error. A cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops.”⁵⁸ With that, Ballor commented saying, “This is the ultimate devolution of politics from the pope as “head of Christendom” to the simple and mundane calling of every individual Christian.”⁵⁹

Defining Missional

As a local gathering of people called by God to participate in God’s mission in the world, the basic nature of the local church is essentially missional. Christopher J. H. Wright defines missional as “an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes or dynamics of mission.”⁶⁰ For example, Israel has a missional role in the midst of the nations – implying that they had identity and role connected to God’s ultimate intention of blessing the nations, thus, Israel had a missional reason for existence. Missional church therefore is a community of God’s people that defines itself,

⁵⁷ Carl Raschke, “The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation -- Where Is Martin Luther When We Need Him?,” 2017, <https://politicaltheology.com/the-500th-anniversary-of-the-reformation-where-is-martin-luther-when-you-need-him-carl-raschke/>.

⁵⁸ Jordan J. Ballor, “The Political Implications of Luther’s ‘Priesthood Of All Believers,’” 2017, <https://politicaltheology.com/the-political-implications-of-luthers-priesthood-of-all-believers-jordan-j-ballor/>.

⁵⁹ Ballor.

⁶⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006), 23.

and organizes its life around its real purpose of being an agent of God's mission to the world, In other words, the church's true and authentic organizing principle is mission.⁶¹

Levi Oracion said "The church's reason for being is mission, and the church is the church if it is involved in mission just as wind is wind if it is blowing, and fire is fire if it is burning."⁶² It means to say that the church is basically a missionary community. Her fundamental character can only be understood from the perspective of God's mission to the world.⁶³ With that, there is an intrinsic inseparable relation between the church and her mission.⁶⁴

Alan Hirsch, a self-professed missional activist defines missional this way. He said, to understand missional properly is to have an understanding of God who is a missionary, as affirmed in the doctrine known as *mission Dei*. By his very nature God is a missionary who takes the initiative to redeem his creation.⁶⁵ This doctrine has caused many to redefine their understanding of the church – as the instrument of God's mission in the world. No longer we say, "the church has a mission", rather, according to missional theology, a more correct way to say would be, "the mission has a church."⁶⁶

Moreover, Hirsch explained, a truly missional church "sees the mission as both its originating impulse and its organizing principle." A missional community is patterned after what God has done in Jesus Christ. In the incarnation, God sent his son, similarly, to be

⁶¹ Wright, 23.

⁶² Levi V. Oracion, *Human Realizations of Grace* (Cebu City: Strongwaters Publishers, 2005), 263–64.

⁶³ Wilbert R. Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York 10545: Orbis Books, 1999).

⁶⁴ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 378.

⁶⁵ Hirsch, "Defining Missional."

⁶⁶ Hirsch.

missional is to be sent into the world and engage the world the same way he does, that is, by going out, rather than just reaching out..⁶⁷

Ragnhild Kristensen, pointed out a growing awareness around the local church's part in mission starting with the post-Vatican II Catholics, ecumenical (WCC) and Evangelicals. This has led to the development of the concept of the missional church, which Guder defined as "the essential nature and vocation of the church as God's called and sent people."⁶⁸ Here the concept of missional church brings mission into the essence of being a church. Consequently, it affects not only our understanding of the church, but also for how the church is shaped. "Being a missional church means being a church sent into the world, searching to see what God's mission is, and letting the church be shaped by this."⁶⁹

The Different Polities of the Churches at Work

Before going further, a glimpse at different church polity would be in order. Polity is a word that describes how the church is structured, how it makes decisions, how the role of leaders and others are put together, who has the authority to make what decisions, what are the lines of accountability, among others.⁷⁰ Most authors identify three types of church polity, namely:

1. The Episcopal polity (Greek, *episcopos*, "bishop") which by definition centers around the rule of bishops. We could see this kind of polity in Episcopalian church, in Roman

⁶⁷ Hirsch.

⁶⁸ Ragnhild Kristensen, "Missional Church -- Problem or Possibility for Global Mission:," in *A Learning Missional Church: Reflections from Young Missiologists*, Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2012), 18–19.

⁶⁹ Kristensen, 16.

⁷⁰ Janeen Bertsche Johnson, *Mennonite Church USA Polity Introduction*, accessed January 14, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bEIRm6Q7LP0>.

Catholic Church and other churches that have a clear hierarchy and which bishops have a great deal of authority over the churches under them.⁷¹

2. The Presbyterian polity (Greek, *presbuteros*, ‘elders’)⁷² also called synodal kind of polity or conference based authority/polity. We would see this kind of polity in Presbyterian church, and other churches that are structured in which the gathered body of churches is the authority.⁷³
3. The Congregational type of polity. In this polity, the congregations are autonomous. They may choose to relate to one another for various purposes and group themselves together but the congregation has the highest authority in this kind of polity. We could see this polity in the Baptist churches, Pentecostal churches, and most independent churches.⁷⁴

How do these polities operate in the churches/denominations? What follows are examples of how these polities operate in the churches.

1. United Methodist Church – *Connectional Polity*

The United Methodist Church is known of having an **episcopal polity**, but they often speak of their denomination as “connectional.” This is derived from John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, who recognized the need for an organized system of communication and accountability and developed what he called the “connexion,” a network of classes, societies, and annual conferences. This system enables them to carry out their mission in unity and strength. The connectional structure of UMC include the General Conference, Annual Conferences, Districts, and the Local Churches.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Alston, *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective*, 84.

⁷² Alston, 85.

⁷³ Johnson, *Mennonite Church USA Polity Introduction*.

⁷⁴ Johnson.

⁷⁵ “Organization: The Church as Connection” (UMC.org), accessed January 12, 2019, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/organization-church-as-connection>.

Within the connectional structure of the UMC, the conferences provide the primary groupings of people and churches for discernment and decision-making. At every level of the connection, church leaders and members come together to discuss important issues and discover God’s will for the church. Conference, therefore, refers to both the assembly and organization of people as well as the process of discerning God’s call.⁷⁶

The local church, on the other hand, is considered as the visible presence of the body of Christ. It is the place where members grow in faith and discipleship. It is also where they put their faith into action through the ministry in the world.⁷⁷ Their Book of Discipline contains rules that local churches must follow, yet, it provides “ample room for a local church to adapt its distinctive ministries and missions to the needs, circumstances, and culture of its congregation and local community.”⁷⁸

The structure of the United Methodist Church polity consists of three bodies -- the General Conference, the Council of Bishops and the Judicial Council, functioning as legislative, executive and judiciary bodies respectively.

The General Conference is the primary legislative body of the UMC, and the only body that speaks officially for the church. The General Conference defines and fixes the conditions, privileges and duties of church membership; the power and duties of elders, deacons, diaconal ministers and local pastors; and the power and duties of annual conferences and congregational meetings. It authorizes the organization, promotion and administrative work of the church. It also defines the powers and duties of the episcopacy, among others.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ “Organization: The Church as Connection.”

⁷⁷ “Organization: The Church as Connection.”

⁷⁸ “Local Churches” (UMC.org), accessed January 14, 2019, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/local-churches>.

⁷⁹ “Constitutional Structure” (United Methodist Church), accessed January 14, 2019, <http://www.umc.org/who-we-are/constitutional-structure>.

The Council of Bishops is composed of all active and retired bishops. The council gives general oversight of the ministry and mission of the church and spiritual leadership to the entire church connection. Once elected by Jurisdictional Conferences, the bishop is assigned to a particular area where s/he provides oversight of the ministry and mission of the annual conferences in his or her area and appoints all clergy to their places of service.⁸⁰

The Judicial Council is the denomination's highest judicial body or "court." They consider whether actions of the various church bodies adhere to the constitution and follow the rules outlined in the Book of Discipline. Decisions of the Judicial Council are final.⁸¹

2. Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) – *Mission-Focused Form of Government*

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has adopted a New Form of Government on July 10, 2011.⁸² The introduction states:

With greater freedom and flexibility, the New Form of Government encourages congregations and councils to focus on God's mission and how they can faithfully participate in this mission. In offering a structure that is more horizontal than hierarchical, the New Form of Government encourages the Church to be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit as it seeks to be Christ's body and live out its calling as a community of faith, hope, love and witness.⁸³

This New Form of Government claims that at its heart is God's mission (*missio Dei*), and the mission of God in Christ is what gives shape and substance to the life and work of the church. With that, this New Form of Government is considered a ***mission-focused form of government***. Here, God's mission acts as the central framework and is critical to the

⁸⁰ "Constitutional Structure."

⁸¹ "Constitutional Structure."

⁸² "Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness: An Overview of the New Form Of Government, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), accessed January 15, 2019, http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/nfog-overview.pdf.

⁸³ "The Missional Church and the New Form of Government: Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)" (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), 1, accessed January 15, 2019, http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/nfog-missional-church.pdf.

understanding of the entire form of government.⁸⁴ Mission thus guides their understanding of the church. For instance,

Congregations – “the congregation is a church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context.”

Membership – is a joy and a privilege, and “a commitment to participate in Christ’s mission.

Councils – councils (sessions, presbyteries, synods and the General Assembly) exist “to help congregations and the whole church be more faithful participants in Christ’s mission.”

Administration – “Mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work.”

Property – “a tool for the accomplishment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.”⁸⁵

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is governed by councils. The councils of the church are the *session*, the *presbytery*, the *synod* and the *General Assembly*. They serve as an expression of the unity of the church. The *session* is the council for the congregation and is composed of ruling elders, elected by the congregation to active service, as well as all installed pastors and associate pastors. The session is responsible for governing the congregation and guiding its witness. The installed pastor serves as a moderator of the session.⁸⁶

In relation with other Councils, the *session* elects commissioner to the presbytery; nominate to the presbytery commissioners for the synod and the General Assembly; and propose to the presbytery measures concerning mission and send to the presbytery and General Assembly required statistics and information. At the same time, the *sessions* consider

⁸⁴ “The Missional Church and the New Form of Government: Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” 1.

⁸⁵ “The Missional Church and the New Form of Government: Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” 2.

⁸⁶ “The Session and the New Form of Government: Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)” (Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)), 1, accessed January 15, 2019, http://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/oga/pdf/nfog-session.pdf.

guidance from the higher councils and carry out binding actions; and welcome representatives from the presbytery.⁸⁷

3. The Mennonites – *Mix Polities*⁸⁸

According to Janeen Johnson, Campus Pastor teaching Mennonite polity in Associated Mennonite Bible Seminary and teaching Mennonites have a mix of congregational and conference polity, with some areas emphasizing conference more, and some areas emphasizing congregation more. The congregation is the most visible part, and they are the basic unit of the structure of Mennonite Church. Johnson claimed that location affected that kind of polity. She said that because of the different ways these area churches developed, each of them has a slightly unique polity, a legacy of their *conference polity*. Each one developed each own way of structuring itself. Congregation have even more variety as to how these are structured. She claimed that there are hundreds of different kinds of congregational/local church polity. These are due to the congregational polity.

Mennonite polity document uses a metaphor of a family of adult children. They are a congregation with a common heritage and mission but they do not control one another just as adult siblings would not control one another.

Conference is considered as a place of fellowship, discussion, mutual accountability, relationships, working together and sharing resources. Conference is congregations working together, not a separate body *over* a congregation. It is characterized by voluntary relationship, and a giving and receiving of counsel.

⁸⁷ “The Session and the New Form of Government: Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” 2–4.

⁸⁸ Johnson, *Mennonite Church USA Polity Introduction*.

Discipline is understood as discipling, it is discernment and sharing of resources, and not understood as sanctions. Sanctions is believed to be a function of the congregation / local church. Except in the cases of the pastors, since the Ministerial Committee of the conference grants the credentials of pastors in the conference, they have the authority to remove those credentials.⁸⁹

4. United Church of Christ (U.S.A.) – *Covenantal Polity*

The United Church of Christ (U.S.A.) claimed that their governance structure is *covenantal*. This polity seeks to balance the two governance structures of congregational autonomy of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Presbyterian church order of the Evangelical and Reformed Church that merge in 1957.⁹⁰

UCC polity sets out different settings of the denomination. There is the local church. Groups of local churches unite as associations. Groups of associations unite as a conference. Conferences, in sending representatives from local churches in their conference, unite all together as a General Synod. But the church polity is covenantal. Each expression of the Church exists in relationship to the others, meaning that they are to be in mutual relationship with all settings of the Church -- the local church, the associations, the conferences, and the General Synod – to listen to one another and to respect each other’s actions and give them thoughtful and prayerful responses.⁹¹

For the UCC, the basic unit of the life and organization is the local church. UCC’s polity provides that “its congregations are autonomous, meaning that each local church has

⁸⁹ Johnson.

⁹⁰ “The Question of Authority: Exploring Where Authority Resides in the UCC” (UCC, USA), accessed January 12, 2019, <https://uccfiles.com/pdf/polity-10.pdf>.

⁹¹ “A Commitment to Covenant” (UCC, USA), accessed January 12, 2019, http://www.ucc.org/exploring_ucc_polity.

the freedom to discern and decide for itself how it will structure and organize themselves, what pastor to call, what style of worship they'll engage, how members are received into the congregation, etc.” The result of local church autonomy is that churches across the denomination vary widely, yet they are in covenant with other settings or bodies of the UCC.⁹²

Conference Connection

Local congregations have membership in regional *associations*, which have the authority to authorize pastors and grant ministerial standing to them. *Associations* are in turn gathered into conferences. A *conference*, in the interest of the local churches, conducts administrative duties and provides support to strengthen the witness of the United Church of Christ. Because each conference adapts itself to the needs of its context and its local churches, each varies slightly from the next in terms of its style, leadership, programs, and focus.⁹³

The *General Synod* is the gathering of a faith community representative of the wider Church of the United Church of Christ. The General Synod deliberates, discerns, and identifies the mission of the wider Church in God's world and receives and offers suggestions, invitations, challenges, and assistance in covenant with local churches, conferences, and other settings as they engage in mission together.⁹⁴

One of the major tasks of the General Synod is to review, edit, and vote on pronouncements and resolutions. A pronouncement is a statement of Christian conviction on a matter of moral or social principle. The General Synod speaks *to* local churches, not *for*

⁹² “The Local Church: Membership, Organization, Freedom and Responsibilities” (UCC, USA), accessed January 12, 2019, <https://uccfiles.com/pdf/polity-6.pdf>.

⁹³ “A Commitment to Covenant.”

⁹⁴ “The General Synod: The Gathering of the Wider Church” (UCC, USA), accessed January 12, 2019, <https://uccfiles.com/pdf/polity-8.pdf>.

local churches. That is, the resolutions and actions passed by General Synod represent the position of the General Synod and help guide the work of the wider Church, but each local church has the responsibility to discern what the decisions of General Synod will mean for their local contexts.⁹⁵ Meaning, there is freedom for the local church to determine how to best respond to call to actions or recommendations from wider settings.⁹⁶

Biblical -Theological Framework of the Study

The foundation of this study lies in the Christian understanding that God is a missionary God who calls the church into being and sends it to participate in God's mission in the world. The church therefore has no mission of its own but to serve God's mission. The church must respond and follow God alone who calls and sends it. This movement of calling and sending is being actualized primarily in a *local church* setting, where each local church exercises its right and power to conduct its ministry free from outside control (autonomous).

The Local Church: The Basic Unit of the Church

In the gospels, Jesus said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (Mt. 18:20).

The recognition of the local church as the basic unit of the church has recently increased within the different traditions of Christianity. This recognition is expressed in the statement made by the Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (WCC) affirming that while "there is only one church in God's plan of salvation, this one church is present and manifested in the local churches throughout the world."⁹⁷ It goes on further to say that "it is

⁹⁵ "The General Synod: The Gathering of the Wider Church."

⁹⁶ "The Local Church: Membership, Organization, Freedom and Responsibilities."

⁹⁷ Faith and Order Paper No. 150, para. 2, "The Church: Local and Universal," 2.

the same Christ's body which is present in every local church, and the same Spirit of the Pentecost who gathers together the faithful in the individual local churches."⁹⁸

Furthermore, the same body argued that the local church is not merely a sub-section or part of the universal church. It claimed that,

In the local church the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church is truly present and active. The local church is the place where the church of God becomes concretely realized. It is a gathering of believers that is seized by the Spirit of the risen Christ and becomes koinonia by participating in the life of God.⁹⁹

This recognition of the importance of the local church was first recovered during the Reformation. John Calvin (1509-1564), the Father of Reformed Faith devoted the fourth book of "The Institutes of Christian Religion" to the doctrine of the Church.¹⁰⁰ In this book, Calvin stresses on the importance of the church, as external means or help "by which God invites people to fellowship with Christ and keeps them in it" (4:1:1).¹⁰¹ Calvin re-echoed the Reformers in saying, "Wherever we see the word of God sincerely preached and heard, wherever we see the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, there we cannot have any doubt that the Church of God has some existence" (4:1:9).¹⁰²

Calvin argues that the church is universal--as the multitude collected out of all nations, yet, it comprises single churches, which exist in different towns and villages, according to the wants of human society, and single individuals (4:1:9).¹⁰³ Here, Calvin made a distinction between the church universal (the visible throughout the world), and the

⁹⁸ "The Church: Local and Universal," 2.

⁹⁹ Faith and Order Paper No. 150, para. 14, "The Church: Local and Universal," 7.

¹⁰⁰ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 621-917.

¹⁰¹ Calvin, 622.

¹⁰² Calvin, 629.

¹⁰³ Calvin, 629.

local churches and individuals (the visible Church manifested in particular places). It is the latter which is characterized as responsive to the needs of the society and individuals.

The Roman Catholics have rediscovered the local church much later. In his celebrated book, *Transforming Mission*, David J. Bosch stated that in Roman Catholicism, “local churches” did not exist, neither in Europe nor in the mission fields for many centuries. What they had was affiliates of the universal church.¹⁰⁴ The mission churches in particular had to resemble the church in Rome in almost every detail. They were missions, daughter churches, and not yet autonomous dioceses. It was only in the wake of World war I that the *local church* was discovered and eventually was carried on by the Vatican II.¹⁰⁵ Bosch explained that the major reason behind the new development was

the discovery that the universal church actually finds its true existence in the local churches; that [the local churches], and not the universal church are the pristine expression of church (cf LG 26); that this was the primary understanding of church in the New Testament ...; that the pope, too, was in the first place the pastor of the local church in Rome; that a universal church viewed as preceding local churches was a pure abstraction since the universal church exists only where there are local churches; that the church is the church because of what happened in the local church’s *martyria, leitourgia, koinonia, and diakonia*; that the church is an event among people rather than an authority addressing them...¹⁰⁶

An example of early attempt to local church autonomy by some segment of the Roman Catholic church was described by two SVD missiologists, Bevans and Schroeder. They were referring to Francis Ford (Maryknoller) who as bishop of Guandong (1935) made efforts towards the establishment of a self-governing and self-reliant local Chinese church with its own well-trained clergy, sisters and laity.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 388.

