

Report of the Joint Council of the Associations

The agenda for the Joint Council of the Associations during this past year was driven by the results of the survey of churches and ministries done during the previous year. Those goals were presented at last year's Associations Annual Meeting. The Council divided into working groups to address the various topics. Here is an update on the progress around each goal.

1. Establishing one Association Council and one Committee on Ministry to serve both associations. Each body would determine how their work can best be accomplished.

Both of these goals have been accomplished. The two councils met as one this year. The size of a joint council proved larger than necessary. Proposed constitutional changes (see documents "Proposed Revised EOA Constitution" and "Proposed Revised WRA Constitution") will create a smaller, single council. The Committee on Ministry is now meeting as one combined committee, with four working groups for the equitable division of labor.

2. Bringing the governing documents of the two Associations in line with each other to streamline their administrative and collaborative work. Engaging in conversation about stewardship of financial resources.

If approved, the proposed changes to the Associations' constitutions will make them identical except for the name at the top. Combining budgets would be simple to accomplish and a logical step since there would be a single governing body without Association distinctions. Some funds have specific restrictions which limit their use within a limited geography and others have language that would need legal clarification regarding their use in a combined Association were that to become the case.

3. Exploring the feasibility of combining into one body.

Given the positive experiences of additional combined ministry this past year and if the constitutional changes are approved all that would remain to becoming a single Association would be a positive vote of the Associations and the legal process necessary for creating a new corporation replacing the two former ones. The authority to establish Association boundaries is granted to Conferences by the UCC Constitution. This has never been the practice in the Ohio Conference given the unique situation of Associations incorporating here (something not done anywhere else in the UCC). That being said, the approval should be little more than a technical matter. If approved, the proposed plan for one judicatory serving the current Ohio geography would require another incorporation. (see documents "For Such a Time as This" and "Conference Structure Process")

4. Doing our best to overcome the distance between our settings through more effective use of technology, choosing centrally-located meeting places, and finding creative ways to communicate.

We began a conversation about the best way to send and receive information. For now, a variety of platforms will be necessary, but we need to agree upon where we would like to see ourselves

in 2-5 years. Communication requires commitment to intentionality on both ends, both in sharing and receiving of information. We can't ensure people will pay attention, but we can attempt to offer clear communication, shared regularly with appropriate reminders, in as many platforms as is feasible.

5. Fostering connections among people, churches and those with common interests for mission and ministry

Conversation began on this topic which is an on-going concern.

6 Living into our covenant with all settings of the church, being faithful stewards of the resources entrusted to us, and creating new funding streams. This includes taking part in the conversations about the future of the UCC in Ohio.

The Stewardship and Resources Working Group of the Council made progress in the following areas:

- Creation of a case statement / brochure to be used to communicate with local congregations regarding the work of the associations and how the budget supports OCWM
- Development of a strategy for contacting and communication with pastors and congregations regarding financial support of the associations budget
- Review of the giving record of the congregations to the associations annual budget from 2014 through 2016
- Maintained our staffing of key ministries through staff retirements and changes.

7. Making Faith Formation and Youth a priority focus to encourage the next generation of leaders. Not use electronic communication.

The Faith Formation Ministry Team and the X-Team Team Youth Council are composed of educators and youth leaders from both associations. The Faith Formation Ministry Team has adjusted its structure and mission statement to reflect the fact that we are now one team, even though we have been collaborating, planning, and networking for at least 15 -20 years—way before all this happened! That said—we are striving to communicate more efficiently with smaller churches and offer alternative forms of communication for all. We do our best to maintain current lists of contacts from as many churches as we can. Currently we are reaching out to two new church leaders because we have a need to include new faces in our leadership.

Both groups plan and implement programs and events for all churches in EOA/WRA area.

- Great Summer Serve, MLK Lock-In, JR. High Event, Sr. High Leadership Camp, Monthly Road Map gatherings for Youth leaders
- Quarterly educators gatherings for sharing resources, maintenance of the Faith Formation Resource website <http://www.eoawrafaithformation.com/>
- Boundary Training for educators and youth leaders, and retreats for both groups for spiritual development.

8. Seeking in all ways to improve communication with sensitivity to those who do not use electronic communication.

We need to gather information from both senders and receivers as to what they prefer, like, use, etc. Discussion began about how we do that: Letters? Web questionnaires? Phone calls? Mass email?