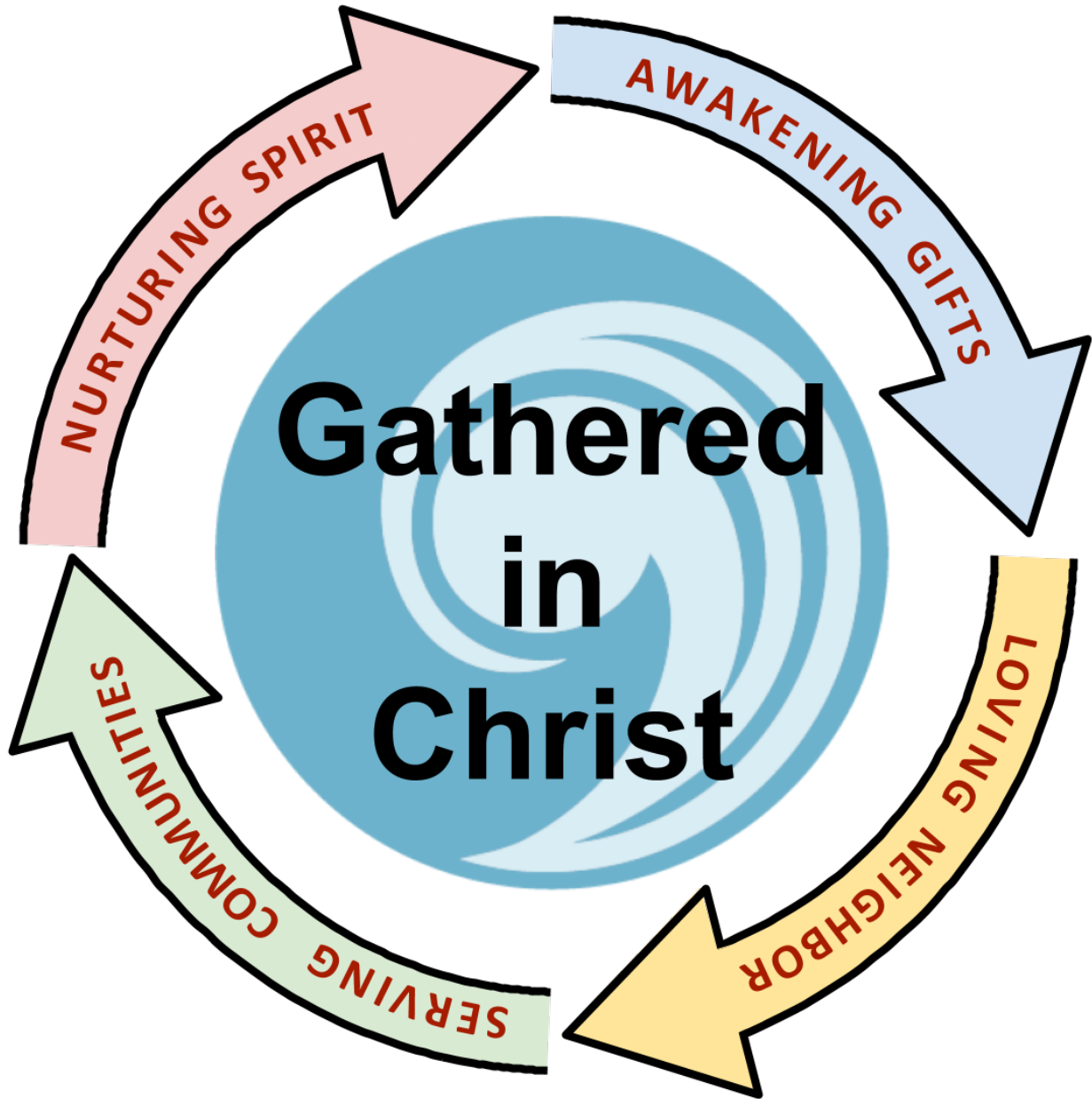


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Restructuring Proposal from the Vision Team

May 2018

PREFACE:

(an excerpt from "For Such as Time as This" – by Vision Team in August 2017)

Esther is in a precarious position. She is to advocate to her husband, the king, on behalf of the Jewish people. Such advocacy will be dangerous for Esther, a Jew herself, possibly bringing death at the hand of her king who is not yet aware of her lineage.