¹⁰⁵ Bosch, 388.

¹⁰⁶ Bosch, 389.

¹⁰⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, SVD and Roger P. Schroeder, SVD, *Constants in Contexts: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 246.

The Local Church: Locus of Mission

“The church-in-mission is, primarily, the local church everywhere in the world,” states David Bosch.¹⁰⁸ Knud Jorgensen echoes this statement as he reviewed the differing perspectives between the Edinburgh 1910 Missionary Conference and its centenary the Edinburgh 2010. He takes note of the shifts that took place in the way mission was understood and carried out within a hundred-year-span of missionary endeavors. Edinburgh 1910 focused on “traditional mission, mission societies, missionaries and missionary encounters in foreign lands” and talks about “church and mission” as different entities.¹⁰⁹ While Edinburgh 2010, sees “the church as essentially missionary.” From the very nature of God who is a missionary (*missio Dei*), the church, as God’s people are a missionary people.¹¹⁰ Within this new understanding, “missionary activity is not the work of the church but the church at work.”¹¹¹

The WCC in its Affirmation on Mission and Evangelism, entitled *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*, recognize this by affirming that “local congregations are frontiers and primary agents of mission.”¹¹² It says that “like the early church in the book of Acts, local churches have the privilege of forming a community marked by the presence of the risen Christ.”¹¹³ Moreover, it calls the local congregations to

¹⁰⁸ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 378.

¹⁰⁹ Knud Jorgensen, “Edinburgh 2010 in Global Perspective,” in *The Church Going Global: Mission and Globalisation*, Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2011), 12.

¹¹⁰ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 519.

¹¹¹ Jorgensen, “Edinburgh 2010 in Global Perspective,” 12.

¹¹² “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscape” (World Council of Churches, 2012), 12.

¹¹³ para. 73, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscape,” 12.

take on new initiatives like exploring contextual ways of being a church in response to the needs arising from the changes taking place in society.¹¹⁴

Additionally, it recognizes the fact that local congregations today can play a key role in emphasizing the crossing of cultural and racial boundaries, and affirming cultural differences as a gift of the Spirit. They can create a space for different cultural communities to come together (para 75).¹¹⁵ It also recognizes that advocacy for justice – human rights, gender justice, climate justice, unity and peace, calls for the engagement of local churches (para 77).¹¹⁶

Tulo Raistrick, discusses that the Micah Declaration on Integral Mission from the evangelical circle placed the local church at the heart of doing holistic mission by declaring “God by his grace has given local churches the task of integral mission.” Raistrick continues saying that in the proceedings which is published in a book entitled *Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral Mission and the Poor* its editor, Tim Chester, wrote in his introduction that, “At the heart of integral mission is the local church... The New Testament ... focus is on Christian communities, which are to be distinctive, caring and inclusive.”¹¹⁷

This emphasis on the local church is anchored on the central thrust of holistic mission which is about “restoring relationships – with oneself, with others, with God and with creation.” It is based on the assumption that “broken relationships are at the root of poverty,” with poverty as “the result of a social and structural legacy of broken relationships with God, damaged understanding of self, unjust relationships between people, and exploitative

¹¹⁴ para. 72, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscape,” 12.

¹¹⁵ “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscape,” 12.

¹¹⁶ “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscape,” 12.

¹¹⁷ Tulo Raistrick, “The Local Church, Transforming Community,” in *Holistic Mission: God’s Plan for God’s People*, Regnum Edinburgh 2010 Series (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2010), 137.

relationships with the environment.” And “the local church is at the heart of transforming these relationships.”¹¹⁸

Moreover, the local church is a profound context for holistic mission because it is made up of people, drawn together by faith, who meet and worship together across social, cultural and economic divides, and transformed as a result. It is the local church that prays for and support the sick, that buries the dead with dignity and purpose, and cares for the bereaved, especially the widowed and orphaned. The local church is a place to encourage good stewardship of resources, to challenge exploitative use of the environment, to value and celebrate the beauty of the created world. The local church is present 24 hours a day. It is part of the community.¹¹⁹

Rene Padilla, an Argentinian theologian, in an unpublished paper, *Wholistic Transformation and the Local Church* quoted by Cathy Ross claims, that the local congregation is the best agent for transformation because the deepest and most significant changes in people’s lives take place through love expressed and experienced in community.¹²⁰

The Local Church: A Trinitarian Community

A Trinitarian community is a church community whose existence is based on what God has done and will do through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹²¹ As a community of the Triune God, firstly, the church is “essentially social and relational, bound together by mutual and self-giving love.”¹²² Secondly, the Trinity provides an pattern as to how the

¹¹⁸ Raistrick, 138.

¹¹⁹ Raistrick, 138–43.

¹²⁰ Catherine Ross, “‘Without Faces’: Women’s Perspectives on Missiology,” 2011, 25–26, <http://www.methodistheritage.org.uk/missionary-history-ross-without-faces-2011.pdf>.

¹²¹ Howard A. Snyder, “The Missional Church and Missional Life,” n.d., 6, www.tyndale.ca/sites/default/files/SnyderMissionalChurchandLife.pdf.

¹²² Snyder, 7.

church structures itself. As the Trinity is a “community of mutual and self-giving love,” it acts in opposition to hierarchy, and seeks a “nonhierarchical, other-directed, inclusive, diverse communities modelled on the mutual self-giving of the Trinity; a community in which people work together for the common good and are mutually enriched through each other’s unique contributions.”¹²³

In the Institutes, Calvin points to the fact that Jesus Christ, is the head of the church, and have all authority in it. But because Christ does not dwell among us in visible form [Matt. 26:11], Calvin argued that Christ uses the ministry of human persons “as a sort of delegated work,” so that through them Christ may do his own work (4:3:1).¹²⁴ Calvin added saying that, “By them Christ dispenses and distributes his gifts to the church, and thus making himself present by energizing the church through the Spirit” (4:3:2).¹²⁵ “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12). Based on these gifts, Calvin enumerated those who preside in the affairs of the church:

- a) the nature of the *Apostolic function* is from the command, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).¹²⁶ The *apostles* therefore were sent forth to propagate the gospel and plant churches.
- b) *Prophets* are those who excelled in special revelation.
- c) *Evangelists* were next to the apostles in office, and even acted as their substitute.

¹²³ Mary Doak, “Power, Protest, and Perichoresis: On Being Church in a Troubled World,” in *Christianity, Democracy and the Shadow of Constantine* (Fordham University, 2017), 83, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/jctt1gn6b41.7>.

¹²⁴ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 648.

¹²⁵ Calvin, 648-49.

¹²⁶ Calvin, 650.

d) *The Pastors and Teachers*. The teachers are in-charge of the interpretation of the Scripture in order to maintain a pure and sound doctrine, while the two principal parts of the office of the *Pastor* are to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments (4:3:6).¹²⁷

Calvin also argued that bishops, presbyters and pastors are sometimes used in the scriptures as synonymous (4:3:4).¹²⁸ He also recognized the fact that in his letter to the Romans and to the Corinthians, Paul enumerates other offices: powers, gifts of healing, interpretation, government/leadership, care of the poor (Rom. 12:6-7; 1 Cor. 12:28). All of these are Christ's gifts to the church, to build up and energizing the church through the Spirit.¹²⁹

Calvin also provided a Scriptural basis as to how a minister be chosen-- whether by the whole church, or by colleagues and elders, or appointed by the authority of an individual. Drawing upon the example recorder by Luke, in the case of Matthias (Acts 1:23-26) to replace Judas in the roll of the apostles, election was done at the sight and approval of the people (the whole church). In Acts 6:3 when murmuring arose among the Greeks because in the administration of the poor their widows were neglected, the apostles excusing themselves that they were unable to discharge both offices, to preach the word and serve the table, requested the multitude to elect seven men of good report, to whom the office might be committed (Acts 6:2).¹³⁰

There are New Testament passages where Paul instructs Titus "to appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5), however, Calvin argued that it is a mistake to suppose that Titus

¹²⁷ Calvin, 651.

¹²⁸ Calvin, 651.

¹²⁹ Calvin, 653.

¹³⁰ Calvin, 654-55.

reigned in Crete and Timothy at Ephesus, as to dispose of all things at their own pleasure. They only presided by previously giving good and salutary counsels to the people, not by doing alone whatever pleased them, while all others were excluded (4:3:15).¹³¹

The closest the New Testament comes to hinting at a hierarchy are the actions of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. To answer some questions about the keeping of the Mosaic Law in the church, believers from Antioch met with the elders and apostles in Jerusalem (verse 6). Arguments were heard, and “after much discussion” (verse 7), the council issued some guidelines in a letter for Gentiles in the growing church (verses 23–29). Some would point to this incident as supporting a hierarchy and centralized power in the early church. The thing is, the apostles and elders were giving guidance on an important matter. The decision was not handed down by one person but by a group of men who saw themselves as “brothers” to the disciples asking the question. The letter from the council began this way: “The apostles and elders, your brothers, To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 15:23).

Finally, Snyder argued, “the roots of authentic ministry are found in Spirit-empowered community, not in organizational hierarchy.”¹³² The deep theological grounding of this is the Trinity itself. As Mary Doak said, “The Trinity is and invites us to, a unity-in-diversity... its goal is not a uniformity that eliminates otherness, but rather a unity enriched by diversity,”¹³³ reminding us that each human person contributes uniquely to the community, at the same time, finding his/her fulfillment in participating in that common life.

¹³¹ Calvin, 655.

¹³² Snyder, “The Missional Church and Missional Life,” 9.

¹³³ Doak, “Power, Protest, and Perichoresis: On Being Church in a Troubled World,” 90.

Biblical-Theological Framework

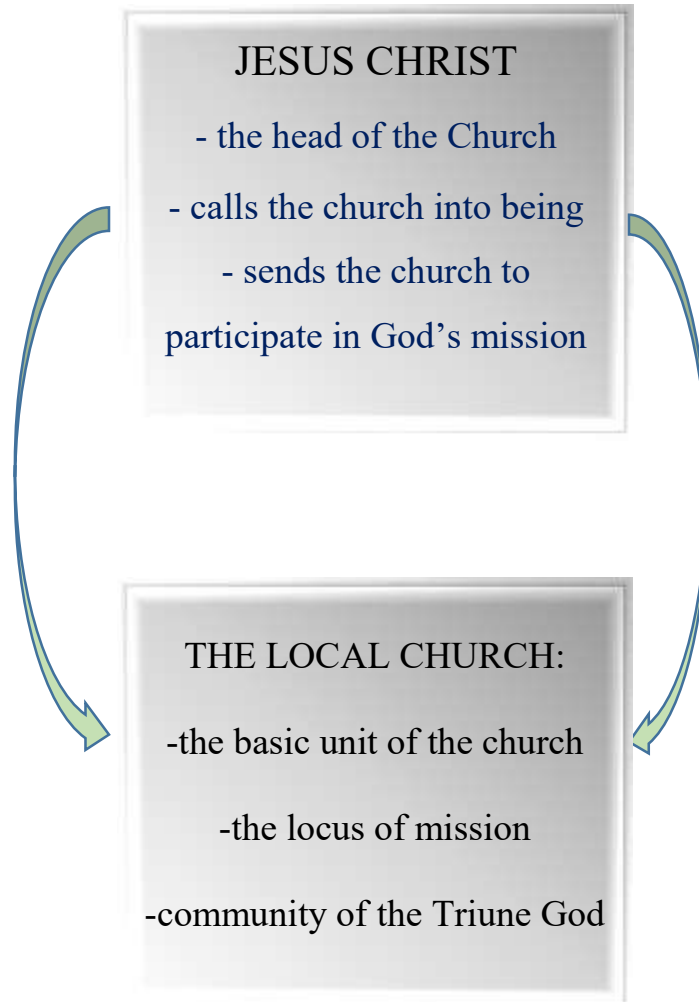


Figure 1. Autonomous Local Church

Figure 1. Shows a picture of a local church. It is directly connected to Jesus Christ who is the only Head and the authority over the church, who calls the church into being and sends the church to participate God's mission in the world.

Conceptual Framework

Below is a diagram to illustrate the flow of the study to arrive at how local church autonomy relates to the missionary work of the church.



Figure 2. Flow of the Study

CHAPTER III

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

This chapter will provide a presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data gathered pertaining to local church autonomy in the UCCP. The data were collected from the following sources: The Basis of Union in 1948, the Constitution and By-Laws of the UCCP, UCCP History books and Manuals and the UCCP Statement of Faith. Data were also gathered from participant local churches and supplementary interview respondents.

Biblical and Theological Basis of UCCP's Understanding of Local Church Autonomy

Local church autonomy is an integral component of UCCP's ecclesial life. By looking at some of the provisions in the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws, and the UCCP Statement of Faith, we can find statements that point to the Biblical and Theological Basis of UCCP's understanding and practice of local autonomy. Among such provisions is as follow:

The doctrines and beliefs of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines are based on the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures and *articulated in the historic Christian creeds, expressed in the diverse heritage of faith and practice brought into the union by its uniting Churches, and embodied in its Statement of Faith (Art. II, Sec. 4).*¹³⁴

The above provision affirms that the UCCP based its doctrines and beliefs *on the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures*, therefore, on the teachings of Jesus Christ and in the revelation of God as recorded and witnessed to in the Bible. The provision likewise asserts another important conviction, that these doctrines and beliefs are based on the Word of God as... *articulated in the historic Christian creeds, expressed in the diverse heritage of*

¹³⁴ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence* (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 2015), 6, https://uccpchurch.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/final-uccp_cbl.pdf.

faith and practice brought into the union by its uniting Churches, and embodied in its Statement of Faith.

This means that the UCCP values its heritage: “from the uniting Churches that brought it into being, with the churches of the 16th century Reformation, with the Christian Church of the ages which had articulated the historic Christian creeds, and finally with the Church of the Apostles in New Testament times.”¹³⁵ The provision further states the fact that the UCCP Statement of Faith *embodied* all those heritage of faith and practice. Therefore, what the UCCP believed about the Church as articulated its Statement of Faith is but a restatement of what our forebears believed of what the church is all about. UCCP’s Statement of Faith on the Church states:

WE BELIEVE, that the Church is the one Body of Christ, the whole community of persons reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and entrusted with God’s ministry (paragraph 3, Statement of Faith of the UCCP).¹³⁶

UCCP through its Constitution and By-Laws defines the manner of membership in the UCCP and the nature of a local church to wit:

Membership in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines shall be through one of its local churches or congregations (Art. III, Sec. 1, Amended Constitution).¹³⁷

A Local Church *consists* of baptized or dedicated persons who adhere to the Statement of Faith of the UCCP, who worship in a particular place and carry out the church’s mission and ministry. It is the basic unit of the Church (Article V, Sec. 1, Amended Constitution and By-Laws).¹³⁸

The above-mentioned provisions from the Statement of Faith and the Constitution and By-Laws lead us to UCCP’s Biblical and Theological basis of local autonomy.

¹³⁵ Sitoy, “The Dynamic Heritage: Fifty Years of the UCCP, 1948-1998,” 11–12.

¹³⁶ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 2.

¹³⁷ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 6.

¹³⁸ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 7.

First, the UCCP strongly adheres to the belief that the local church is “the basic unit of the church.”¹³⁹ This finds its basis on Jesus’ saying, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). This understanding of the local church was reclaimed during the Reformation and became one of the Reformation’s Principles, as stated: “where the Word of God is rightly proclaimed and heard, and the Sacraments rightly administered, there is the Church.”¹⁴⁰ As the basic unit of the church, the local church is where membership in the UCCP is located. Bishop Camba, commenting on the topic said:

Theologically, it is the local church that proclaims the gospel and accepts the believer. The moment the person accepts the Lord Jesus Christ s/he becomes part of the church, but not national, one becomes part of the national because s/he is accepted in the local church. All rituals of the church wedding, baptism, communion, etc. they are all done in the local church.¹⁴¹

Second, the UCCP affirmed that the local church is the locus of mission. It is a community *entrusted* to carry out God’s mission and ministry;¹⁴² it is a community to whom Jesus spoke, “As the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you” (John 20:21). This is affirmed by the church bishops, Bishop Camba and Bishop Dominguez who claimed that the mission of the church, biblically, is done by the local church; so all local churches should do the mission.^{143/144} Whatever the mission or ministry of the local church becomes the corporate mission of the whole church.

¹³⁹ See Article V, Sec. 1, *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 7.

¹⁴⁰ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 629.

¹⁴¹ Erme R. Camba, Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP, Face-to-face Interview, January 31, 2019.

¹⁴² See para. 3, Statement of Faith of the UCCP in *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 2.

¹⁴³ Camba.

¹⁴⁴ Benito Dominguez, Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP: Its Missional Implications, Face-to-face Interview, January 29, 2019.

Although the national body has a statement on mission and this statement is given flesh and blood or carried out by the local churches, these statements on mission are considered coming from the local churches because the local church is represented in the conference and the Conference is represented in the General Assembly. So in that case there is an autonomy of the local congregation. It is a democratic process from the bottoms-up, not from the top-down.¹⁴⁵ This has been articulated clearly in the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals:

... the local church itself will always have to be a source of the impetus and enlightenment for the further knowing and doing of the church. The national programs will always have to be tempered and responsive to the actual needs and conditions of the local churches in forming and implementing such programs *even as the voices and actual conditions emanating from the churches continue to serve as vital sources* that will continuously energize the rest of the church for continuous and sustained mission work as a body.¹⁴⁶

Moreover, the local church serves as the concrete embodiment of the essence of the church. As the basic unit of the church, the fullness of the ministry of Jesus Christ is realized and actualized in the local church. As such the church must be autonomous, and empowered to be able to discern and respond to the needs of the time in its particular location.

A very important ecclesiological and missiological theme could be derived from this understanding. It affirms a Trinitarian understanding of the nature and mission of the church. Howard A. Snyder, Professor of Wesley Studies at Tyndale Seminary said, “the church is, and is called to be, a Trinitarian community.”¹⁴⁷ It is as reflected in Jesus’ prayer to the Father in John 17:

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given

¹⁴⁵ Camba, Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP.

