

Special Congregational Meeting – July 26, 2026

Dear Members of Marine United Church of Christ,

A **Special Congregational Meeting** will be held on **Sunday, July 26, 2026**, immediately following the church service, for the purpose of voting on whether Marine UCC should enter into a yoke (shared pastor arrangement) with Grantfork UCC.

At our Annual Congregational Meeting on February 1, 2026, I shared that our church can no longer financially support a full-time pastor with benefits. As a result, our options have been:

- Call a full-time pastor who already receives benefits through a spouse.
- Call a part-time pastor who already has benefits.
- Share a pastor with another congregation and split the associated costs.

For the past two years, Grantfork UCC has also been searching for a pastor. Like many churches today, they have found the process challenging due to the limited number of available pastoral candidates. Currently, six churches in our area are searching for full-time pastors, while two others are seeking part-time pastors.

Because of these realities, the councils of Marine UCC and Grantfork UCC have met several times to discuss the possibility of sharing a pastor. This arrangement, commonly known as **yoking**, would allow both churches to maintain their own identities while sharing pastoral leadership.

It is important to understand that **this is not a merger**. Each congregation would continue to operate independently, maintaining responsibility for its own finances, records, facilities, ministries, governance, and mission. The only shared responsibility would be the pastor, who would spend approximately 20 hours per week serving each congregation.

We recognize that a change of this nature raises questions. Below are some of the topics the two councils have discussed.

Pastor's Compensation

- The pastor's salary and benefits would be shared equally between Marine UCC and Grantfork UCC (salary, social security, pension, health insurance, housing allowance, and professional expenses).
- Office hours would be divided equally between both churches.

Church Finances

- Each congregation would continue to manage its own budget, investments, facilities, ministries, and financial obligations.
- This arrangement does not combine church finances or assets.

Meetings and Ministries

- The pastor would attend the monthly council meetings of both churches.
- Attendance at other committees and ministry meetings may alternate as scheduling requires.

Confirmation

- A combined confirmation class is a possibility and could provide a richer learning experience through greater participation.

Worship Schedule

- Sunday worship services would likely be scheduled at different times, such as 9:00 a.m. at one church and 10:30 a.m. at the other. The exact schedule would be determined after a pastor is called.
- Weddings, funerals, and other pastoral responsibilities would be coordinated between the two congregations.

Our Search Committee continues to meet twice each month and remains committed to finding the right pastoral candidate. However, after a couple of months of searching and learning more about the current pastoral landscape, it has become clear that finding a candidate who meets our needs and already has benefits is highly unlikely.

The councils of both churches believe that a shared ministry offers the most realistic and sustainable path forward. In addition, both congregations have similar cultures, values, and ministry philosophies, making this partnership a promising opportunity for both churches.

At this meeting, you will be voting to authorize the Search Committee and Church Council to pursue a joint search with Grantfork UCC and to call a shared pastor if a suitable candidate is identified. If approved, each church's Search Committee will update its Church Profile to reflect that both congregations are seeking one pastor to serve Marine UCC and Grantfork UCC in a shared ministry.

If you have questions or would like additional clarification before the meeting, please speak with a member of the Church Council.

This is an important decision that belongs to the congregation. We encourage every member to attend the Special Congregational Meeting on **July 26** and participate in the vote.

In the meantime, please keep both congregations, our Search Committee, and this discernment process in your prayers as we seek God's guidance for the future of our church.

Blessings,
Dave Grotefendt
President Church Council