In her hesitation and discernment, her uncle Mordecai suggests that this may be exactly why God has placed her in this position. He says, "Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity **for just such a time as this.**" (Esther 4.14c, emphasis added)

Anyone who has spent some time in and around the Ohio Conference knows our judicatory structure is unlike anywhere else in the United Church of Christ. This original structure was developed as a compromise between the Evangelical and Reformed Church and the Congregational Christian Church. In creating two layers of middle judicatory, it was believed that the local church would receive care and support from the associations, and that the associations would in turn give care and support to a holistic conference of churches in the greater Ohio area.

For a long time this structure, with two judicatory levels, served us well. At its formation, the Ohio Conference boasted 600+ congregations most of whom contributed financial resources for the work of the UCC in portions of West Virginia, Kentucky, and all of Ohio. While we continue to fund this structure, the Ohio Conference comprises 339 congregations today. One implication of this change is that the amount forwarded to the national setting has fallen from 37% of total OCWM in 1995, to 19% in 2010, to just 13% in 2017. We lament this as it affects ministry and mission for the entire denomination.

Hence, it is not practical to continue with the same structure. Responsible stewardship calls us to reconsider the current structure that simply was not made **for just such a time as this.**

For just such a time as this, the Holy Spirit calls us to do ministry in new and relevant ways, responding to the ever-changing world in which we live. Every now and then, we are called to reimagine and to birth ministry models that reflect who we are, and what God is calling us to be and do – a connected, covenantal church living the mission of Jesus Christ throughout our communities, states, and local region.

BACKGROUND

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The current visioning process grew out of a discussion in late 2015 involving the Association Ministers, the Designated Conference Minister, General Minister and President John Dorhauer, and Global Ministries Executive Jim Moos.

A core Vision Team was formed by two members plus the Association Minister from each Association, and the Conference Moderator and interim Conference Minister.

The Vision Team has met approximately every six weeks throughout 2016 to the present. National staff and a consultant assisted the Vision Team through January 2017. Information and perspective regarding the changing nature and configuration of Conferences has been gathered from the Council of Conference Ministers, and discussions with Conference Ministers representing six Conferences currently implementing plans to consolidate or merge Conference boundaries, staffing, leadership boards, and financial management.

The Vision Team sponsored 15 Listening Sessions throughout the area in January to March 2018 attended by 120 persons, in order to hear concerns, and identify needs and interests of congregations and clergy. Eighty-eight (88) persons used an online survey and a special email account to provide additional input for the Vision Team. Feedback from Association Councils and from all-staff meetings was also shared with the Vision Team.

After this extensive discernment there is unanimity by this group of “Conference” and “Association” folk, all of whom recognize that we are called to find a more faithful, responsible and covenantal way as we continue to be the United Church of Christ in Ohio, West Virginia and Northern Kentucky.

88 **PURPOSE, VISION and MISSION STATEMENTS**

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90 Building on all the Vision Team has heard and researched, the following purpose, vision and
91 mission statements have been developed for re-imagining the work of the United Church of
92 Christ in this geographic area.

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94 PURPOSE (goal) of the Vision Team:

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96 **to create one nimble and responsive judicatory faithful in mission and responsible in**
97 **stewardship.**

98
99 VISION: *(See cover page for a graphic to illustrate the Vision statement)*

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101 **Gathered in Christ - nurturing Spirit, awakening gifts, loving neighbor, and serving**
102 **communities.**

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104 MISSION:

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106 **To connect and equip faith communities in following Jesus Christ.**

110 **PROPOSED STRUCTURE**

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112 There will be one single setting (judicatory) which will have a Leadership Board that is elected
113 at an annual meeting of the UCC faith community in this area.

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115 The Leadership Board will:

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- 117 • Oversee and assist the development of 3 or 4 support centers, including their physical
118 plants, finances, and staff.
 - 119 • Assume the responsibilities of the current conference Board of Directors, and much of
120 what is done by the governing bodies of the current associations.
 - 121 • Include all executive and ministerial staff. (NOTE that titles and relationships are still
122 under review)
 - 123 • Appropriately and faithfully reflect the diversity of the congregations and people
124 throughout the wider setting of the UCC in this area.
 - 125 • Include a leadership development team to identify persons for future service on the
126 board and will assist in developing the gifts of these persons for service.
- 127
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129 **ANTICIPATED CALLED POSITIONS:**