¹⁴⁶ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals” (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 2000), 17.

¹⁴⁷ Snyder, “The Missional Church and Missional Life,” 6.

me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me (John 17:20-23 NRSV).

This is the prayer that the uniting churches have responded into for the sake of the church's mission and witness in the Philippines. Jesus was praying for the unity of the believers, saying, "so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me" (Jn. 17:21). This prayer picture to us what a Trinitarian community is – a community grounded in God: the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer; a church community whose existence is based on what God has done, is doing now, and will do through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁸

The doctrine of the Trinity teaches us about mission also. It points to the Triune God as the source of mission. "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (John 20:21). It pictures the Trinitarian sending of the Father sending the Son, and now the Son sending the disciples as he breaths on them saying "receive the Holy Spirit. Mission is thus based on the initiative of the Father, defined by the Son in the Incarnation, and directed by the Holy Spirit to the ends of the earth (Shenk 2003).¹⁴⁹

Here are some aspects of the Trinitarian emphasis that needs to be stated right here. First, the church is basically a community – "essentially social and relational, bound together by mutual and self-giving love," given the reality of the Trinity.¹⁵⁰ The UCCP Statement of Faith made that affirmation of the church as "a community of those reconciled to God through their faith in Jesus Christ."¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Snyder, 6.

¹⁴⁹ As quoted by Mark Laing, "Missio Dei: Some Implications for the Church," *Missiology: An International Review* XXXVII, no. 1 (January 2009): 95.

¹⁵⁰ Snyder, "The Missional Church and Missional Life," 7.

¹⁵¹ See para. 3, Statement of Faith of the UCCP in *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 2.

Second, the church is to minister especially to the poor. This too is grounded in the Trinity. This is articulated by Jesus in Luke 4: 18ff.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Luke 4:18-19).

Jesus' life on earth was a demonstration of God's solidarity with the least of this earth. By Jesus' suffering, God suffered with those who suffer. God's solidarity with the poor impels the church to incarnate the gospel among the poor.¹⁵² This is one of the tasks of the church as being "entrusted with God's ministry."

Third, the Trinity also holds important implications as to how the church structures itself if it patterns its life after the Trinity. As the Trinity is a "community of mutual and self-giving love," it acts in opposition to hierarchy. Snyder argued, "the roots of authentic ministry are found in Spirit-empowered community, not in organizational hierarchy."¹⁵³ The deep theological grounding of this is the Trinity itself.

Historical Overview of UCCP's Understanding and Practice of Local Autonomy

To better comprehend UCCP's understanding and practice of local church autonomy, one cannot do away with UCCP's *heritage and commitment*, as pointed out in a provision in the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws which states:

Consistent with the *heritage and commitment* of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, the autonomy of the Local Church shall be respected. The scope of such autonomy shall be defined in the By-Laws (Art. II, *Declaration of Principles*, Sec. 14).¹⁵⁴

The provision stated above implies a need to revisit the stories of the different denominational Protestant churches which unite to form the United Church of Christ in the

¹⁵² Snyder, 8.

¹⁵³ Snyder, 9.

¹⁵⁴ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 6.

Philippines in 1948, because issues of local church autonomy are intertwined within these stories. This section then will present a brief account of the heritage and commitment of the different denominational Protestant churches towards unity and the challenges they faced along the way; and the Basis of Union of 1948 as the fundamental declaration of faith and plan of government of the United Church. From these documents we can learn further the basis of UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy.

The Commitment to Unity of the Uniting Churches: Success and Challenges

In the account of Dr. Enrique C. Sobrepeña, one of UCCP's pioneers, in his book, *That They May Be One*, several major Protestant Churches in the United States established missions in the Philippines during the early years of the American occupation.¹⁵⁵ Dr. T. Valentino Sitoy, church historian, described these American missions, as “generally imbued with the principle of comity in missions which had grown among the various mission-sending churches in the United States during the 19th century.”¹⁵⁶ Having felt the need for cooperation in the task of evangelization, right away, the missionaries started a movement towards unity.¹⁵⁷

There were two types of movement towards unity that these mission bodies had gone through: the interchurch cooperation and organic church union. Interchurch cooperation is a form of *cooperation* among churches on certain aspects of their common work,¹⁵⁸ while, organic church union is a *merger* of two or more churches to form one new body.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Enrique C. Sobrepeña, *That They May Be One*, 2nd ed. (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1964), 31.

¹⁵⁶ Sitoy, “The Dynamic Heritage: Fifty Years of the UCCP, 1948-1998,” 2.

¹⁵⁷ Sobrepeña, *That They May Be One*, 31.

¹⁵⁸ Sobrepeña, 30.

¹⁵⁹ Sobrepeña, 31.

Interchurch Cooperation

The very first interchurch cooperation that the various Protestant missions entered into is *The Evangelical Union* on April 26, 1901. The Evangelical Union was a council of representatives from the various participating missions and Christian agencies¹⁶⁰ which main purpose was to bring about a “spirit of comity, unity and cooperation that will eliminate competition and effect harmony for the common task.”¹⁶¹ The division of the country into areas of responsibility, where each participating mission is “being charged with the evangelization of one or more areas;”¹⁶² and the establishment of joint seminary for the training of pastors, deaconesses, and lay leaders are among its achievements.¹⁶³

In 1929, the Evangelical Union (EU) was reorganized into National Christian Council (NCC). Like the EU, it kept for its objective the promotion of comity among the churches, at the same time looking forward to organic church union.¹⁶⁴ In 1938, due to growing number of churches and increasing participation of Filipinos in the leadership of the churches, the Council was again reorganized into The Federation of Evangelical Churches (FEC). This time, churches became the center and regular members, while other agencies were recognized as affiliate members.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ T. Valentino Sitoy Jr., *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, Vol. 1 (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1992). They include the *Methodist Episcopal Mission*, the *Presbyterian Mission*, the *United Brethren*, the *Disciples of Christ*, the *Baptists*, the *Congregationalist*, the *Young Men’s Christian Association*, the *American Bible Society*, among others.

¹⁶¹ Sobrepena, *That They May Be One*, 31–33.

¹⁶² Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 1992, Vol. 1:325.

¹⁶³ Sobrepena, *That They May Be One*, 34. i.e. *Union Theological Seminary* in Dasmariñas, Cavite established in 1907 joined together the Ellinwood Bible School of the Presbyterians and Nicholson Seminary of the Methodists; also in Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 1992, Vol. 1:341. the *Silliman Bible School* (now Divinity School) in Dumaguete City was jointly established in 1921 by the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists.

¹⁶⁴ Sobrepena, *That They May Be One*, 38–39.

¹⁶⁵ Sobrepena, 39–40.

Organic Church Union.

As mentioned, one of the goals of earlier interchurch cooperation was the organic union of Protestant churches in the Philippines. Sobrepena wrote that as early as 1909, a Committee on church union was organized whose responsibility was to work out a basis for the organic union of the churches that were members of the Evangelical Union.¹⁶⁶ Dr. Sitoy wrote that by 1915, there was already a completed plan of union “for the merger of all Protestant Mission churches into the proposed *La Iglesia Cristiana Evangelica de las Islas Filipinas* (The Evangelical Christian Church of the Philippine Islands)”.¹⁶⁷ This church union plan centered on the creation of a “General Advisory Council” which is a council of united regional churches.¹⁶⁸ However, the Baptists and the Disciples could not agree on the powers of the “General Advisory Council” of the United Church for fear that in the future, the majority might invest the General Advisory Council with powers which both groups believed should properly reside only in the individual congregations and not in any centralized ecclesiastical body. Additionally, there was also another issue – the question of episcopacy.¹⁶⁹

The union did not materialize because the rest were not willing to go on without the Baptists and the Disciples. Yet, they were hoping that someday a *mutually acceptable basis of union* could be found.¹⁷⁰ Eventually, in 1921 the Evangelical Union took a new stance. It voted to endorse “any effort on the part of groups to enter into Union without waiting for all the others.”¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁶ Sobrepena, 42.

¹⁶⁷ Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 1992, Vol. 1:330.

¹⁶⁸ Sitoy, Vol. 1:331.

¹⁶⁹ Sitoy, Vol. 1:333.

¹⁷⁰ Sitoy, Vol. 1:333.

¹⁷¹ Sitoy, Vol. 1:336.

Meanwhile, the Filipino evangelical lay leaders who were ardent advocates for church union felt frustrated for the delays in the union.¹⁷² On their own initiative and with the encouragement of missionaries like Dr. Frank Laubach, they organized themselves and formed a single independent congregation called “The United Church of Manila” (UCM) in February 1924.¹⁷³ From the original 20 charter members drawn from various denominations, they grew into 1000 and more.¹⁷⁴ This congregation follows a congregational polity of autonomy of the local church,¹⁷⁵ and engages in a variety of mission work: campus and dormitory ministry; does ministry in jail, in hospital, in youth rehabilitation center, in orphanages, in school for persons with special needs; as well as evangelism work to laborers and employees.¹⁷⁶

The organization of the UCM has contributed significantly in the process towards organic church union. Dr. Sobrepeña wrote, “its purpose was to demonstrate the workability of a united church.”¹⁷⁷ It therefore served as a forerunner and one of the founding members of the first denominational union, the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines (UECP)* on March 15, 1929. The UECP is the first successful organic church union of three major denominations namely, *Congregationalists, Presbyterians* and *United Brethren*.¹⁷⁸

Inspired by the formation of the UECP, smaller independent Filipino-led churches unite themselves into one and formed the *Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo (UNIDA)* in February 6, 1932.¹⁷⁹ At the height of the Japanese occupation in World War II, there were

¹⁷² Sitoy, Vol. 1:348.

¹⁷³ Sitoy, Vol. 1:349–50.

¹⁷⁴ Sitoy, Vol. 1:350.

¹⁷⁵ Sitoy, Vol. 1:350.

¹⁷⁶ Sitoy, Vol. 1:352.

¹⁷⁷ Sobrepeña, *That They May Be One*, 48.

¹⁷⁸ Sobrepeña, 50.

¹⁷⁹ Sobrepeña, 52–53. These Churches were identified by Dr. Sitoy as the Evangelical Church of Filipino Christians, the Reformed Methodist Evangelical Church, the Trinitarian Church, the La Iglesia de Jesucristo

pressures coming from the Japanese government ordering churches to unite. To that effect, the *Evangelical Church in the Philippines (ECP)* was born in 1943 involving all the Protestant churches including the United Evangelical Church.¹⁸⁰ However, after the war, the union disintegrated back to their churches. The Evangelical Church in the Philippines remained with churches in Northern Luzon under the leadership of Bishop Enrique Sobrepena, but the United Evangelical Church continued with churches in Southern Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao under Bishop Leonardo Dia.¹⁸¹

In 1946, efforts for organic church union continued through the re-organized Philippine Federation of Evangelical Churches (PFEC). Its membership now included the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines*, the *Methodist Episcopal Church*, the *Convention of Philippine Baptists*, the *National Convention of the Christian Church (Disciples)*, and four new members, namely the *Evangelical Church in the Philippines (1943)*, the *IEMELIF*, the *UNIDA* and the *Philippine Methodist Church (1933)* (split of Methodist Episcopal Church).¹⁸²

By April 1946, a *draft* of a Basis of Union of these churches had been adopted by an enlarged Committee on Church Union of the PFEC for further study.¹⁸³ However, this time, the *question of bishops* became a problem in the union negotiations, particularly for the United Evangelical Church. Dr. Sitoy wrote that “when the United Evangelical Church was

“Jerusalem Nueva”, the La Iglesia de Dios, and Iglesia Evangelica de Atlag (Sitoy, *Several Springs*, Vo.1:388).

¹⁸⁰ Sobrepena, 58. ECP brought together the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines*, the *Church of Christ (Disciples)*, the *Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo (UNIDA)*, a segment of the *Iglesia Evangelica Metodista En Las Islas Filipinas (IEMELIF)*, the *Iglesia Evangelica Nacional*, some congregations of the *Philippine Methodist Church*, and a number of independent local congregations.

¹⁸¹ Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, 1992, Vol. 1:449–50. Both ECP and UECF as independent denominations together with PMC formed the UCCP in 1948.

¹⁸² Sitoy, Vol. 1:463-64.

¹⁸³ Sitoy, *Several Springs, One Stream: United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, Vol. 1:485.

formed in 1929, the United Brethren whose polity is episcopal had not insisted on episcopacy. But with the entry into the union negotiations in 1946 of the Philippine Methodist Church, the issue of bishops could no longer be avoided nor ignored.” Former Presbyterian and Congregationalist in the Visayas and Mindanao have raised a strong anti-episcopacy voices.¹⁸⁴

It was then that the Rev. Proculo A. Rodriguez stepped in and opened the way for a successful resolution of the issue. He submitted a position paper to the 1946 General Assembly of the United Evangelical Church.¹⁸⁵ In the position paper he stated the fact that “the United Evangelical Church is in favor of any move toward larger union” of Protestant bodies “which respects and preserves all the virtues of Evangelical faith and democratic processes.”¹⁸⁶ He also expressed the emotional and psychological difficulty of those unfamiliar with the episcopal polity.

Part of the position paper quoted by Dr. Sitoy reads:

... to many of us, the title ‘bishop’ carries with it the picture of pomp, power and wealth. History is to blame... The title seems to require a purple robe, an expensive car, an autocratic power. This need not be, of course. The people of Luzon have already become acquainted with the meeker bishops, true shepherds of the sheep, going about in a more humble garb without losing the dignity and respect which by faithful labor they worthily won.¹⁸⁷

Among Rodriguez proposals therefore are as follow:

That we reserve to the district conferences in areas concerned viz., Mindanao, Visayas, etc., the right to organize their area organizations ... and with such titles for area officers as are acceptable to them; at the same time according to Luzon areas that choose Episcopal titles the recognition and respect due to those church officials, even when they are in our own areas using other titles...¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Sitoy, Vol. 1:487.

¹⁸⁵ Sitoy, Vol. 1:488.

¹⁸⁶ Sitoy, Vol. 1:489.

¹⁸⁷ Sitoy, Vol. 1:489.

¹⁸⁸ Sitoy, Vol. 1:488–89.

Dr. Rodriguez' voice effected certain influence to the UEC. Two years after, during its last General Assembly on May 19-22, 1948, the assembly acted to appoint 79 officers and members as official delegates to the Uniting Assembly of the projected United Church of Christ in the Philippines.¹⁸⁹

Finally, a Plan and Basis for the Organic Union of the Churches was approved and adopted at a joint session of the commission¹⁹⁰ on November 3, 1947, and thereafter presented to their respective denominational bodies¹⁹¹ in preparation for the Uniting Assembly. We can assume then that a *mutually acceptable basis of union* was already arrived at, taking into consideration the issues in question – the autonomy of the local church, and the question of bishops.

The Basis of Union: Fundamental Declaration of Faith and Plan of Government of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines

The Uniting Assembly finally took place on May 25-27, 1948. In this assembly, 167 delegates coming from the *Evangelical Church in the Philippines*, the *Philippine Methodist Church* and the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines*, formally adopt the plan and Basis of Union as the fundamental declaration of faith and plan of government of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines¹⁹² (Appendix 1, pp. 96-100).

¹⁸⁹ Sitoy, Vol. 1:490.

¹⁹⁰ "First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings" (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1948), 7–13. The Joint Commission on Church Union which approved the Basis of Union was composed of representatives appointed by different denominations, namely, the *Evangelical Church in the Philippines*, the *Convention of the Philippine Baptist Churches*, the *Philippine Methodist Church*, the *Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo*, and the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines*. The approval and adoption of the Basis of Union took place in a Conference on Church Union at Union Theological Seminary on Taft Avenue in Manila held on November 1-3, 1947 (Sitoy, Vol. 2:560; and footnote # 6, p. 594-95).

¹⁹¹ "First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings," 15–16.

¹⁹² "First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings," 7–13. Only UECP, ECP and PMC came back with official representatives to the Uniting Assembly. CPBC and UNIDA sent representatives who reported they approve the basis of Union but were not yet ready to vote. Right after the union, the CPBC was considered as a "constituent" member of the UCCP, which did not materialize.

That we, delegates to the Uniting Assembly, hereby formally adopt the Plan and Basis of Union formulated by the Joint Commission on Church Union of the Uniting Churches, as the fundamental declaration of faith and plan of government of the **United Church of Christ in the Philippines**, and forthwith proceed to organize ourselves accordingly for the furtherance of the redemptive work of Christ in the World.¹⁹³

The **Basis of Union** consisted of nine articles about faith, order and practical measures. The first six articles would relate to the issue on local autonomy:

ARTICLE I — Name.

The name of this organization shall be: ***UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES.***

ARTICLE II — Church Property.

Church property may be held by individual congregations of other church bodies. It is desirable that property be held in the name of the church. Transfer of property should be held in the name of the church. Transfer of property shall be voluntary.

ARTICLE III — Historic Faith and Message.

We do preserve all of the heritage of faith brought into the Union by each of the constituent Churches and hereby declare as our common faith and message: ***Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Saviour.***

ARTICLE IV — Church Practices and Worship

Congregations may follow their customary practices and worship.

ARTICLE V — Membership.

Members in good and regular standing of each of the Uniting Churches shall be regarded as such by all the others in the Union.

ARTICLE VI -- The Local Church

1. A ***local church*** is a group of at least 25 baptized believers, 15 years of age or over, having officers and a regular time and place of worship.
2. ***Membership:*** Regular and affiliated members.
3. ***Government:*** The local church shall be governed by a church council composed of the Pastor, other church workers, officers, stewards and the heads of the various organizations of the church.

¹⁹³ “First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings,” 15–16.

4. *Duties and powers of the local church*

- a. Subject only to the general laws and regulations of the Church, every local church or congregation shall, with its pastor, be responsible for watching over its members, keeping its life pure, ordering its worship, providing Christian education and proclaiming the Gospel.
- b. Call a pastor.
- c. Recommend candidates for the ministry.
- d. Elect delegates to the Annual Conference.¹⁹⁴

Interpretation of the Basis of Union

Salient points of the Basis of Union were reviewed by Rev. Leonardo C. Dia, the Chairman of the Joint Commission on Church Union, including the fact that there is *no written articles of faith except the one provided in Article III, Historic Faith and Message*.¹⁹⁵

ARTICLE III – *Historic Faith and Message*

We do preserve all of the heritage of faith brought into the Union by each of the constituent Churches and hereby declare as our common faith and message: Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Saviour.

