

# Living Waters Association

# NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

of the Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ.

January 2025

## Sacramental Servants:

### Applications are being accepted now!

In response to the growing challenges faced by smaller churches in finding or accessing licensed or ordained ministers to celebrate the sacraments, the Living Waters Association of the United Church of Christ has developed a groundbreaking solution: the role of Sacramental Servant with Lay Ministerial Standing.

### What Is a Sacramental Servant?

**A Sacramental Servant** is a unique and distinguished role within the local church, created to meet the needs of congregations unable to secure the services of a licensed or ordained minister due to financial hardship or physical distance. **When authorized by the association, Sacramental Servants who are members of their local congregations, in covenant, are trained, authorized and entrusted to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion within their own church.** This voluntary role reflects a deep commitment to service and community.

Beyond the vital role of administering the sacraments, **this position also assists congregations in meeting the requirements of many insurance companies, including the Insurance Board, which often require an authorized minister with an accountability structure as part of a church's policy.** This ensures that congregations remain in compliance and maintain necessary coverage for their operations.

While Sacramental Servants receive no financial compensation, the local church is responsible for the costs of initial formation and the required background check for candidates. However, **don't let concerns about cost hold your church back!** The association has set aside funds to assist churches for whom training and authorization costs would be a burden. These funds cover the costs of textbooks and training, ensuring all congregations have access to this vital ministry.

## Role and Responsibilities

The role of a Sacramental Servant is temporary, voluntary, and highly specific:

- **Primary Responsibilities:**  
Administer the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion.
- **Limitations:**  
Sacramental Servants are not trained or authorized to lead entire worship services, conduct funerals or weddings (except for the sacraments), preach, provide pastoral care, or manage church administration.
- **Support in Worship:**  
Sacramental Servant may participate in other parts of worship as desired but are not expected or train to lead an entire worship service.

**Annual Renewal:** Authorization for this role must be renewed annually.

## Initial Formation Training

To prepare for this ministry, candidates must complete an initial formation training of approximately 15–20 hours which includes home study and in person hands on lab. This training is intentionally designed to be low-tech and accessible, conducted primarily through one-on-one phone conversations and an in-person hands-on lab study. If there is enough interest, training could also be offered in a group setting, providing flexibility to meet the needs of group participants.



(Continue on Page 2 "Sacrament Servant")

### Mentorship and Covenant Support

In covenant with the United Church of Christ, each candidate will have a supervising mentor to provide guidance during their initial formation and throughout their authorization. This mentor serves as a resource for consultation and support, ensuring Sacramental Servants have access to experienced counsel as questions or challenges arise. This mentorship reflects the association's commitment to collaborative ministry and ongoing spiritual growth.

### Learning Together: Theology in Community

To ensure candidates do not undertake this journey alone, we encourage participation with a friend or even as part of a theological study within the local church. The association will provide materials to support this shared learning experience. While only the candidate is responsible for completing the written assignments, these can serve as discussion prompts for group exploration and deeper theological reflection. This collaborative approach enriches the learning process, fosters communal growth, and strengthens bonds within the congregation.

### Join the Initial Formation Cohort

The Living Waters Association is now forming the first training cohort of Sacramental Servants. If your congregation is interested in this opportunity, we encourage you to act now. For more information, application packets, or questions, please contact **Adam, the Living Waters Association Registrar, at 402-910-8111.**



**Living Waters Association  
of the Nebraska Conference  
OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

This innovative initiative is already gaining attention from the National Setting of the United Church of Christ and groups such as the Lay-Led Church Coalition. With support, mentorship, and accessible training, this program ensures that all congregations can celebrate and partake in the sacraments as a vital part of their faith community.



**YEARBOOK/DATA HUB  
COLLECTION  
IS QUICKLY APPROACHING!**

**📖 Yearbook/DataHub Will Open for Reporting on January 23,2025!**

### What is the Yearbook/DataHub?

The **United Church of Christ (UCC) DataHub** is the denomination’s secure, web-based database. Designed to keep our church community connected, it serves as the primary repository for all UCC congregations and authorized ministers. This invaluable tool tracks:

- Membership numbers
- Clergy information
- Other church-related records

Each year, the data you submit supports the creation of vital resources like:

- **The Printed Yearbook**
- **Access UCC Directory**
- **Find A Church Tool**

By contributing your church’s data, you’re helping to maintain a comprehensive and accurate snapshot of our denomination.

### Key Dates to Remember

The DataHub is now accepting **2024 data submissions January 23,2025 through March 20, 2025.**

We encourage you to **submit your data as early as possible** to avoid delays. If you run into any issues, support is available to help you navigate the process smoothly.

*Every church is required to complete this process annually!*

## How to Access Yearbook/DataHub Reporting

To make the Yearbook/DataHub reporting process as smooth as possible, the Living Waters association has provided a printed copy to every church in the Living Waters Association with the **17-page instruction guide**. This guide includes step-by-step directions on accessing the DataHub and a reporting checklist to help you gather all the necessary information before you begin.