- 130 • Transitional Conference Minister (it is not clear yet whether this position will continue
131 long term)
 - 132 • An authorized minister in each of the support centers – this position is referred to as
133 “Associated Minister” for the remainder of this document. They are responsible for the
134 health and well-being of the congregations within the areas to which they relate. This
135 includes resourcing Committees on Ministry, Search and Call, and providing pastoral
136 care with authorized ministers and congregations. All the Associated Ministers will work
137 in partnership, supporting each other.
 - 138 • Specialized Ministries as needed to support the vision. One or more of these ministries
139 might be fulfilled by another minister on staff. They may be full-time, part-time, or
140 volunteer. Specialized Ministries may include Faith Formation, Church Vitality, and
141 Stewardship and Generosity.
- 142

143 **ANTICIPATED APPOINTED POSITIONS:**

144 Administrative, financial, and support persons as needed. Staff would be managed centrally
145 but dispersed physically.

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147 Associated Ministers would have a primary focus on Committees on Ministry and the Search
148 and Call process. Associated Ministers will be supported by Advisory Teams as needed.

149
150 Associated Ministers would hire and supervise appointed administrative staff as needed in their
151 area, within defined budget parameters, and in collaboration with the Leadership Board.

154 **PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES OF THIS STRUCTURE**

- 155 ▪ Focuses first on collaboration and a unified purpose, then on how structure allows for
- 156 collaboration
- 157 ▪ Reduces overlapping tasks and fills in gaps
- 158 ▪ Allows specialists to thrive in their settings, as opposed to expecting generalists to serve
- 159 in all settings of the area.
- 160 ▪ Expands time the Associated Ministers in the support centers have for pastoral ministry
- 161 by reducing administrative responsibilities.
- 162 ▪ Offers more time for Associated Ministers to concentrate on building personal
- 163 relationships and to do pastoral work.
- 164 ▪ The implementation process will build on the existing gifts and strengths of the
- 165 associations to enrich our shared ministry.

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169 **BEST PRACTICES**

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171 Exploring what things need to be accomplished by “one setting” of ministry in Ohio and what

172 things we want to see accomplished. We delineated five focus areas to consider when

173 gathering Best Practices.

174

Focus Area:	Includes: (not meant to be exhaustive)
Church & Ministry	Authorization for Ministry Search & Call Members in Discernment Standing Ecclesiastical Councils
Social Witness	Prophetic Witness Eco Justice Missional Work Three Great Loves Interpretation
Faith Formation	Outdoor Ministries Faith Formation/Sunday School Youth Lay Education
Wider Church Relationships	Ohio, West Virginia, and Kentucky Councils of Churches Kirchengemeinschaft Council of Conference Ministers General Synod Relationships to Local and National Settings of the UCC
Communication (Marketing)	Use of Technology Newsletters Covenant UCC Identity Networking

Clearing House for Resources Instill in folks that this new setting should be first stop when looking for information/best practices for ministry
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A specific effort is being made to bring together Committees on Ministry teams to discuss the strengths and expertise inherent in each Committee’s work, and consider how to share those resources with one another, and how to standardize process and procedure.

FINANCE AND STEWARDSHIP

We have been blessed with gifts abundant. God has graced us beyond measure. We respond with thanksgiving as we commit ourselves to responsible stewardship of the resources given and entrusted to the wider setting of the faith community.

Financial gifts given to the wider setting are used to support both local and wider mission and ministry. In 2017, just 13% of Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM) gifts from congregations is forwarded to the national setting and the remainder is retained for ministry within the current associations and conference. Our goal is to retain a smaller percentage so that we forward more to the national setting including Global Ministries.

An Annual Budget will be developed in collaboration with all Advisory Teams and staff and approved by the Leadership Board. A unified accounting and bookkeeping system will be implemented.

One financial management staff will be employed to handle one payroll, one Federal ID number, consolidated tax accounting, benefits programs, expense and income accounting, and one annual audit or CPA review.

Donor Designated and Endowment funds will be honored according to donor parameters.

The working group recognizes the need for plans and programs to nurture generosity as a spiritual practice, challenging faithful stewardship and encouraging giving practices to support the life and mission of local, regional, national and wider settings of the UCC.