It means to say that members of the United Church, whether “individuals, congregations, or conferences may adopt any or all of the statements of faith previously adopted officially by the various uniting churches.”¹⁹⁶ These statements of faith constitute UCCP’s faith heritage (see Appendix 1.2, pp. 101-106). It was a demonstration of the inclusive spirit of the Commission in reaching a common ground for union. Rev. Dia further pointed out that local churches, in their government and practice will be almost entirely

¹⁹⁴ “First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings,” 7–8.

¹⁹⁵ “First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings,” 13.

¹⁹⁶ Sobrepena, *That They May Be One*, 87.

unchanged. He also stressed the fact that no personal head of the church is provided apart from the General Assembly which will be the governing body of the new Church.¹⁹⁷

The article on Historic Faith and Message is being followed right after by the article on Church Practices and Worship:

ARTICLE IV — *Church Practices and Worship*

Congregations may follow their customary practices and worship.

Those principles (Art. III & IV) serve as declaration *on the nature of the faith and order of the UCCP*.¹⁹⁸ Freedom is granted to the various congregations of the uniting churches to follow their heritage of faith, and their customary practices and worship.

Moreover, local church autonomy for every congregation, so well preserved in the Baptist, Congregationalists and the Disciples has been safeguarded in the Basis of Union. **Article VI, *The Local Church, No. 4, Duties and Powers of the Local Church***, provides the limits which the general councils of the church must not violate.¹⁹⁹

The Basis of Union as a Contract

Following the first General Assembly, a supplementary statement to the Basis of Union was produced to further clarify the interpretation of the document. It states that

The Basis of Union is in the nature of a contract and no point in it should be abrogated without the full consent of every party concerned...that the task of the Polity Committee in drawing up a Constitution for the United Church of Christ in the Philippines is to elaborate and to implement our basic document, always remembering the inclusive nature of our union, i. e. a union which preserves “all of the heritage of faith brought into the union by the constituent Churches” as well as the provision that “congregations may follow their customary practices and worship” (Basis of Union, Article III and IV).²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ “First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings,” 13.

¹⁹⁸ T. Valentino Sitoy Jr., “The Autonomy of the Local Church in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines” (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1992), 8.

¹⁹⁹ Sobrepena, *That They May Be One*, 85.

²⁰⁰ “Supplementary Statement to the Basis of Union” (United Church of Christ in the Philippines).

Furthermore, Dr. Sitoy wrote that on February 23, 1950 meeting of the UCCP Executive Committee, the following points were noted as implicit in the Basis of Union:

- a. No expansion of the statement of ‘Historic Faith and Message’ (Art. III) is necessary.
- b. *The autonomy of the local congregation in all matters pertaining to its life in its own community is to be preserved.*
- c. The responsibility and authority of the Annual Conferences and of the General Assembly are to be considered as delegated – derived from and resting upon the autonomous local churches.
- d. All administrative officers of the Church (Bishops, General Secretary and Moderators) have only such executive powers as are regularly enjoyed by administrative officers of democratic bodies. They are the servants of the bodies by which they were elected and are primarily responsible to the same.
- e. The use of the term ‘Bishop,’ not being the historic practice of certain parts of the Church is optional in those localities. The Area administrator in such cases may be called by some other suitable title, such as ‘Executive Officer’ or ‘Area Moderator.’
- f. The Basis of Union provides that ‘congregations may follow their customary practices and worship’ (Art. IV), and that the local church may have both ‘regular and affiliated members’ (Art. VI, 2). It is clearly understood that only those who are regular members, in good standing, of a congregation of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, or of some other Evangelical Church, may be received as affiliated members. It is also understood that as such (Art. V, Basis of Union), being full members of the United Church of Christ, they shall enjoy full fellowship with any congregation of the United Church of Christ.²⁰¹

Statement by former Disciples of the Ilocano Convention

Dr. Sitoy also wrote that on March 6, 1950, the Executive Committee of the Northwest Luzon Conference of the UCCP, who were former Disciples of the Ilocano Convention drafted a statement titled Statement by Northwest Luzon Conference (Former Disciples). Part of the document reads as follows:

1. ...the Churches of Christ (Disciples) in Northwest Luzon joined the United Church of Christ in the Philippines that they may contribute their influence, history and heritage to so great an enterprise. This does not mean that we lose our faith, message and practices as Disciples. From our basis of union, the churches are guaranteed to continue in their

²⁰¹ Minutes, UCCP Executive Committee, Feb. 23-24, 1950, 4 as quoted by Sitoy, “The Autonomy of the Local Church in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines,” 14–15.

faith and practice. Because of this, we can still declare that we are true and loyal to every teaching and practice which is clear to all Disciples.

2. CREED. We do not subscribe to any man-made creed. We have no creed but Christ, no book but the Bible, no name but Christian, no overlord but our Master.
3. ECCLESIASTICAL CONTROL. According to the basis of union the congregational authority and practices is not impaired. Our churches are as free as when they were before they joined the United Church of Christ. Our church government is based on the simple New Testament church.

Regarding the use of Bishops, Superintendents and Moderators, our churches do not understand them to mean the way Roman Catholic or other ecclesiastical churches use them. We, as Disciples, recognize that the officers of the United Church of Christ are only executive officers.

4. CHURCH MEMBERSHIP. We accept only as members those of age who have been immersed. Unimmersed Evangelical members from other communions are regarded only as affiliated members.²⁰²

From these statements we can surmise that the Disciple churches are “the most zealous champions of local church autonomy.” Dr. Sitoy commented that these are the same sentiments the Tagalog Disciples had who joined UCCP 14 years later, in 1962. “It was the inviolability of the local church autonomy which enabled the Disciples to join the union in 1948 and 1962.” It was the same assurance which kept the doors open for the Baptists even after 1948.²⁰³

Here, it is interesting to note that the inclusive nature of the union and the preservation of all the heritage of faith and practice brought into the union are emphasized again and again. Bishop Erme R. Camba, in his commentary on the UCCP Statement of Faith regarding our belief on the Church said, “All the doctrines and practices of the uniting churches were accepted by the new Church. The unifying and binding confession of the new United Church

²⁰² Sitoy, 15–16.

²⁰³ Sitoy, 16.

(1948) is our ‘common faith and message: Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Savior.’”²⁰⁴

Based upon the narrative explanation provided above, a number of things can be deduced: First, that the UCCP is an organic union of various ecclesiastical traditions which traced their origin from the evangelical tradition of the 16th century Protestant Reformation. Because of that common origin, they all share the same understanding of the Christian faith seen through the experience of the 16th century Reformation. Yet, while they shared so much in the area of belief, they are divided in their understanding and preference for the ideal church government, claiming scriptural basis for their respective preferred form, hence, the different polities -- Episcopal, Presbyterian and Congregationalist.

Second, because of their strong desire for Christian unity, they came up with a very inclusive Basis of Union. In the union, congregations were granted autonomy to follow their faith, customary practices and worship. According to Dr. Sitoy, these actions implied a number of things, namely:

1. The uniting churches are open to the variety of faith traditions, ministry, ways of worship, and expressions of faith and practices. The essential element that bind them is the common faith and message: “Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Savior.”
2. They recognized that within the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ, there is a variety of gifts, understanding, and expressions. All these belong to the one Church, to build up and to equip the church for its service in the world.

²⁰⁴ Camba, “The Church: The Household of God,” 127–28.

3. They acknowledged that the various uniting Churches had grown and developed differently, under different historical circumstances, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. That Christians of various backgrounds simply cannot be expected to be uniformly the same.²⁰⁵

Therein rest the basis of UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy. Furthermore, it appears that the UCCP's understanding of local autonomy is solely connected with the congregationalism of the Mindanao churches and the Disciples. However, on closer examination, it can be seen 'that even in Presbyterianism, the basis of ultimate church authority is, in fact, the local church.'²⁰⁶ Both in Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, the local church had freedom to manage its own affairs. The only difference is that, in Congregationalist pattern, local church manages its own affairs more freely, while in the Presbyterian system, it is done within the limits allowed it by the higher judicatories.²⁰⁷

The same may be said of the local churches within the Methodist polity. On the local church level, Methodism also allows for freedom for the local church to manage its own affairs. As seen in the statement of Faith of the Philippine Methodist Church as follows:

The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same (*Article XIII. Of the Church*).²⁰⁸

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; they may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word (*Article XXI. Of the Rites and Ceremonies of Churches*).²⁰⁹

Thus, even in the tradition that came into the UCCP from Methodism, there is provided an ample freedom for the local church in the conduct and management of its own

²⁰⁵ Sitoy, "The Autonomy of the Local Church in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines," 9.

²⁰⁶ Sitoy, 7.

²⁰⁷ Sitoy, 7.

²⁰⁸ Sobrepena, *That They May Be One*, 95.

²⁰⁹ Sobrepena, 98.

affairs. All these things, taken together, shaped UCCP's understanding of the church and the autonomy of the local church.

The Practice of Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP

From what have been discussed in the previous section, UCCP polity is of a hybrid kind, as it combined the elements from the church governments of the uniting bodies. It took into its system 'the autonomy and democracy of the Disciples and the Congregationalists, the representative authority of the Presbyterians and the connectionism of the Methodists.' This hybridized polity reflects the kind of autonomy practiced in the UCCP.

Specific provision for local church autonomy is enshrined in the official document of the UCCP – the Constitution and By-Laws. The constitution and By-Laws is the third most important document of the UCCP, after the Bible and the Statement of Faith. Dr. Noriel C. Capulong, former member of the Faith and Order Commission of the UCCP defined it as a legal document that serves to guide the faithful for their Christian living, as well as provide limits to what its members and its officers can do and cannot do with their powers and authority. Most of all, the Constitution and By-Laws of the UCCP is a "theological statement being an expression of the faith of the church put into responsible, collective, organized and accountable action. It is no less than a sacred statement of the church entering into covenant with God and with one another in the church."²¹⁰

This section contains two parts: first, it will look into the scope of local autonomy as provided in Art. III, Sec. 27 of the amended By-Laws; and, second, it will present the study conducted in the participant local churches as to how local autonomy operates in the UCCP.

²¹⁰ Noriel C. Capulong and et.al, "Official Statement of the Faith and Order Commission," November 21, 2017.

The Scope of Local Autonomy (Article III, Section 27, By-Laws)

It has to be stated right here the provision that in the UCCP, “to be recognized as a Local Church, a *worshipping* congregation shall have at least seventy-five (75) members..., and *shall have demonstrated its capability to conduct its life, ministry and administrative affairs* for at least two (2) years” (Art. V, Sec. 2, Amended Constitution).²¹¹ This section provides the background and qualification as to the question of who can, and, how can a congregation be considered a local church and enjoy local autonomy. Clearly given in the provision is the readiness and the capability of a certain congregation to be autonomous – being capable to *conduct its life, ministry and administrative affairs*, before they can be given due recognition as a local church.

The By-Laws of the UCCP defines the scope of local church autonomy. The By-laws is a necessary companion to the constitution containing the details to implement the provisions of the constitution. The particular section that deals with the Scope of Local Autonomy starts with an introduction that explains the importance of autonomy in the local church. It states:

The primary locus of mission is the Local Church. Hence, the UCCP upholds the autonomy of the Local Church particularly as to its right and power to conduct its ministry free from outside control, provided the same is in line with the Constitution, By-Laws and statutes of the Church, thereby enabling the Local Church to become an effective instrument in the ministry and mission of the Church and ensuring its positive contribution to the unity and strengthening of the whole Church (Art. III, Sec. 27, Amended By-Laws).²¹²

The same section goes on to enumerate the specific areas covered by the provision, which includes the authority to do the following:

²¹¹ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence* (Quezon City: United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 2015), 7.

²¹² *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 35.

- a) *To call and support its Pastor and other Church workers keeping in mind the basic policy of the Church to call to its ministry pastors and Church workers belonging to the UCCP...*
- b) *To administer, maintain, encumber or dispose of its personal or real properties pursuant to a resolution of its Board of Trustees...*
- c) To invite pastors, ministers, workers and lay leaders of other churches to speak, preach or otherwise enter into fellowship with the Local Church, from time to time ...
- d) To nominate and elect its officers, in accordance with the Constitution and By-Laws, and hold annual and such special meetings as it may deem necessary and proper;
- e) To admit qualified persons into the membership of the Local Church, help ensure their nurture and spiritual development, and promote and develop among them the idea of loving service, stewardship and missionary outreach;
- f) *To celebrate its worship services that are orderly and solemn, yet joyful and meaningful, reflective of the faith and life of the Church and responsive to the needs of the community in terms of witness, service and prophetic ministry;*
- g) To support the ministerial and lay formation program of the Church and recruit, recommend and support candidates for the ministry.
- h) *To adopt its own budget and financial program and fulfill its obligations to the wider bodies; and,*
- i) *To do all things as it may deem wise, necessary and proper, without encroaching on the prerogatives of, and interfering with, the wider Church bodies, ensuring at all times that its action contribute to the unity and strengthening of the whole UCCP.*²¹³

I would like to point out some salient points from the provisions that mostly apply to the issue of local autonomy.

On The Proviso

A ***proviso*** is an article or clause that introduces a condition (Merriam-Webster). The section containing the Scope of Local Autonomy has this kind of clause that states, “provided

²¹³ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence, 35–36.*

the same is in line with the Constitution, By-Laws and statutes of the Church”²¹⁴ This same provision appears in the Basis of Union in 1948 stating that the local church has autonomy to manage its own affairs “subject only to the general laws and regulations of the Church” (Article VI:4a, Basis of Union).

This provision, Dr. Sobrepena explained, might be interpreted to provide a window for a centralized authority to evolve “against the cherished ideal of local church autonomy.”²¹⁵ However, Sobrepena argued that “the real spirit of this section is to make secure independence and local option in congregational affairs,”²¹⁶ and must be interpreted in the light of the provision for congregations to ‘follow their customary practices and worship.’ Moreover, it serves as “an expression of an effort to make secure for the total church a reasonable degree of co-ordination.”²¹⁷ The same could be said of the similar provision in the By-Laws.

On the Call of Pastor

To make a call for pastors (a), to conduct its worship life (f), are rights and privileges of the Local Church, including electing delegates to the Conference and other bodies. Of these three, the call of pastor causes much tension.²¹⁸

In strict form of congregationalism, the call of a Pastor is complete, meaning, when a local church calls a Pastor, and the call is accepted by the Pastor, the call is complete. But not so in the UCCP. The local church (through a Church Worker’s Call Committee) will send a request to the Conference (through the Conference Settlement Committee); and the

²¹⁴ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 35.

²¹⁵ Sobrepena, *That They May Be One*, 86.

²¹⁶ Sobrepena, 86.

²¹⁷ Sobrepena, 86.

²¹⁸ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 29.

Conference *recommends* the Pastor to the local church based on the stated needs of the local church. If the congregation *confirms* and the church worker *accepts* the call, the call and assignment of the Pastor is successfully done.²¹⁹ Unlike the Methodists whose Pastors are appointed by the Bishop; in the UCCP, it is the local church that calls a Pastor.

This has some important implications to the autonomy of the local church and the inviolability of a valid call. The National Commission on Conflict Resolution (NCCR) produced a ruling that the Conference Council (or for that matter, the Settlement Committee) has no authority to “recall” or to “rescind” a call which had been made on a pastor. As the call of the Local Church for the service of a Pastor is a *right*, it cannot be subordinated to a decision or recommendation of the Settlement Committee or of any other committee of the Conference, unless the call itself is not valid.²²⁰ Nor the Conference or its Settlement Committee invalidate a valid call based on complaints coming from some members of the congregation. Such complaints should be dealt with in the manner provided for in the Bylaws (Art. VI and VII).

As the right to make a valid call is a vested right belonging exclusively to the Local Church –only the Local Church may rescind, overturn, or reconsider the same (Ruling, NCCR Case NO. 02-003, Sept. 6, 2003).²²¹ Moreover, assignment of a Pastor who has already been granted a valid call cannot be withheld by issues of installation. Vital as it is, the Conference role “to install ministers in their respective assignments” (Art. VI, Sec. 4e)²²²

²¹⁹ “Magna Carta for Church Workers” (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 2008), 26–27.

²²⁰ A call may be considered not valid under the following circumstances: non-acceptance by the pastor, lack of congregational confirmation, the pastor had already served beyond the maximum number of terms allowed for pastoral service in a local church.

²²¹ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 131.

²²² *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 11.

cannot be made an instrument to withhold a pastor's assignment (Ruling, NCCR Case NO. 02-003, Sept. 6, 2003).²²³

On the Management of Properties

Most of the local churches of the UCCP own and acquire properties like church building and lot, other facilities and equipment like furniture, etc. The Constitution and By-Laws provide that the management and maintenance, as well as disposal of these properties belong to the sphere of local church autonomy through the Board of Trustees²²⁴ (or the Church Council) of a particular local church. This particular provision also fall under the *Duties and Functions of the Congregation* (Article V, Section 8, item *c* of the Amended Constitution).²²⁵ But where real properties are involved, like selling a portion of the local church lot, consent from the General Assembly is required.

Moreover, the local church is provided with the privilege of using particular name, as long as it bears with it the name UCCP²²⁶ (Art. I Sec. 2), i.e. Don Graciano Memorial Church, United Church of Christ in the Philippines. A section for incorporation of local churches and other Church bodies is also provided as long as prior approval of the General Assembly is secured. It is also provided that “all real properties may be held by the Local Churches, Church bodies, or Church Institutions, in trust for the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (Art. IX, Sec. 1).²²⁷

Furthermore, in case of local church operated prep-school, the workers are accountable to “whichever authorities that called/hired them.” Those whose services are

²²³ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 132.

²²⁴ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 34.

²²⁵ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 8.

²²⁶ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 5.

²²⁷ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 19.

hired by a local church, without the participation of the conference in their recruitment or assignment, they are accountable to the Board of Christian Educators of the local church as far as the education program of the school is concerned and generally, to the local church council for operation and management (NCCR Opinion No. 01-007, Oct. 22, 2001).²²⁸ This demonstrate the autonomy of the local church in running its own programs and ministries.