### No Internet Access?

If your church does not have internet access, don't worry! Simply gather all the required information and contact the conference office to schedule an appointment for assistance.

The Conference is here to help:

- **Jane Estrada:** (605) 338-8738

We're committed to making sure every church can successfully complete their reporting. Let us know how we can support you!

Further questions contact Adam at 402-910-8111



## 2024 Living Waters Association Small Church Grant Recipients!

We're pleased to share the news of this year's **Small Church Grant Awards!** At the recent **Fall Gathering of the Living Waters Association**, we had the privilege of awarding **five \$500 grants** to the following congregations:

- **Albion**
- **Arlington**
- **Blair**
- **Omaha – Northwest Hills**
- **Newcastle**

Each year, the Living Waters Association dedicates **\$5,000** to support our smaller congregations, giving them the resources to invest in what matters most to their ministries. These grants reflect the importance of smaller churches in our shared faith community and their commitment to mission and fellowship. Congratulations to this year's recipients!

## How your congregation can prepare for the 2025 Small Church Grant Applications!

We're excited to announce that applications for the 2025 Small Church Grant program will open this spring. This grant is a meaningful opportunity for smaller congregations, less than 250 members to receive financial support, empowering their ministries and their work in our communities.

### Requirements to Apply for the 2025 Small Church Grant:

1. **Update Your Yearbook/DataHub Information**  
Ensuring your church's details are up-to-date is a crucial first step.- Information has been included in this newsletter on how to do this.
2. **Attend the Association Annual Fall Meeting**  
A representative from your congregation must participate in the fall gathering to remain eligible.
3. **Keep Your Association Dues Current**  
This simple step reflects your commitment to the shared goals of our association and ensures continued support for all congregations.

---

### Stay Tuned!

We'll share more details about the application process as spring approaches, so keep an eye out for updates. This is an excellent opportunity to secure funding to further your church's mission and enhance its impact in your community.

Smaller congregations play a vital role in our faith community, and this grant program is one way we can continue to honor and support their contributions. We encourage you to start preparing now, so you're ready to take advantage of this opportunity.

## Welcoming Rev. Roberto Ochoa as Our New Conference Minister



The Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ and the Tri-Conference Board are thrilled to announce that on December 2, 2024, the Rev. Roberto Ochoa was officially called to serve as our new Conference Minister.

Rev. Ochoa brings a wealth of experience, a deep passion for ministry, and a heart for the unique challenges and opportunities faced by rural and small churches. Many of you may remember Roberto as one of the keynote speakers at the 2023 Living Waters Association meeting, where he shared inspiring insights during his presentation on The Small Church Advantage.

Most recently, Rev. Ochoa served in the National Setting of the United Church of Christ as the Minister for Ethnic Inclusion and Rural and Small Churches, a role in which he championed inclusion, diversity, and the vitality of smaller congregations. His leadership has been marked by a steadfast commitment to building strong, connected, and inclusive communities of faith.

### What's Next?

Details about Rev. Ochoa's installation service will be shared in the coming weeks, so stay tuned for updates. This will be a wonderful opportunity to gather as a community and celebrate this exciting new chapter in the life of the Nebraska Conference and the Tri-Conference.

As we look ahead, we are excited for the leadership and vision Rev. Ochoa will bring to our shared ministry. Please join us in extending a warm and heartfelt welcome to Rev. Roberto Ochoa as he begins this important journey with us

## Living Waters Association Newsletter Knowledge Grows When Shared

Each congregation in the Living Waters Association receives a printed copy of our newsletter. This initiative guarantees that every member, regardless of their access to technology, can stay informed and connected with the larger community. It's our way of ensuring inclusivity and keeping the lines of communication open for all. *(Please be sure we have the correct address for your congregation.)*

Information, much like the Gospel, is most powerful when it is shared. The insights and updates in this newsletter are meant to inform and inspire every member of our congregations. But their true value lies in their ability to spark connection, conversation, and action within our community.

### Share During Fellowship

Make this newsletter a topic of discussion during coffee time or other fellowship gatherings. Highlight key updates, and invite others to join the conversation.

### Post It on Your Bulletin Board

A visible reminder goes a long way. Pin this newsletter to your congregation's bulletin board or any common space where members can easily access it. *(Maybe leave it on the coffee table!)* This ensures everyone has the opportunity to read and benefit from its content.

### Communication Is a Two-Way Street

We value your voice and would love to hear from you. Communication is essential to building a strong and vibrant community. Please feel free to reach out with your thoughts, questions, or feedback by emailing, writing, or calling us.

You can contact us at:

**Email:** [LWAregistrar@gmail.com](mailto:LWAregistrar@gmail.com)

**Traditional Mail:** Living Waters Association,  
1072 21st Ave, Columbus, NE 68601

**Phone:** 402-910-8111

By working together to share this knowledge, we can ensure that every member of our congregations are informed.