IMPLEMENTATION

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The work involved in moving the organization onward in its evolutionary process is daunting. The Vision Team’s aspiration in planning and implementing a new integrated wider church structure in Ohio, Northern Kentucky, and West Virginia, includes a commitment to strengthen covenantal relationships and trust among us, as we collaborate in ministry, as we discover the joy of working together in harmony, and as we shape the possibilities of what can be, trusting the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Consequently, the Vision Team recommends that we do two things simultaneously:

1. Identify a few areas where the associations can cooperate and find value in working together. Possibilities include School of Ministry, Pastoral Excellence programs, Committee on Ministry procedures and policies, or Faith Formation initiatives.
2. Continue planning a new structure and when opportunities are recognized, begin to live into a new structure, shaping it into what it can become.

Planning Steps: This process would be managed by a representative Transition Team consisting of members of each Association, with guidance and support from the new Transitional Conference Minister. The steps would include the following, though not necessarily in this order:

- A. **Name:** Select a non-exclusionary name for the United Church of Christ in Ohio, Northern Kentucky and West Virginia. The Vision Team understands that the term “Ohio Conference” is exclusionary. The term does not include the congregations of West Virginia or Northern Kentucky. Before moving to discussions of structural organization or shared ministries that are based in best practices, the Vision Team realizes that it must unify the vision to which the title refers. That suggests a process of selecting the single, inclusive judicatory name.
- B. **Best and Standard Practices Resource:** The Transition Team (or a working group) develops a resource for ministries, approaches, or programs of local churches, the unified judicatory, and the national setting of the United Church of Christ that can be standardized in form and practice to enhance and improve the consistency of ministry in Ohio, Northern Kentucky and West Virginia.
- C. **Finance and Stewardship:** The Transition Team (or a working group) examines current practices within each current entity and plans for a new process that preserves the best practices from each. The planning would include the flow of OCWM dollars from churches to the new entity and expenditures to cover all staff and expenses related to the regional Support Centers.
- D. **Structure and Form:** The Transition Team (or a working group) develops a plan for organization and structure of the new setting, inclusive of regional Support Centers, staffing, both professional and support, location, and Center logistics. The Team will also review all sets of bylaws (association and conference) and draft a new set of

254 bylaws for the new entity. This will likely be one of the final steps in the planning
255 process. It is recommended that the current corporate structures be retained until
256 we are living and functioning as one entity. If necessary, interim changes to existing
257 bylaws could be made to facilitate this.

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259 E. Reports and Approvals – Throughout the planning process, the governing bodies of
260 the conference and the associations will be given regular reports. Reports will also
261 be made at each of the called meetings. Approvals will be sought from the current
262 judicatories when we reach a point where changes are to be made to the legal
263 structures.

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266 NEXT STEPS – SUMMER 2018

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268 ✓ Distribute this “first draft” proposal for how the purpose, vision and mission goals might
269 be accomplished.

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271 ✓ Distribute the draft prior to informational meetings in each Association. There will be
272 no voting at these meetings; in depth discussions are encouraged.

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274 ✓ Invite and encourage congregations and members of Associations to critique the
275 proposal, test its recommendations, and propose amendments, edits, or additional
276 considerations

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278 ✓ Collect what is heard from Associations, and revise, expand, or incorporate the input in
279 a second draft.

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281 ✓ Consider opportunities for additional conversation: video conference, cluster
282 gatherings, written materials, video “commercials” and such.

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284 ✓ Provide a document to the entire “conference of congregations” for review prior to the
285 Annual Gathering on September 28 -29.

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287 ✓ At Annual Gathering offer Friday sessions to explore the research and recommendations
288 of three “working groups;” and, on Saturday revisit that information briefly before
289 seeking a consensus which will direct the Vision Team to continue developing
290 recommendations to implement this proposal, or to seek a different course.

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292 ✓ NOTE: It is anticipated that full implementation in areas of staffing, financial
293 management, adjusting administrative and legal matters, and development of shared
294 program elements will be phased in as they are developed and approved, probably over
295 a period of two-three or more years.

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MEMBERS OF THE VISION TEAM

Association staff who have retired or moved to other callings were involved in earlier discussions. Three “original” participants have asked to be excused due the press of other responsibilities. We are grateful for the commitment of all that have been involved!

NWOA Tom Kagy, Jared Ruari, Dan Busch

CSEA Terry Williams, Jay Yutzey (working group), Joyce Oyler (outdoor ministry),
Patricia Battle

SONKA Craig Showalter (working group), Wilda Peters (working group), Karl Ulrich, Carl
Robinson

EOA/WRA Dan Doty, Mark Frey, Ian Lynch, Machel Miller (working group), Kelly Brill
(working group), Cheryl Lindsay (working group), Nayiri Karjian

Conference Cathy Green, John Gantt