On Wider Mission Support

It is the policy of the church that all local churches shall provide financial support to the Wider Church Mission. Stated in the policy guideline, the local church shall set aside 22 percent of its actual gross collections every month for Wider Mission support. It will be remitted to the Conference and allocated as follows: 13 percent out of 22 percent goes to the Conference for its operations, and the remaining 9 percent goes to the National.²²⁹

This is the Local Church's obligation to wider bodies which should be included in its budget and financial program, and mandated in the Constitution and By-Laws (Art. V, Sec.4i, Constitution and Article III, Section 2d of the By-Laws). Wider mission support demonstrates the local churches commitment to the unity of the church, hence, it is an obligation, a duty. It is based on the conviction that the work of the church extends beyond the community of the local church. Through the wider mission support, the local churches are able to participate in the various ministries done by the conference and the national body. Though it is an obligation, it is an act of generosity and freedom on the part of the local church to share some of its needed resources so that the other bodies can function also. So

²²⁸ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 130.

²²⁹ "Stewardship: A Way of Life" (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 2003), 39.

when local churches withhold their Wider Mission Support, the operation of the wider judicatories is not only affected, UCCP’s unity is also diminished.

All those points discussed above show that UCCP does not have a complete autonomy of the congregation. It is because UCCP’s polity is a combination of the three polities – Congregational, Presbyterian, and Episcopal. The local church, however, according to the constitution is autonomous in the whole life situation of the local. Bishop Camba said, “the General Assembly does not interfere in the affairs of the local church. If there is a ruling, it is agreed upon because the local church is represented in the General Assembly.”²³⁰

Case Studies on How Local Church Autonomy Operates in the UCCP

This part takes into account the local autonomy as exercised by each participant local church, and how each local church relates to the higher judicatories of the UCCP. A brief background will be provided for each participant local church; to be followed by identifying local initiatives, such as programs and missions, and lastly the ways in which they relate with the higher judicatories of the UCCP.

A. UCCP Dumaguete Church Silliman Avenue Extension Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental

Background:²³¹

The story of Dumaguete City Church is related to the story of Silliman Institute. Its early missionaries, yearning to spread the word of God not only in academic setting, yet conscious of a language barrier, requested a Cebuano preacher to come to Dumaguete. The Rev. Angel Sotto from Cebu was sent to Dumaguete, and he founded the Dumaguete Church which inaugurated on July 08, 1906 (in the corner in Escolta, now Perdices St.). There was only one church in

²³⁰ Camba, Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP.

²³¹ “Handumanan Sa Pagtoo” (Dumaguete City UCCP, 2016), 21–26.

Dumaguete then, for both Sillimanians and the town's people; until in 1916, Rev. Smith initiated the creation of two congregations: The Dumaguete Town Church and the Silliman Church.

The Dumaguete Town Church grew in number and in various ministries. In the 50's it founded the Rosebud Kindergarten; and launched the Church Reconstruction Fund Campaign. With the money they raised and the grant from the General Assembly, the church was able to buy the Buchanan property along Silliman Avenue extension, the present site of the Dumaguete City Church.

The Dumaguete City Church had its tumultuous years in the 1980s (1984-86). It was due to the influx of Pentecostal style of worship which divided the members into two factions: one group embraced the Pentecostal style of worship (as influenced by the Pastor); while the other group don't feel comfortable with such style. It resulted into two separate congregations, and eventual split, with the Pentecostal faction leaving the church. The situation was aggravated when the latter tried to padlock the church, denying the other congregation the use of the sanctuary for worship.

The Dumaguete City Church has moved on from the split and continued its ministry and mission for 112 years. Presently, aside from its regular worship services, Bible studies and outreach programs, it is involved in various ministries and locally initiated programs and projects, to name a few:

- a. It operated an Early Childhood School, the UCCP Learning Center, Inc. (DULCI).
- b. It organized *Tahas: Atong Dangpanan, Inc.*, an advocacy for Anti-Trafficking of Women and Children
- c. It organized the Youth Advocate for Negros Oriental (YANO), a youth theatre art group of the church which serves as information campaign arm of the Church advocacy. It performs during conferences, church worships and other public events...
- d. It initiated its own project campaign fund like, "One Day Salary for the Lord's Temple" for renovation of sanctuary roof
- e. It has its locally initiated property development project which proceeds help financed DULCI, *Tahas: Atong Dangpanan*, help support NDC Church workers, among others.

Dumaguete City Church maintained its relationship with Negros District Conference and the wider judicatories of the UCCP by:

- a. Faithfully giving its 22 percent wider mission support
- b. It is willing to support the NDC in whatever capacity, like, hosting different NDC conferences, institutes, music festivals, meetings; giving support to the church workers by providing uniforms, etc.
- c. Generally, it is responsive/supportive to the programs of the National body channeled through the Conference.

B. UCCP Valencia
North Poblacion, Valencia
Negros Oriental

Background:

UCCP Valencia is a local church which was organized in 1912 through the American Missionary Rev. William Smith. In this year, he baptized three men (heads of the family) who with their families became the first members of the Presbyterian Church in Valencia. Through the years, the congregation grew through the services and ministry of different missionaries and ministers, both foreign and local. Starting in the 1920's students of Silliman Bible School, now the Divinity School, become involved in the ministry of the church through the Field Education program.

The local church came to its present location in a lot donated by the Dagooc family in 1940. The Dagooc became part of the church in the 1930s. As of this writing, Valencia UCCP celebrates its 107th founding anniversary. It has a membership record of 322 members with 120 to 140 average church goers every Sunday.

Valencia UCCP holds a yearly program planning retreat to discern and evaluate the various ministries of the local church. Aside from its regular worship services and various programs based on the program thrust of the UCCP, it is also involved in outreach programs and locally initiated projects:

- a. It has a regular outreach programs for the mentally challenged in Talay;
- b. It owns a cemetery in a lot donated by the Mapula family (one of the first 3 converts). The cemetery also serves the congregation of Camplook-out, Malabo and Cambukad. In January 2007, the policies of the use of the cemetery was approved by the congregation together with the representatives from the neighboring congregations.
- c. It launched its own church development plan through the local CSRD
- d. It initiated a livelihood program in 2012 (Canadian funded).

UCCP Valencia maintains its relationship with Negros District Conference by doing the following:

- a. Faithfully giving its wider mission support (among the top 5).
- b. Host different church gatherings like circuit and conference wide fellowships and conferences, choir festivals, youth conference (2018 Christmas Con).
- c. It also sends delegates to the various conferences and actively joins fellowship with other local churches in the area.
- d. Generally, it is responsive/supportive to the programs of the National body channeled through the Conference.

- C. United Church of Christ in the Philippines
Don Graciano Lozada Memorial Church
Polo, Tanjay City, Negros Oriental

Background:

Polo United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Don Graciano Lozada Memorial Church started as an outreach of UCCP Tanjay during the pastoral term of Rev. Angel Sotto in Tanjay UCCP. It was Don Graciano Lozada Sr. who initiated the construction of a chapel in Polo for the people in the area. Before he died he told his children to continue what he had started. Eventually, after he died, his children decided to build a church in his memory. It was in the 60s that the church was built in its present location and form. Since it was still an outreach of Tanjay UCCP, the Pastors serving the congregation were pastors assigned in Tanjay UCCP, its mother Church.

Finally, in June 23, 1991, the congregation decided to apply for a local church status and was approved. Polo UCCP, Don Graciano Memorial Church was recognized as an organized local church. From then on, they were able to call and support their own pastor, plan their programs based on the program thrust of the UCCP, adopt their own budget, and launched their own fund campaign for church renovation. Presently, the church records 167 members from 27 families, served by a full time resident/administrative Pastor.

UCCP Don Graciano Lozada Memorial Church maintains its relationship with Negros District Conference by doing the following:

- a. Faithfully giving their 22 percent assessment,
- b. Sends delegates to the Conference
- c. actively participates in circuit and conference-wide activities

D. Silliman University Church
Silliman University Campus
Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental

Background:

Silliman University Church is a campus church of Silliman University, established as an integral part of the educational curriculum at the time of the founding of Silliman Institute in 1901 by the Board of Foreign Missions of the Presbyterian Church in the USA. It was formally organized into a campus church in 1916 to offer and provide ministry to Silliman University students, faculty and staff and their dependents, alumni, and friends and neighbors, regardless of their denominational and religious affiliations. The Church has served as the university's principal arm in infusing its foundational faith-claims and proclamation.

The church operates under the organizational, institutional, and legal auspices of Silliman University, but maintains an active ecclesiastical relationship with the UCCP through the Negros District Conference of the UCCP. It subscribed to the UCCP Statement of Faith. But its life and ministry is governed by its own Church Manual. The Church Manual is crafted to fit to the context of a University setting. But “any changes/difference in the manual from the UCCP Constitution and By-Laws have been mutually agreed upon by Silliman University Church, the Silliman University BOT and the UCCP, as being necessary to make Silliman University Church a special UCCP ministry of Silliman University for its faculty, staff, students and alumni and their families, friends, and neighbors.”²³²

The Church Manual's General Principles of Order and Governance provides that Silliman University Church and its administration shall ensure that:

²³² “Church Manual,” in *Silliman University Manual* (Silliman University, n.d.), 137.

- a. Within the University, it shall have the ability to make independent prophetic and liturgical proclamation and shall be able to conduct its ministries and functions as it deems fit and fitting of a Christian pastorate.
- b. With the University, it is able to fulfill its covenantal obligations and responsibilities to the wider works and missions of the UCCP through the Negros District Conference (NDC) and the wider UCCP Judicatories.²³³

Silliman University Church's ministry is varied and far reaching – it ministers not only to the students, faculty and friends of Silliman, but reaches out to depressed communities, rehabilitation centers, among others. It also maintains its covenantal duty to Negros District Conference and participates in fellowships and conferences.

The study presented four types of UCCP local churches: a big city church (Dumaguete City Church); a regular town church (UCCP Valencia); a small rural/barangay church (UCCP Don Graciano Lozada Memorial Church); and a big University Church (the Silliman University Church). The things they all have in common is that they all enjoy the rights and privileges of a recognized local church, namely: a) to conduct its worship life; b) to make a call for pastor/s; c) to elect delegates to and be represented at the Conference and higher church bodies. Each local church sustains its life and work by its own resources and gifts of the Holy Spirit; and manages its own affairs, although each church differs in scope and forms of ministry depending upon their context and location.

It appears that the bigger the church, the bigger the scope of their ministry; and the more resources the local church have, the more liberty they have to engage in different forms of programs and missions. The above observation might be true but the truth of the matter is

²³³ "Church Manual," in *Silliman University Manual* (Silliman University), 138–39.

that, the context shaped the church's approach, form and content of missionary activities. As Bishop Camba puts it, "The context is very important; the mission and ministry of the church is done in the local area where the church is. Every church has a different area, different context; so what you have in the urban area will be different from the rural area."²³⁴

For instance, Silliman University Church, because of its university setting is more autonomous in terms of making decisions on internal ecclesiastical matters, define its ministerial and pastoral direction, and raise operational resources. Such autonomy is important because the church has to specifically respond to its context and has to employ effective means to integrate its programs into the total life of the university. In that way, the church becomes an effective instrument through which the university fulfill its responsibilities to the spiritual life of the university community.

The autonomy of these local churches is not absolute. While they are free to conduct their own internal affairs, they are at the same time conscious of a "covenant relationship" with the other judicatories of the church -- like the Conference and the National level. This is manifested in the way they pattern their local ministries based on the program thrust of whole UCCP, and adapt the same to their specific context; and by faithfully fulfilling their obligation to the wider judicatories of the church through the Wider Mission Support. Even Silliman University Church which claimed to be more autonomous compared to the other local churches in the UCCP is conscious of this relationship and accepts a kind of "covenantal obligation and responsibilities to the other bodies of the UCCP through the Negros District Conference of the UCCP."²³⁵ All of those things mentioned above show how autonomy works in the UCCP.

²³⁴ Camba, Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP.

²³⁵ "Church Manual," 39.

CHAPTER IV

MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF LOCAL AUTONOMY IN THE UCCP

The place of local church autonomy in the UCCP is so important not only in terms of church order and governance, most specially, it holds significant implications to the missional nature of the church. The third article of the UCCP Statement of Faith states: “**We believe**, that the Church is the one Body of Christ, the whole community of persons reconciled to God through Jesus Christ and entrusted with God's ministry;”²³⁶ expresses both the ecclesiological and missiological understanding of the church. It affirmed the inseparability of *church* and *mission* resonating the popular saying of Emil Brunner, “The Church exists by mission, just as a fire exists by burning.”²³⁷ This expresses the conviction that *mission Dei* is the breath that gives life to the church.

In line with this, the UCCP affirmed that it is the local church or congregation which acts as the primary bearer of mission; that “the universal church finds its true existence in the local church;” and that, “the mission and ministry of the universal church is carried out universally through the particularity of the local church.”²³⁸ It is in this account that the UCCP upholds the autonomy of the Local Church²³⁹ and envisions a “responsible, empowered, self-reliant and caring community of Christian believers committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all.”²⁴⁰

²³⁶ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 2.

²³⁷ From the *Word and the World* by Emil Brunner (1931), p. 108 quoted in Quote: *The Relationship Between Church and Mission*. <https://www.missionalchallenge.com/quote-the-relationship-between-church-and-mission/>

²³⁸ “Magna Carta for Church Workers,” 2.

²³⁹ Art. 3, Sec. 27, *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 35.

²⁴⁰ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals,” 19.

Missional Implications of Local Church Autonomy

Having thus described the indispensable role of the local church in mission, let us turn to its implications:

a. Local Initiatives for Missions

It refers to local initiatives for missions (plural). The word “initiative” covers a range of meaning from judgment, to the ability to take action; hence, the ability to assess, and initiate things independently (Cambridge online dictionary). In a local church setting, initiative would refer to the ability to discern and respond to God’s call. “Missions” (*missiones ecclesiae*: the missionary ventures of the church), is the church’s participation in the *mission Dei*, and refer to particular forms, related to specific times, places, or needs.²⁴¹ Hence, local initiative for missions means, the church capacity to develop plans based on their specific needs and context; making “mission as both its originating impulse and its organizing principle.”²⁴² It entails some degree of freedom on the part of the local church.

The “priesthood of all believers” is the principle that would support this claim. The priesthood of all believers is a loud call of freedom -- freedom of the church from the tyranny of the pope, freedom of the laity from dominance of the clergy, freedom of the conscience from the strictures of the canon law and human traditions.²⁴³ Consequently, this revolutionary call toppled many traditional church structures, and transferred the mantle of spiritual authority from the educated clergy to the most humble of Christians who read the Bible for themselves...²⁴⁴ It is based on the conviction that, “It is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error. A

²⁴¹ Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 10.

²⁴² Hirsch, “Defining Missional,” 2.

²⁴³ Witte, “The Legacy of the Protestant Reformation in Modern Law,” 1.

²⁴⁴ Raschke, “The 500th Anniversary of the Reformation -- Where Is Martin Luther When We Need Him?”

cobbler, a smith, a peasant—each has the work and office of his trade, and yet they are all alike consecrated priests and bishops.”²⁴⁵ Everyone’s contribution for kingdom building is recognized as equal in dignity, whether lay or clergy.

This Reformation also becomes the motivation of missions in both the Reformed and the Lutheran traditions.²⁴⁶ The traditional division between priest or pastor and lay people, who are the true priesthood (1 Peter 2:9), has been broken down so that all who confess Christ as Lord are “priests’ and called to a missional vocation (Eph. 4: 1-2).

b. Equipped and Empowered Membership

Local autonomy is both a duty and a right that carries with it a corresponding tremendous responsibility for the church and its members. That responsibility involves knowing the heritage of faith and commitment of the church and to participate actively in decision making. Knowing is one of the three dimensions of the life-work (Being-Knowing-Doing) of the UCCP as a faith community.²⁴⁷ Knowing is integral to the Being and Doing of the Church. It “involves the whole task of the church to equip itself with the necessary knowledge about the faith, its history and traditions, along with the necessary skills for its mission task, the necessary education for the nurture of its own people” among others.²⁴⁸

It is important to note that the Primer to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals declared, “it is the entire people in the church who needs to be equipped for the mission of

²⁴⁵ Jordan J. Ballor, “The Political Implications of Luther’s ‘Priesthood Of All Believers,’” 2017, <https://politicaltheology.com/the-political-implications-of-luthers-priesthood-of-all-believers-jordan-j-ballor/>.

²⁴⁶ Timothy A. Van Aarde, “The Missional Church Structure and the Priesthood of All Believers (Ephesians 4:7-16) in the Light of the Inward and Outward Function of the Church,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 38, no. 1 (2017): 1, <https://doi.org/104102/ve.v38i1.1709>.

²⁴⁷ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals,” 21.

²⁴⁸ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals,” 22.

the church,” and not just its leaders. It claimed that for the church to be able to live its life in mission, it has to be empowered to do the task.²⁴⁹

This points to the significant place of the education program of the local church. But it’s not like any other education, for it must be “rooted more than ever on the Scriptures, illumined by its own theological traditions as a church and responsive always to the challenges of our contemporary situation.”²⁵⁰ Like the way Israel educated its own people by enabling them to realize God’s gift of a new and alternative society for them, this education program of our church should be geared towards that vision of a transformed society.²⁵¹

Additionally, as the autonomy of the local church is exercised relative to the other judicatories of the church, it would mean exercising the freedom to listen, evaluate, decide and act through the highest exercise of rationality. So that whatever mission initiative the local church produces, it truly is in accord with the church’s heritage and commitment and at the same time responsive to the needs of the time and context. UCC Mission Statement Together Towards Life (TTL) had this to say:

Local congregations are frontiers and primary agents of mission. Like the early church in the book of acts, local churches have the privilege of forming a community marked by the presence of the risen Christ. Therefore, local congregations must take on new initiatives like exploring contextual ways of being a church in response to the needs arising from the changes taking place in society.²⁵²

Consequently, local initiative in doing mission produces mature churches. It builds a sense of ownership and stability which build a sense of confidence; whereas, dependency and reliance on outside support weakens any movement.

²⁴⁹ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals,” 22.

²⁵⁰ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals,” 22.

²⁵¹ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals,” 22.

²⁵² “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscape,” 12.

c. Localized Responsibility for Mission

It is the local church taking the responsibility in the mission work; in other words, the local church doing mission and supporting the same. It allows the local church to be responsive to the needs/mission mandate in the local context and according to its means.

Freeman argued that:

...only the local body stands in its place in its time... it cannot ask others to make its decision for it. Others may be able to do with, but they cannot do for...It would be wise to turn to others for counsel, critique and support, or in some cases collaborate, and that is the most that others could offer. For although others stand in the same time, they do not stand in exactly the same place.²⁵³

This is echoed by our bishops Camba and Dominguez that in terms of mission, *local decisions* and actions are very important because they would relate to where the church is.²⁵⁴ Every church has a different area, different context, so what we have in the urban area is different from what we have in the Barangays or rural areas. Every mission initiative must respond to the needs in a given context.

Additionally, localized responsibility in mission is an affirmation that every Christian is called of God to a life of faith and service, and “commissioned for this task at the time of baptism.”²⁵⁵ Meaning that the ministry of the church is one in which each Christian is called of God. Mission engages everyone in the Christian community. Thus, within the church, the Spirit give gifts to believers to be witnesses in different ways.

Paul wrote the Corinthians that there are “different kinds of gifts, but the same spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work” (1 Cor. 12:4-

²⁵³ Freeman, “Autonomy: An Interpretation for the United Church of Christ,” 20.

²⁵⁴ Camba, Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP. Also Benito Dominguez, Face-to-Face Interview, January 29, 2019.

²⁵⁵ Alston, *The Church of the Living God: A Reformed Perspective*, 86.

6). God gives gift of people with their various abilities so that “the body of Christ may be built up in love, as each part does its work (Eph. 4:16). Hence, local church is to be God’s servant people, ministering actively but humbly according to their gifts.

Finally, local responsibility in mission means the local church being *incarnational in its witness* to the community. Howard A. Snyder, Chair of Wesley Studies in Toronto, Canada, define incarnated witness to mean the “visible demonstration of the reality of the body of Christ wherever we are.”²⁵⁶ For Timothy A. Van Aarde, “It is the church actively reaching out to its neighborhood that it will be recognized as a relevant presence in the community.”²⁵⁷

By becoming an incarnated witness, the message becomes “inextricably bound up with the messenger;” which means to say that “mission is integral to who we are” as a local church.²⁵⁸ The inherent missional character can be seen in the very foundation and constitution of the people of Israel. They were constituted at Sinai to be missional as a Kingdom of Priests, a Holy nation to the surrounding nations (Ex. 19:3-6). Israel embodied the message of redemption. In the same way, “we are not commanded simply to proclaim a message, but to embody it as witnesses.”²⁵⁹

The incarnational nature of mission changes us from just thinking about how to do mission to reflecting on how we can be more incarnational, and thus, adequately missional.²⁶⁰ The church, being missional in its very character, also corrects our tendency to understand mission as a task rather than as the nature of the church.

²⁵⁶ Snyder, “The Missional Church and Missional Life.”

²⁵⁷ Van Aarde, “The Missional Church Structure and the Priesthood of All Believers (Ephesians 4:7-16) in the Light of the Inward and Outward Function of the Church,” 2.

²⁵⁸ Laing, “Missio Dei: Some Implications for the Church,” 95.

²⁵⁹ Laing, 95.

²⁶⁰ Laing, 95.

d. Timeliness

Closely related to localized responsibility is its *discernment of timeliness*. According to Freeman, “a correlative virtue of this localization of responsibility for ministry is the ability of autonomous ministries to be timely;”²⁶¹ meaning, it is able to respond or to take initiative when the time is ripe or when the need arises. Timeliness has a nature of discernment, to discern the moment and act/minister accordingly.²⁶²

However, the way churches reach out to their communities sometimes raises issues. Often, churches adopt paternalistic welfare models, that is, doing things for communities, rather than with them, treating people as passive recipients of their compassion rather than as co-workers involved in a common task. Studies show that such approaches may help immediate need, but in the long-term may simply reinforce dependency.²⁶³ All too frequently also, the church is known for proclaiming answers, and often to questions the community is not asking.

Acquisition of skills of discernment and analysis in looking at and studying the social context is thus important. But equally important, or even more, is the church being with the community. For as the church begins to listen to their communities, and ask them what they think and what could be done together, a change in the dynamic of the relationship would eventually come. The church learns to value and appreciate the community; the community begins to see the church as a caring community, motivated by love.²⁶⁴ The result would be a seed of transformation breaking in for both the church and the community.

²⁶¹ Freeman, “Autonomy: An Interpretation for the United Church of Christ,” 21.

²⁶² Freeman, 21.

²⁶³ Raistrick, “The Local Church, Transforming Community,” 144.

²⁶⁴ Raistrick, 148.

e. Mutuality and Interdependence

Mutuality and interdependence exist because UCCP is a covenanting community. Each local church is in a covenant relationship with the wider church bodies and in covenant fellowship with other local churches. This covenantal nature of the UCCP is expressed in the ***Prayer*** at the beginning of the church's Constitution and By-Laws. A portion of that prayer is as follow:

O gracious God, behold your people. You have called us to remain *in covenant with you and with one another*. From the beginning you have always been the solid foundation of the Church. Your providence has been our shelter in the storms of life; your strength our stay as we pursue the vision of our founding parents for a united and uniting, reformed and transforming Church. You have given us diversity of heritage in our union - which has enriched our capacity for witness and reconciliation as a community of faith. As we *renew this covenant*, may your Spirit guide us into greater sensitivity, openness of hearts and minds, and a truly creative response to the challenges of our time; May the guidance, blessing and the empowering presence of your Son, Jesus Christ, be upon us, even as we *strive to be faithful to the true spirit of the covenant* we today have forged anew.²⁶⁵

While the independence of the local congregation in the UCCP is inalienable, that independence never exist theologically outside of the covenant binding the whole church together. On that account, Dr. Everette L. Mendoza, retired Professor of Theology at the Divinity School of Silliman University, in talking about the UCCP context said, “the essence of the local congregation as a church ... diminished outside the sphere of the national organization in that without a covenant fellowship with other local churches, as in a Conference, it loses the Church's essential mark of Catholicity and Apostolicity.”²⁶⁶

In the same manner, Crabtree in speaking about UCC-USA context argues that based on the “authority of Christ over the church ... no local church can be understood to exist by

²⁶⁵ *Amended Constitution and By-Laws, Magna Carta for Church Workers and Jurisprudence*, 3.

²⁶⁶ Everette L. Mendoza, “A Theology of Church Government” (unpublished paper, 2017).

itself, but always in organic relationship with the rest of the body of Christ.” Thus, “covenant is not an option, but given in the nature of the church for a united witness to the world.”²⁶⁷

The major implication is that we are called to live and do mission mutually and interdependently, between the different judicatories of the church and among the different local churches. Given the fact of UCCP’s context of great diversity, this means working hard to see things from others’ points of view, respecting, honoring, and learning from the diversities of gifts, various contexts, needs and expressions. This, will actually build and nurture a community reflective of the Triune God and will make an amazing witness to the world.

PC-USA mission-focused form of government provides us with example as to how the different constituents work together /interdependently as they seek to be Christ’s church. For them “the congregation is a church engaged in the mission of God in its particular context;” membership is a joy and a privilege, and “a commitment to participate in Christ’s mission; Councils like sessions, presbyteries, synods and the General Assembly exist “to help congregations and the whole church be more faithful participants in Christ’s mission;” in administration “mission determines the forms and structures needed for the church to do its work;” while property is “a tool for the accomplishment of the mission of Jesus Christ in the world.”²⁶⁸

Being missional then is the church’s very character. The local church itself is being sent into the world: a pilgrim people of God, who draw others to worship the Triune God and mediate his love to the world. Mission, then is not a mere compartment of the church

²⁶⁷ Crabtree, “The Vocation of Autonomy in the United Church of Christ,” 60.

²⁶⁸ “The Missional Church and the New Form of Government: Building a Community of Faith, Hope, Love and Witness, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.),” 2.

nor can be reduced to one program of the church. The local church itself is the church in mission. The local church is the people of God in time and space. In each local context the people of God are the footprint of the church universal.²⁶⁹

Kathy Galloway, as referred to by Raistrick, brings a sociological perspective on the role the local church can play in bringing about values and worldview change. She claimed:

“Local churches have a strong symbolic framework which is part of its ongoing life. Week by week, church members meet, remind themselves who they are, take an audit of their personal and corporate failures and achievements, assume responsibility for their failures (confession), are released from being defined by their failures, give thanks for good things, intentionally call to mind the needs and suffering of others, and commit themselves in caring ways for the realization of the vision...”²⁷⁰

As a church we find our life and our vocation within the mission of God. It is with God’s mission within us that we find meaning. We are called to live under and live out that mission. The priority of God’s mission is operationally important in determining the church program, in making decisions, and in discerning the best use of one another’s gifts. So as the church strive to participate in the mission of God towards abundant life, the church must pause to discern whether what they plan to do and do are in fact consistent with our mission as determined by the mission of God.

Finally, it has to be stated here that the church’s respective missions must be rooted in the *missio Dei* if they have to have validity. As Laing pointed out, “There is only one mission, God’s, and our varied missions – if they are to have authenticity and be imbued with a life from the Holy Spirit—must be aligned to the *missio Dei*.”²⁷¹ Bosch also said “We cannot claim that what we do is identical to the *missio Dei*: our missionary activities are only authentic insofar as they reflect participation in the mission of God.”²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Laing, “Missio Dei: Some Implications for the Church,” 91.

²⁷⁰ Raistrick, “The Local Church, Transforming Community,” 141–42.

²⁷¹ Laing, “Missio Dei: Some Implications for the Church,” 93.

²⁷² Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 391.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

This is basically a study about the relationship between ecclesiology and missiology in the specific context of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. This study was undertaken to address the gap in the understanding of the autonomy of the local church and its missional implications. It proceeds from a conviction that the more the church understands its nature, the more it gets hold of its vocation.

The UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy cannot be separated from its heritage coming from the various denominations of different historical backgrounds, ecclesiastical formations and theological traditions which united to form one United Church in 1948. It is a product of a long process of understanding, accepting and settling their diversities to arrive at a mutually acceptable basis of union in 1948. This Basis of Union became the fundamental declaration of faith and plan of government of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. The Basis of Union demonstrate an inclusive spirit reaching a common ground for union. Local church autonomy for every congregation, so well preserved in the Baptist, Congregationalists and the Disciples has been safeguarded in the Basis of Union. Moreover, freedom was granted to the various congregations of the uniting churches to follow their heritage of faith, and their customary practices and worship.

The first section studies the biblical and theological basis of UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy. As inherited from the Reformation, firstly, it holds that the Local Church is the basic unit of the church. "Where the Word is proclaimed rightly and the

sacraments rightly administered, there is the church.”²⁷³ The local church is where the universal church finds its true existence. Secondly, the local church is the locus of mission. Whatever mission or ministry the local church has become the corporate mission of the whole church. It is a democratic process from the bottoms-up, not from the top-down. Thirdly, the church as a Trinitarian community – whose existence is based on what God has done, is doing now, and will do through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is a kind of community which is “essentially social and relational, bound together by mutual and self-giving love, whereby, it acts in opposition to hierarchy. It draws insights from New Testament models of the early Christian communities, how they structure their lives and fulfill the mission. The early church was a missional and closely-knitted community that exercised independent decision-making in matters affecting the church’s life and ministry, with the presence of leadership in each local church.

The second section studies about how autonomy operates in the UCCP. This is done by studying the Constitution and By-Laws and other documents and by the study conducted in the participant local churches. The readiness and the capability of a certain congregation to *conduct its life, ministry and administrative affairs*, is a precondition before a congregation can be given due recognition as a local church. Both in the Constitution and By-Laws and in the practice of the local churches, the kind of autonomy granted to each local church is quite unique. As UCCP polity combined the elements from the church governments of the uniting bodies -- the autonomy and democracy of the Disciples and the Congregationalists, the representative authority of the Presbyterians and the connectionism of the Methodists,’ it also produced a kind of autonomy that is hybridized. The autonomy of the local churches is not

²⁷³ “The Augsburg Confession.”

absolute. While they are free to conduct their own internal affairs, they are at the same time conscious of a “covenant relationship” with the other judicatories of the church -- like the Conference and the National level. This is manifested in the way they pattern their local ministries based on the program thrust of whole UCCP, and adapt the same to their specific context; and by faithfully fulfilling their obligation to the wider judicatories of the church through the Wider Mission Support.

The third section discusses the missional implications of local church autonomy. It is drawn from the conviction that the local church or congregation is the primary bearer of mission; that “the universal church finds its true existence in the local church;” and that, “the mission and ministry of the universal church is carried out universally through the particularity of the local church.”²⁷⁴ The implications of these are as follows:

a. *Local Initiatives for Missions* which refers to the church independent ability to discern and respond to God’s call; its capacity to develop plans based on specific needs and context; making mission its originating impulse and organizing principle.

b. *Equipped and Empowered Membership* which points to the significant place of the education program of the local church; an education for the entire people in the church that is rooted on the Scriptures, illumined by its own theological traditions, and responsive to the challenges of contemporary situation. For the church to be able to live its life in mission, it has to be empowered to do the task.

c. *Localized Responsibility for Mission* on the basis that only the local body stands in its place in its time and it cannot ask others to make its decision for it. It allows the local church to be responsive to the needs/mission mandate in the local context and according to its means.

²⁷⁴ “Magna Carta for Church Workers,” 2.

It also means becoming an incarnated witness, the church becoming an embodiment of the message.

d. *Timeliness* it is able to respond or to take initiative when the time is ripe or when the need arises. Timeliness has a nature of discernment, to discern the moment and act/minister accordingly

e. *Mutuality and Interdependence.* It is affirming the fact that while the independence of the local congregation in the UCCP is inalienable, that independence never exist theologically outside of the covenant binding the whole church together. It also entails living and doing mission mutually and interdependently to be able to build and nurture a community reflective of the Triune God and become an amazing witness to the world.

CONCLUSION

The nature of the church is essentially missional – the church cannot be separated from the mission (*mission Dei*) because it is the church’s reason for being. The church may take organizational forms and structure to achieve some degree of order, but even then, they are at the service of mission. Shenk argued “the organizational forms taken by the church must be subject both to her purpose and mission as well as to the leading of the holy spirit.”²⁷⁵ For this same reason, the founding parents of UCCP worked so hard to accomplish church unity for the sake of the church mission and witness in the Philippines.

UCCP adheres to the conviction that the local church is the basic unit of the church and the primary bearer of mission. It thus accepts the indispensable role of the local church in mission. As such it declares to uphold the autonomy of the Local Church, particularly as

²⁷⁵ Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission*.

to its right and power to conduct its ministry. As the church in time and place the autonomy granted to each local church serves well to further God's mission as it empowers the local church to discern and respond to God's call to mission that is responsive to its time and location.

Moreover, the practice of local autonomy carries with it tremendous responsibility. Firstly, it must not depart from the heritage which gave it form. The church lives its life in the present as a sign or embodiment of the gospel and as an instrument of God's mission. It has to look back always to its heritage in order to remain guided by the richness of its historic traditions and by the lessons that its history conveys to the present. And with this navigate forward to the vision of a transformed church and society towards an abundant life for all of God's creation.

Secondly, local autonomy involves a covenant obligation with the wider judicatories and other local churches. Aside from living and doing mission interdependently, it also means learning from, respecting and honoring the diversities of gifts, contexts and needs, in such a way that would enhance a wider community reflective of the Triune God.

Thirdly, it must bear in mind the responsibility of being equipped with the education rooted on the Scriptures, illumined by its own theological traditions, and responsive to the challenges of contemporary situation.

Finally, it must internalize the truth that being missional is the church's very character and that the local church itself is the church in mission. It is in the mission of God that the local church finds meaning in its existence. As such, the priority of God's mission is important in determining the church program, in making decisions, and in discerning the best use of one another's gifts. Once this is internalized, we can be assured that the local church is alive and is a positive and transformative presence in its local community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the indispensable role of local church autonomy in the fulfillment of the mission the church is called to do, the following are the researcher's recommendations:

First, that the UCCP Formation Centers would include as one of its subject offerings a specific study on UCCP church history and polity, intentionally incorporating in it a strengthened study of local church autonomy in the UCCP and its missional implications. This could be offered as a pre-requisite subject to all UCCP seminary students: for B. Th. before going into the "proper" years of theological education; and for M. Div. in the beginning of their theological education. This study is especially helpful to the seminary students as they are preparing and looking forward to having a local church assignment after schooling. In one way or another, this may help them to tend and equip the local church to understand its nature and mission; it may also broaden their understanding on the issues affecting the relationship between the local church and the wider judicatories and thus prepare them to make informed decisions that would benefit the entire church. To make the subject a pre-requisite at the beginning of the seminary years would affirm its value as a foundational subject every UCCP minister must take.

Second, that the Wider judicatories of the UCCP – the Conference and National, and the national bodies of Church Recognized Organizations (UCWO, UCM, CWA, CYF, CYAF) strengthen their task of helping provide education and empowerment to its constituents, intentionally including the local autonomy of the church and its missional implications in their Continuing Theological Education (CTE) and Seminars. As local autonomy entails knowing and being equipped to carry the task, by doing so the church may fulfill its vision of an "*empowered, responsible and self-reliant* community of Christian

believers committed to the pursuit of a transformed church and society towards an abundant and meaningful life for all.”²⁷⁶

Third, that the Local Church, through the Local Church Pastor and lay leaders strengthen the education ministry of the church to equip the members for mission work in the world. Members must be educated to understand the missional nature of the church so that the local church may become effective instruments for service in the world. As established in the previous chapters, the lack of understanding of the nature of the church leads to a poor witness and subsequent weakening of the members leading some to leave the local church in search of a livelier, spirit-filled fellowship and active service in the community.

A form of discipleship training may be conducted, not only in the month of February which is designated as membership renewal month, but any time of the year as it is deemed necessary. The history of the UCCP be among the contents of the lessons, giving important attention to the place of local church autonomy in the UCCP and its missional implications. As it is said that informed/equipped constituents make great witnesses, it is thus hoped that through this initiative, the church may grow holistically, its members find meaning in the fellowship of the local church and joyfully participate in its witness and service in the community.

²⁷⁶ “A Primer-Study Guide to the UCCP Vision, Mission and Goals,” 19.

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Appendix 1 UCCP's Heritage from the Uniting Churches

1.1 *The Basis of Union in 1948*

BASIS OF UNION **United Church of Christ in the Philippines**

ARTICLE I — Name

The name of this organization shall be: ***UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES.***

ARTICLE II — Church Property

Church property may be held by individual congregations of other church bodies. It is desirable that property be held in the name of the church. Transfer of property should be held in the name of the church. Transfer of property shall be voluntary.

ARTICLE III — Historic Faith and Message

We do preserve all of the heritage of faith brought into the Union by each of the constituent Churches and hereby declare as our common faith and message: ***Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, our Lord and Saviour.***

ARTICLE IV — Church Practices and Worship

Congregations may follow their customary practices and worship.

ARTICLE V — Membership

Members in good and regular standing of each of the Uniting Churches shall be regarded as such by all the others in the Union.

ARTICLE VI -- The Local Church

1. A ***local church*** is a group of at least 25 baptized believers, 15 years of age or over, having officers and a regular time and place of worship.
2. ***Membership:*** Regular and affiliated members.
3. ***Government:*** The local church shall be governed by a church council composed of the Pastor, other church workers, officers, stewards and the heads of the various organizations of the church.
4. ***Duties and powers of the local church***
 - a. Subject only to the general laws and regulations of the Church, every local church or congregation shall, with its pastor, be responsible for watching over its members, keeping its life pure, ordering its worship, providing Christian education and proclaiming the Gospel.
 - b. Call a pastor.
 - c. Recommend candidates for the ministry.
 - d. Elect delegates to the Annual Conference.

ARTICLE VII — The Annual Conference

1. *Area:* The geographical area of each Annual Conference shall be designated by the General Assembly.
2. *Membership*
 - a. Ordained ministers in good standing and one elected delegate for every 200 members or major fraction thereof in each church or pastoral charge provided that a pastoral charge shall have at least one and not more than three delegates.
 - b. Evangelists, Deaconesses and other Church Workers in active service in the area.
 - c. Missionaries from abroad who have been received as members of the conference.
3. *Government*
 - a. The officers of the Annual Conference shall be a Moderator or Superintendent, who shall be the administrative officer of the Conference, a Secretary and a Treasurer. They shall be elected every two years.
 - b. Executive Committee. It shall be composed of the Moderator or Superintendent, the Secretary, the Treasurer and other members as may be desired by the Conference.
4. *Meetings:* The Annual Conference shall meet annually. Special meetings, on call.
5. *Duties*
 - a. Care for pastoral charges within the Conference.
 - b. Receive and dispose of petitions from lower church bodies or councils.
 - c. Deal with matters sent down from higher church bodies.
 - d. Supervise study of ministerial students.
 - e. License lay preachers.
 - f. Ordination of ministers of the Gospel through the bishop of the area assisted by other ministers.
 - g. Install ministers in their respective churches through the Bishop of the area or the Moderator or the Superintendent of the Conference.
 - h. Elect delegates to the Assembly.
 - i. Propagates the faith and promote church expansion.
 - j. Promote the missionary program of the Church.
 - k. Promote evangelism and Christian education.
 - l. Receive ministers from other communion subject to the regulations of the General Assembly.

ARTICLE VIII — The General Assembly

1. The **General Assembly** shall be the highest governing body of the Church. It shall meet every two years and shall be presided over by the Bishops alternating among themselves. The Church shall have for its administrative officer a General Secretary who shall be elected by the General Assembly.

2. *Area*: The entire Philippines. It shall be divided into four jurisdictional areas.

Luzon – two areas
Visayas – one area
Mindanao – one area

3. *Membership*

- a. The Bishops.
- b. One clergy and one Layman for every 2,000 members or a major fraction thereof.
- c. The General Secretary and other general officers designated by the General Assembly.
- d. Annual Conference Moderators or Superintendents.

4. *Executive Committee Membership*

- a. The Bishops.
- b. The General Secretary and other general officers.
- c. One Moderator or Superintendent and one layman for each jurisdictional area.

5. *The Bishops*

- a. They shall be the administrative officers of the respective areas.
- b. They shall be elected by the General Assembly.
- c. They shall serve for a term of four years and may be elected for not more than three consecutive terms.
- d. They shall have joint general oversight over the entire Church; each one, more specifically, over a jurisdictional area to which he is assigned by the General Assembly.
- e. The Bishops shall exercise such other powers and prerogatives as are delegated to them by the General Assembly.
- f. They shall act alternately as Chairman of the Executive Committee of the General Assembly.
- g. Together with the Executive Committee of the General Assembly, they shall initiate and carry out plans of work for the entire church.
- h. Together with the General Secretary, they shall correlate phases of work which are inter-area in nature.
- i. They shall be responsible for the promotion and execution of plans approved by the General Assembly.

6. *Powers of the General Assembly*

- a. Set the number and boundaries of Annual Conferences and Jurisdictional Areas.
- b. Prepare, approve and amend the Constitution. Any proposed change in the Constitution must be submitted — 1) by a General Assembly; 2) to the Annual Conferences; 3) returned by the Annual Conferences to the General Assembly
4) and declared approved or rejected by the General assembly after a 2/3 vote of the General Assembly and a 3/4 vote of the Annual Conferences.
- c. Hold, own and dispose of property.
- d. Prescribe courses of study for ministers and lay workers.
- e. Set standards for the ministry.

- f. Receive and dispose of petitions, overtures and memorials.
- g. Appoint general committees and set up boards to handle the business of the Church.
- h. Seek union with other Churches, promote cooperation and participate in the ecumenical movement.
- i. Promote specific activities within the Church: Evangelism, Literature, Stewardship, Christian Education, etc.
- j. Prepare a budget and provide ways and means of raising the same.
- k. Provide a plan for ministers' insurance, pension and retirement.
- l. Serve as final Court of Appeal in all matters affecting the life of the entire church or its constituents parts.
- m. Propagate the Faith.

ARTICLE IX — Election of Bishops

The Bishops shall be elected by the members of the General Assembly in session. The election shall be **by ballot** without nomination or discussion and shall immediately follow a period of **quiet meditation and prayer**. A **majority vote** of the members present is required for election. To be qualified for election as a Bishop, one must have been an **ordained minister for at least 5 years** but with **at least 10 years in the active ministry** prior to his election. He must be **at least 35 years of age**.²⁷⁷

1.2 The Declaration of Union

THE DECLARATION OF UNION ***The Uniting Assembly 25-27 May 1948***

WHEREAS, it is in accord with the *Divine Will* that Christians should be united in worship and in every effort to spread the Gospel.

WHEREAS, the unity of the Church is founded upon loyalty to Jesus Christ, the Head and Lord of the Church, and on fidelity to the cause of His kingdom;

WHEREAS, any unity is first of all a unity of spirit and life;

WHEREAS, having the same spirit and owning the same Lord, we nonetheless recognize the diversity of gifts and ministrations for whose exercise due freedom must always be afforded in the differences of interpretation, in forms of worship and modes of operation;

WHEREAS, the *Evangelical Church in the Philippines*, the *Convention of the Philippine Baptist Churches*, the *Philippine Methodist Church*, the *Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Cristo*, and the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines*, by their respective General Assemblies, Conferences or Conventions did theretofore appoint commissions on Church Unions;

²⁷⁷ "First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings" (United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1992), 7–13.

WHEREAS, these commissions at a joint session held on the 3rd day of November, 1947, by joint action did agree upon, approve and adopt a Plan and Basis of Union for the Organic Union of these Churches and thereafter presented said Plan and Basis of Union for the *United Church of Christ in the Philippines* to their respective denominational bodies;

WHEREAS, the Bishops, Moderators and Secretaries of these uniting churches did issue a call for sessions of their respective General Assemblies, Conferences or Conventions, and for a subsequent Joint Session to the Uniting Assembly of the *United Church of Christ in the Philippines*;

WHEREAS, this uniting Assembly, now in session, is authorized to constitute itself, as it does hereby constitute itself as the First General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines;

NOW, THEREFORE, the delegates to this Uniting Assembly of the *United Church of Christ in the Philippines* do hereby solemnly publish and declare in the presence of God and before all men the following statement of facts:

- I. That the *Evangelical Church in the Philippines*, the *Philippine Methodist Church*, and the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines* are now and shall be one church known as the *United Church of Christ in the Philippines*;
- II. That the *United Church of Christ in the Philippines* places itself in readiness to continue to negotiate for an ever-expanding church union with these now in negotiation as well as with others;
- III. That the *United Church of Christ in the Philippines* as thus constituted is and shall be the ecclesiastical successor of these uniting Churches, namely, the *Evangelical Church in the Philippines*, the *Philippine Methodist Church*, and the *United Evangelical Church of the Philippines*, permitting, however, in the meantime, the holding of properties by these churches by the different corporations registered under their respective names until such time as proper adjustments shall have been made with regard to such holdings;
- IV. That by adoption of the name *United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, for this Church Union, no right, interest or title in and to their respective names by which the uniting churches have been identified and known, has been nor is surrendered, but all such rights are specifically reserved against the claims of all persons, associations and organizations whatsoever; and
- V. That we, delegates to the Uniting Assembly, hereby formally adopt the Plan and Basis of Union formulated by the Joint Commissions on Church Union of the Uniting Churches, as the fundamental declaration of faith and plan of government of the *United Church of Christ in the Philippines*, and forthwith proceed to organize ourselves accordingly for the furtherance of the redemptive work of Christ in the World.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁸ "First General Assembly United Church of Christ in the Philippines: Proceedings," 15–16.

1.3 The Statements of Faith of the Constituent Churches

➤ **STATEMENT OF FAITH OF THE UNITED EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES**

We believe in God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Who is Spirit and the Father of our spirits, omnipresent, self-existent, eternal, infinite, unchangeable in His being and attributes; we believe that this triune God created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is, visible and invisible; and that He sustains, protects, and governs these with gracious regard for the welfare of man.

Jesus Christ. We believe in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between man and God, and that God, out of His great love for the world, gave His Only Begotten Son to be the Saviour of sinners, and in the Gospel freely offers His salvation to all men. He, being truly God, became truly man, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, without sin, and for us has become the perfect revelation of God. He offered Himself a perfect sacrifice on the Cross to take away the sin of the world; on the third day He arose from the dead and ascended into Heaven.

Holy Spirit. We believe in the Holy Spirit who takes the things of Christ and makes them known unto men. He convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and of judgment. He is the present Comforter in the Church and bears witness with our spirits that we are the sons of God, and works in us the fruits of righteousness and true holiness.

Holy Scriptures. We believe that God is revealed in nature, in history and in the heart of man, but that He has made gracious and clearer revelations through men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is the brightness of the Father's glory and the ex-press image of His person. We gratefully receive the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, given by inspiration, to be the faithful record of God's gracious revelation and the sure witness of Christ, as containing all things necessary to salvation, and as being the ultimate standard of faith and practice.

Man. — We believe that God created man in His own image, meet for fellowship with Him, free and able to choose between good and evil, and forever responsible to his Maker and Lord.

Sin. — We believe that man who was created free and able to choose good or evil, being tempted, choose evil, and that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God so that they are without excuse and stand in need of salvation through Jesus Christ.

Salvation. — We believe that God, out of His great love for the world, has given His Only Begotten Son to be the Saviour of sinners, and in the Gospel freely offers His all sufficient salvation to all men. We believe that all who repent and believe in Jesus Christ are regenerated and saved by Him through the work of the Spirit.

Future Life. — We believe in the resurrection of the dead, the future general judgment; and an eternal state of rewards, in which the righteous dwell in endless life and the wicked receive the eternal reward of their sins.

The Church and the Sacraments. — We believe in the Christian Church, of which Christ is the only Head. We believe that the Church Invisible consists of all the redeemed, and that

the Church Visible embraces all who profess the true religion, together with their children. We receive to our communion all who confess and obey Christ as their Divine Lord and Saviour, and we hold fellowship with all believers in Him. We hold that the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ is a spiritual institution, organized for spiritual ends depending upon spiritual power, which as the Visible Church, is commissioned by Him to proclaim the Gospel to all mankind, encouraging righteousness, justice, brotherhood, and international good will, until the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

We receive Baptism and the Lord's Supper as the only divinely established sacraments committed to the Church, together with the Word as means of grace made effectual by the Holy Spirit, and always to be observed by Christians with prayer and praise to God.

Service and Duty. — We believe that it is our duty as servants and friends of Christ to do good unto all men, to maintain the public and private worship of God, to hallow the Lord's day, to give of our means for the support of the Gospel as God prospers us, to preserve the sanctity of the family, to uphold the just authority of the State, and so to live in all honesty, purity, and charity, that our lives shall testify of Christ. We joyfully receive the Word of Christ, bidding His people to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations and to declare unto them that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, and that He will have all men everywhere to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We accept our individual responsibility for carrying out this program of world evangelization and for this we work and to this end we pray.

— As reproduced in **Book of Common Worship of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines**, 1952, pp.160-164.

➤ ARTICLES OF FAITH OF THE PHILIPPINE METHODIST CHURCH

- I. **Of Faith in the Holy Spirit.** — There is but one living and true God, everlasting, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one being, power, and eternity — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- II. **Of the Word, or Son of God, Who Was Made Very Man.** — The Son, who was the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one being with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin Mary; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, died, buried, and rose again to life to reconcile God and Man, and to be a sacrifice for the sins of men.
- III. **Of the Resurrection of Christ.** — Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and ascended of one being, majesty, and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

- IV. Of the Holy Spirit.** — The Holy Spirit proceeds from God, the Father and the Son, is of one being, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.
- V. The Sufficiency of the Scriptures for Salvation.** — The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the spirit and essence of the Holy Scriptures we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testaments of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church. The names of the canonical books are:
- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, The First of Samuel, The Second Book of Samuel, The First Book of Kings, The Second Book of Kings, The First Book of Chronicles, The Second Book of Chronicles, The Book of Ezra, The Book of Nehemiah, The Book of Esther, The Book of Job, The Psalms, The Proverbs, Ecclesiastes or the Preacher, Canticle or Song of Solomon, Four Prophets the Greater, Twelve Prophets the Lesser.
- We do receive and account canonical all the books of the New Testament as they are commonly received, which are:
- The Book of Matthew, The Book of Mark, The Book of Luke, The Book of John, The Acts, Romans, I Corinthians, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, II Thessalonians, I Timothy, II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, I Peter, II Peter, I John, II John, III John, Jude, Revelation.
- VI. Of the Old Testament.** — The Old Testament is not contrary to the New for both in the Old Testament and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by God, and the way to the Kingdom of God and its righteousness is presented to man by and through Christ. Wherefore they are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses as touching ceremonies and rites doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any State, yet, notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral.
- VII. Of Original or Birth Sin.** — Original Sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.
- VIII. Of Free Will.** — The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ: which will give us that goodwill.
- IX. of the Justification of Man.** — We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

- X. Of Good Works.** — Although good works which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgments; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.
- XI. Of Works of Supererogation.** — Voluntary works — besides, over and above God's commandments which are called works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogance and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake than of bounden duty is required; whereas Christ saith plainly: When he have done all that is commanded of you, say, we are unprofitable servants.
- XII. Of Sin after Justification.** — Not every sin willingly committed after justification is the sin against the Holy Ghost, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification: after we have received the Holy Spirit, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here; or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.
- XIII. Of the Church.** — The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.
- XIV. Of Purgatory.** — The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshipping and adoration, as well as of images as of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant to the Word of God.
- XV. Of the Sacraments.** — Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or token of Christian men's profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God's good will toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in Him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called Sacraments, that is to say, confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel; they being partly states of life allowed in the Scriptures, but yet have not the like nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as Saint Paul saith, I Cor. 11:29.

XVI. Of Baptism. — Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church.

XVII. Of the Lord's Supper. — The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another but rather is a Sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death; insomuch that, to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of our Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a Sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions. The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Super is faith.

XVIII. Of Both Kinds. — The Cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the Lay People, for both the parts of the Lord's Supper, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be administered to all Christians alike.

XIX. Of the One Oblation of Christ, Finished. — The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world; that there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifice of masses, in the which it is commonly said that the priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit.

XX. Of the Marriage of Ministers. — The Ministers of Christ are not commanded by God's law either to vow the state of single life, or to abstain from marriage; therefore, it is lawful for them, as for all other Christians, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve best to godliness.

XXI. Of the Rites and Ceremonies of Churches. — It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; they may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the Church to which he belongs, which are not repugnant to the Word of god, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly (that others may fear to do the like), as one that offendeth against the common order of the Church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.

— As reproduced in **Book of Common Worship of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines**, 1952, pp. 165-174.

➤ **STATEMENT OF FAITH THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES**

We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, goodness, and love; and in Jesus Christ, His Son, Our Lord and Saviour, Who for us and our salvation lived and died and rose again and liveth evermore; and in the Holy Spirit, Who taketh of the things of Christ and revealeth them to us, renewing, comforting, and inspiring the souls of men.

We are united in striving to know the will of God as taught in the Holy Scriptures, and in our purpose to walk in the ways of the Lord, made known or to be made known to us.

We hold it to be the mission of the Church of Christ to proclaim the Gospel to all mankind, exalting the worship of the one true God, and laboring for the progress of knowledge, the promotion of justice, the reign of peace, and the realization of human brotherhood.

Depending, as did our fathers, upon the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit to lead us into the truth, we work and pray for the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God; and we look with faith for the triumph of righteousness and the life everlasting.

— *As reproduced in **Book of Common Worship of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, 1952, pp. 164-165.***

Appendix 2. Participants/Respondents Information

2.1 Brief Background of Negros District Conference²⁷⁹

The history of Negros District Conference traces its roots to the establishment of the Dumaguete Presbytery on February 11, 1918. Among its charter members were the Silliman Student Church and the Dumaguete Town Church. Both Congregations comprised what was then the “Presbyterian Church of Dumaguete” organized in December 06, 1911. In 1916 they separated to form two worshipping congregations with the formal organization of the Silliman Pastorate. In 1929, the Dumaguete Presbytery was eventually reorganized to form the Dumaguete District Conference (DDC) of the United Evangelical Church of the Philippines.

The growth and expansion of the DDC is closely tied with the story of Silliman Institute. Aside from its key role of providing education and training to future church workers through the Silliman Bible School, now the Divinity School, Dr. and Mrs. Hibbard were instrumental in calling Pastor Angel Sotto. Pastor Angel Sotto was a fiery and emphatic evangelist who come to Silliman to preach to their student in Visayan, and was responsible for laying the foundations for future conversions. It was Sotto who was greatly responsible for opening the work in Dumaguete and Sibulan in 1904, Bais in 1905, Siquijor in 1907, and Tanjay in 1909.

Since its inception and through the 1930’s, the DDC came under the spiritual tutorship of Rev. William Smith and Rev. Paul Lindholm. The DDC has survived and continued to grow despite the different crisis it faced through the years: the second World war in the 1940’s and the Martial Law in the 70s and 80s. Due to its expanding area of coverage, in 1972, the Conference acted to change its name from Dumaguete District Conference (DDC) to Negros District Conference (NDC). NDC has also its share of “schisms” which affected the churches of Bayawan, Dumaguete and Guihulngan. Yet despite the conflict, the NDC remained strong and united.

Presently, the NDC is headed by Rev. Ed Samson. Its latest record shows thirty (30) ordained ministers, nine (9) licentiates, seventeen (17) retired church workers, eight (8) church workers on special assignment and four (4) ministerial students.

²⁷⁹ From a revised version of “A History of the Negros District Conference: 80 Years of Creative Journey of Faith (1918-1998) by Rev. Joel Bon Tabada; and from the accounts and other documents provided by Rev. Ed Samson, current Conference minister of Negros District Conference (NDC).

2.2 Lists of Participant Local Churches and Interview Respondents

➤ For the Documents Study

A. Participating Conference

Contact Persons

Negros District Conference

Rev. Ed Samson
Conference Minister
National Highway, Ajong,
6201 Sibulan, Negros Oriental

B. Participating Local Churches

1. Dumaguete City UCCP

Rev. Neminda E. Esquiedo
Administrative Pastor
Silliman Avenue Extension
Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental

2. Valencia UCCP

Rev. Vengee E. Gumalo
Administrative Pastor
UCCP Valencia, Negros Oriental

3. Polo UCCP

Rev. Marcelina Francisco
Administrative Pastor
UCCP Don Graciano Lozada
Memorial Church
Polo, Tanjay City, Negros Oriental

4. Silliman University Church (Optional)

Rev. Dr. Noriel C. Capulong
Administrative Pastor
Silliman University Church,
Dumaguete City

C. Interview Participants

1. Bp. Erme R. Camba

Bishop Emeritus / Theologian
UCCP / DS Adjunct Professor in Church Admin

2. Bp. Ben Dominguez

Retired Minister /Theologian
UCCP / DS Adjunct Professor in New Testament

3. Dr. Valentino Sitoy

Church Historian and Theologian
UCCP / Divinity School, Silliman University

4. Rev. Ed Samson

Conference Minister
Negros District Conference

2.3 Map of Negros District Conference



Appendix 3 Research Instruments

3.1 Interview Schedule (English)

Interview Schedule

A. Personal Profile

Name: _____

Gender: Female Male

Age: Under 20 35 - 49 65 - 79
 20 - 34 50 - 64 80 or older

Marital status: Single, never married Married
 Widowed Separated

Position in the United Church of Christ (current and previous)

Minister Bishop: ___ Incumbent ___ Emeritus
 Conference Minister Others: specify _____

2. Personal Views

1. How important is the autonomy of the local church in the UCCP?
2. What are the foundations (biblical-theological basis, etc.) of UCCP's understanding of local church autonomy?
3. How does local church autonomy operate in the UCCP?
4. In what ways are the UCCP congregations autonomous?
5. How does a local church relate to other judicatories of the UCCP?
6. How does this organizational structure reflect the UCCP's commitment to mission?

3.2 Checklist of Documents from the participating LC

1. Profile of the Local Church (e.g. location, number of households/members, average attendance in regular worship, etc.)
2. History of the Local Church
3. Actions of the Local Church exhibiting the following:
 - a. Exercise of local church autonomy
 - b. Relationship with higher judicatories like the Conference and General Assembly
4. Mission understanding and programs of the Local Church

Appendix 4 Informed Consent Letter

4.1 Informed Consent Letter (Cebuano)

University Graduate Programs
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
Dumaguete City

Pagpahibalo sa Pag-uyon

Ulohan sa Pagtuon

Local Church Autonomy in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP):
Its Missional Implications

Magtutuon

Leah Joy Pilande-Capilitan
Divinity School, Silliman University
6200 Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental
09063118899; email leahjoypcapilitan@gmail.com

Usa kini ka pagdukiduki sa mga dokumento sa pipila ka local nga kasimbahanan nga sakop sa Negros District Conference sa UCCP mahitungod sa mga aksyon nga may kalabutan sa awtonomiya sa lokal nga Iglesia.

Mahinungdanon alang sa magtutuon kong giunsa pagsabot ug pag aplikar sa mga lokal nga kasimbahanan kini nga awtonomiya ug unsay kalambigitan niini sa misyon sa iglesya. Kini nga pagtuon pagahimuon sa katapusang semana sa Enero hangtud sa ikaduhang semana sa Pebrero.

Ang imong partisipasyon niini nga pagtuon dako kaayog ikatampo sa pagpalalum sa atong pagsabot sa kinaiya sa iglesya ug sa iyang misyon. Kini usab nagpasabot nga andam ikaw mopakig-ambit sa pagpalapad sa pagsabot tali sa kadugtungan sa gambalay, ug sa misyon sa iglesya.

Sa pagbuhat niini nga pagtuon, gipasalig ang hingpit nga kasiguruhan. Walay impormasyon nga ibutyag kon walay pagtugot sa hingtungdan. Boluntaryo usab ang pag-apil niini ug adunay katungod sa pagdumili ang partisipanti kon ugaling dili siya moangay sa paagi sa pagtigum sa mga impormasyon. Daghang salamat.

Pagtugot

Akong nabasa ug nasabtan ang tinguha ni Reb. Capilitan sa iyang pagtuon, ug miuyon ako nga mahimong kabahin niini. Ang akong lagda maoy timaan sa akong boluntaryong pag-apil ug pasalig sa pagtubag sa mga impormasyon nga iyang gikinahanglan alang sa iyang pagtuon.

Ngalan ug Lagda sa partisipanti

Petsa

Reb. Leah Joy P. Capilitan, Magtutuon

Gitiman-an nila:

Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin
Adviser

Dr. Victor Aguilan
SUDS Graduate Program Coordinator

4.2 Informed Consent Letter (English)

University Graduate Programs
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
Dumaguete City

Informed Consent Letter

Research Title

Local Church Autonomy in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines:
Its Missional Implications

Researcher

Leah Joy Pilande-Capilitan
Divinity School, Silliman University
6200 Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental
09063118899; email leahjoypcapilitan@gmail.com

This research involves a document study of the actions taken by selected local churches in Negroes District Conference of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines that exhibit local church autonomy.

The specific interests of the researcher are the understanding and practices of the local churches of the UCCP about how local autonomy relates to the nature and mission of the church. The study will be conducted within the last week of January and second week of February of this year.

Your participation to this study will be beneficial to the deepening of our understanding of the local church and its mission. Your participation will also indicate your willingness to contribute to a broader understanding of the relationship between the order of the church, specifically local church autonomy and its mission.

In the conduct of the study, full confidentiality will be assured. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. Your participation in this study must be voluntary and you have the right to withdraw if you feel uncomfortable in the process of gathering information from you. Thank you very much.

Informed Consent

I have read and understood the intent of Rev. Capilitan's study, and I agree to participate in it. My signature below indicates my willingness to be part in her study, and a commitment to provide her the necessary documents she needed from our local church for her study.

Printed Name and Signature of the Research Participant

Date

Rev. Leah Joy P. Capilitan, Researcher

Noted by:

Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin
Thesis Adviser

Dr. Victor Aguilan
SUDS Graduate Studies Program Coordinator

4.3 Informed Consent Letter (Interview-English)

University Graduate Programs
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
Dumaguete City

Informed Consent Letter

Research Title

Local Church Autonomy in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP):
Its Missional Implications

Researcher

Leah Joy Pilande-Capilitan
Divinity School, Silliman University
6200 Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental
09063118899; email leahjoypcapilitan@gmail.com

This study involves an interview with leaders, theologians and historians of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

The specific interests of the researcher are the understanding and practices of the UCCP about local autonomy and how it relates to the nature and mission of the church. The interview will be conducted within the last week of January and first week of February of this year and will take about 30 minutes of your time to complete.

Your participation to this study will be beneficial to the deepening of our understanding of the local church and its mission. Your participation will also indicate your willingness to contribute to a broader understanding of the relation between church order and mission of the church.

In the conduct of the study, full confidentiality will be assured. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent. Your participation in this study must be voluntary and you have the right to withdraw if you feel uncomfortable in the process of gathering information from you. Thank you very much.

Informed Consent

I have read and understood the intent of Rev. Capilitan's study, and I agree to participate in it. My signature below indicates my willingness to be part in her study, and a commitment to give a portion of my time for a survey or an interview.

Printed Name and Signature of the Research Participant

Date

Rev. Leah Joy P. Capilitan, Researcher

Noted by:

Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin
Thesis Adviser

Dr. Victor Aguilan
SUDS Graduate Studies Program Coordinator

Appendix 5 Letter to the NDC Conference Minister

University Graduate Programs
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
Dumaguete City

January 25, 2019

Rev. Ed B. Samson
Conference Minister
Negros District Conference UCCP
National Highway, Ajong,
6201 Sibulan, Negros Oriental

Dear CM Rev. Samson:

Warmest greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we live, move and have our being!

I am writing to you in relation to my studies at Silliman University Divinity School. Currently, I am in the process of completing my thesis requirement for the degree in Master of Theology major in Mission studies. My thesis is entitled “Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP: Its Missional Implications.” My study seeks to investigate and determine the perceived relationship of the local church autonomy and the mission mandate of the church.

For this project, I am going to make a document study of UCCP local churches to determine how local church autonomy operates in the UCCP. In this regard, I would like to ask your good office to allow me to conduct this study in your conference, the Negros District Conference and in some of the local churches within your conference. I will be going in the last week of January to the second week of February to conduct the study. I will also communicate with the Pastors in the local churches selected for the study.

I hope for your favorable action regarding my request. Thank you very much! May the abundance of God’s grace be with us always!

Respectfully yours,

Leah Joy P. Capilitan
Researcher

Noted:

Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin
Thesis Adviser

Dr. Victor Aguilan
SUDS Graduate Studies Program Coordinator

Appendix 6 Letter to the Participants & Respondents

6.1 Letter to the Participants

6.1a Cebuano

University Graduate Programs
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
Dumaguete City

25 Enero 2019

Pangulo sa Konseho sa Iglesya

Pinaagi ni _____
Magbubuhay sa Iglesya

Tinahud nga mga igsoon diha ni Kristo,

Maiinitong panghimamat sa ngalan sa atong Ginoo ug Pangulo nga si Jesu-Kristo.

Ako si Leah Joy P. Capilitan, nagtuon sa Silliman University Divinity School sa kurso nga Master of Theology, major in Mission Studies. Anaa ako karon sa proseso sa pagkompleto sa mga kinahanglanon sa akong *thesis* alang sa maong kurso. Ang akong pagtuon usa ka pagdukiduki sa kalambigitan tali sa awtonomiya sa lokal nga simbahan ug sa misyonhong buluhatong sa Iglesya. Kini giulohan ug “Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP: Its Missional Implications.”

Alang niini, ako mohimo ug pagtuon sa mga dokumento sa pipila ka lokal nga kasimbahanan aron sa pagsusi kon giunsa pagpadagan ang awtonomiya sa lokal nga Iglesya sa UCCP. Tungod niini, mohangyo ako kaninyo sa inyong pagtugot nga mohimo niini nga pagtuon diha sa inyong lokal nga simbahan. Ang inyong partisipasyon dako kaayog ikatampo sa kalampusan niini nga proyekto. Kini nga pagtuon pagahimuon sa katapusang semana sa Enero hangtud sa ikaduhang semana sa Pebrero niining tuiga.

Ako nagapanghinaut sa inyong bukas nga pagtugot niining akong hangyo. Daghang Salamat! Ang madagayaong grasya sa Ginoo maga-ania unta kanatong tanan!

Kaninyo matinahuron,

Leah Joy P. Capilitan,
Magtutuon

Gitiman-an nila:

Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin
Adviser

Dr. Victor Aguilan
SUDS Graduate Program Coordinator

6.1b English

University Graduate Programs
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
Dumaguete City

25 January 2019

Chairperson of the Church Council

Thru' _____
Local Church Pastor

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

Warmest greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we live and move and have our being!

I am Leah Joy Pilande-Capilitan, a graduate student of Silliman University Divinity School taking up Master of Theology, major in Mission Studies. I am currently in the process of completing my thesis requirement for the said course. My study seeks to investigate and determine the perceived relationship of the local church autonomy and the mission mandate of the church. It is entitled "Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP: Its Missional Implications."

For this project, I am going to make a document study of UCCP local churches to determine how local church autonomy operates in the UCCP. In this regard, I would like to ask you to allow me to conduct my study in your local church. I will be going in the last week of January and the second week of February to conduct the study.

I hope for your favorable action regarding my request. Thank you very much! May the abundance of God's grace be with us always!

Respectfully yours,

Leah Joy P. Capilitan
Researcher

Noted:

Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin
Thesis Adviser

Dr. Victor Aguilan
SUDS Graduate Studies Program Coordinator

6.2 Letter to the Respondents (English)

University Graduate Programs
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
Dumaguete City

January 25, 2019

Bishop Erme R. Camba
Bishop Emeritus
Silliman University, Divinity School
Dumaguete City

Dear Bishop Camba,

Warmest greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom we live, move and have our being!

I am writing to you in relation to my studies at Silliman University Divinity School. Currently, I am in the process of completing my thesis requirement for the degree in Master of Theology major in Mission studies. My thesis is entitled “Local Church Autonomy in the UCCP: Its Missional Implications.”

This study involves an interview with leaders and historians of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines to solicit their understanding on how local church autonomy operates in the UCCP and how it relates to the mission mandate of the church. In this regard, may I have the honor to invite you to be one of the respondents in the interview. The interview will be conducted within the last week of January and first week of February of this year and will take about 30 minutes of your time to complete.

I hope for your favorable action regarding my request. Thank you very much! May the abundance of God’s grace be with us always!

Respectfully yours,

Leah Joy P. Capilitan
Researcher

Noted:

Rev. Dr. Lope B. Robin
Thesis Adviser

Dr. Victor Aguilan
SUDS Graduate Studies Program Coordinator

Appendix 7 Clearance Certificate from UREC



UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
SILLIMAN UNIVERSITY
6200 Dumaguete City
Philippines

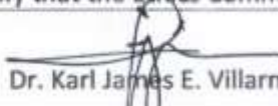
Sub-Committee Review
February 4, 2019

Principal Investigator	Leah Joy P. Capilitan		
Date Submitted:	January 25, 2019	Department	ARTS and SCIENCE
Semester:	2 nd Semester 2018-2019		
Research Title	LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST IN THE PHILIPPINES (UCCP): ITS MISSIONAL IMPLICATIONS		
Meeting Date	January 28, 30 & February 4, 2019	Venue: UREC Office	
Sub-Committee Members	Dr. Ferdinand M. Mangibin Dr. Andrea G. Soluta Dr. Karl James E. Villarmeas		

<input type="checkbox"/>	Full Review Sub-committee	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Expedited Review	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non-Coverage
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Approved w/ suggestions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Deferred w/ suggestions & corrections	<input type="checkbox"/>	Disapproved

SEE ATTACHED

This is to certify that the Ethics Committee has reviewed the proposal.

	 Dr. Karl James E. Villarmeas	February 4, 2019
	Print Name & Signature	Date

Appendix 8 Curriculum Vitae

CURRICULUM VITAE

Leah Joy P. Capilitan

E-mail: leahjoypcapilitan@gmail.com

Mobile no.: 09063118899

Personal Data

Date of Birth	04 December 1972
Place of Birth	Capoocan, Leyte, Philippines
Civil Status	Married
Home Address	Cambite, Tomas Oppus, Southern Leyte, Philippines

Educational Background

<i>Graduate</i>	May 2019	Silliman University Divinity School Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, Philippines
		<i>Master of Theology, major in Mission Studies</i>
<i>Undergraduate</i>	April 2002	Silliman University Divinity School Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, Philippines
		<i>Bachelor of Theology, major in Pastoral Ministry</i> <i>Graduated cum Laude</i>
<i>High School</i>	March 1990	National Heroes Institute Kananga, Leyte, Philippines
<i>Elementary</i>	March 1986	Calunangan Elementary School Calunangan, Merida, Leyte, Philippines

Work Experiences

June 2014 – May 2016	Cambite, Tomas Oppus, So. Leyte, Philippines
	<i>Administrative Pastor</i> at Camp Bethel United Church of Christ in the Philippines <i>School Chaplain and Guidance Coordinator</i> at Dr. Rath Memorial Institute
June 2013 – May 2014	UCCP San Isidro, Tomas Oppus, So. Leyte, Philippines
	<i>Visiting Pastor</i> , performing Ministerial functions to the Church

June 2008 – May 2013 The College of Maasin UCCP, Maasin City
Southern Leyte, Philippines

June 2012 – May 2013
School Chaplain; Center for Christian Formation Coordinator

June 2011 – May 2012
Assistant School Chaplain; Center for Christian Formation Coordinator

June 2008 – May 2011
Assistant School Chaplain; College Religious Education Instructor

June 2008 – May 2011 Sto Rosario, Macrohon, So. Leyte, Philippines
Administrative Pastor of UCCP Macrohon

June 2002 – May 2008 Kananga United Church of Christ, Kananga, Leyte
Administrative Pastor

June 1996 – May 2001 UCCP Cambite, Tomas Oppus, So. Leyte, Philippines
Licentiate Pastor
UCCP Malitbog, Southern Leyte, Philippines
UCCP Ichon, Macrohon, Southern Leyte, Philippines

June 1994 – April 1995 Camp Bethel UCCP, Cambite, Tomas Oppus,
Intern Pastor Southern Leyte, Philippines

Ordination into the Ministry *June 3, 2003*
Venue: UCCP Kananga, Leyte, Philippines

Trainings and Seminars Attended

Venue **United Methodist Church**, Colombo, Sri Lanka
Date September 28 – October 13, 2018
Mission Study Tour in Sri-Lanka (German and Filipino Seminary Students)

Venue **Instructional Media and Technology Center**
Silliman University, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental,
Philippines
Date May 30 – June 1, 2018
International Conference on Mission Studies

Venue **Southern Christian College**
Midsayap, North Cotabato, Philippines
Date March 27 – April 5, 2017
Inter-Seminary Summer Exposure Program for Interfaith Dialogue

Venue **Silliman University Justice and Peace Center**
Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental Philippines
Date October 25 – 26, 2016
Teachers and Religious Leaders Conference on Interreligious and Cultural Understanding

Venue **Iloilo Mission Hospital**
Jaro, Iloilo City, Philippines
Date April – May 1994
Clinical Pastoral Education