



Restructuring Proposal from the Vision Team

September 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

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 UCC 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.

PURPOSE, VISION and MISSION STATEMENTS

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

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

Gathered in Christ to heal, reconcile and restore the world - nurturing Spirit, awakening gifts, loving neighbor, and serving communities.

MISSION:

To connect and equip faith communities in following Jesus Christ.

PURPOSE (goal) of the Vision Team:

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

PROPOSED STRUCTURE

There will be one unified setting (judicatory) which unifies the existing Associations (CSEOA, EOA, NWOA, SONKA, WRA) and the Ohio Conference into **One Body**. The unified setting will have a Leadership Board that is elected at an annual meeting of the UCC faith community in this area.

The Leadership Board will:

- Oversee and assist the development of 3 support centers, including their physical plants, finances, and staff.
- Assume the responsibilities of the current conference Board of Directors, and much of what is done by the governing bodies of the current associations.
- Include all executive and ministerial staff. (NOTE that titles and relationships are still in development)
- Appropriately and faithfully reflect the diversity of the congregations and people throughout the wider setting of the UCC in this area.
- Include a leadership development team to identify persons for future service on the board and will assist in developing the gifts of these persons for service.

ANTICIPATED CALLED POSITIONS:

- Area Ministers in each of the Support Centers. They are responsible for the health and well-being of the congregations within the areas to which they relate. This includes resourcing Committees on Ministry, Search and Call, and providing pastoral care to authorized ministers and congregations. All the Area Ministers will work in partnership, supporting each other. Each Area Minister will have responsibility for process evolution for the entire judicatory in at least one area, like Committee on Ministry, Search and Call, or Lay School. The Area Ministers will determine these assignments collectively.
- An Executive Minister to support Area Ministers by supervising area service staff, assuring collaboration and sharing of resources in the Support Centers, representing the entire territory in ecumenical and national UCC settings, and assuring the evaluation of Area Ministers by Support Center advisory boards.
- The Executive Minister will be a specialist in at least one essential ministry. Possibilities include Generosity Development, Church Vitality, New Church Development, Prophetic Witness, or Faith Formation.
- Additional short term or long-term specialists in other essential ministries as determined by the Board. These may be full-time, part-time, or volunteer.
- All staff are considered all-Conference staff

ANTICIPATED APPOINTED POSITIONS:

- Administrative, financial, and support persons as needed. Staff would be managed centrally but may be dispersed physically.
- Area Ministers would hire and supervise appointed administrative staff as needed in their area, within defined budget parameters, and in collaboration with the Leadership Board.

PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES OF THIS STRUCTURE

- Focuses first on collaboration and a unified purpose, then on how structure allows for collaboration. The structure will be designed intentionally to build and develop partnerships.
- Reduces overlapping tasks and fills in gaps by sharing ministry across the geographic territory.
- A more efficient administrative structure that will permit greater investment in essential ministries.
- Allows specialists to thrive in their settings, as opposed to expecting generalists to serve in all settings of the area.
- Expands time the Area Ministers in the support centers have for pastoral ministry by reducing administrative responsibilities.
- The implementation process will build on the existing gifts and strengths of the associations to enrich our shared ministry.

SHARED PRACTICES

Exploring what things need to be accomplished by “one setting” of ministry in Ohio and what things we want to see accomplished. We delineated five focus areas to consider when gathering Shared Practices.

The current plan is to look first at defining best practices for ministries where there is a common interest among the associations. 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.

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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STEWARDSHIP and FINANCE

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 was forwarded to the national setting with the remainder retained for ministry within the current associations and conference. One of our hopes is that with a unified structure we will be able to forward a higher percentage 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

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:

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 shared 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.

Best and Standard Practices Resource: Discover and put in place shared practices that can be offered collaboratively throughout the region, such as:

- Lay school education programs
- Common procedures for search and call, authorizations, situational and fitness reviews
- Collaboration in communication and technology
- Unified budgeting, receiving and disbursing income, and providing financial resources to each support center.
- Generosity development for annual and long-term funding, capital fund raising, planned giving, and other resources
- Opportunities for broader relationship development among clergy such as periodic clergy convocations, preaching workshops, pastoral excellence groups, and skill development and cultivation programs
- Support for congregation treasurers, moderators, councils/consistories, and other groups as determined to be useful and desirable
- Assessment of strategic locations for support centers

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 shared 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.

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

Reports and Approvals – Actively interpret and promote support for this report among congregations, clergy groups, and throughout Associations. The governing bodies of the conference and the associations will be kept informed and reports will be made at every called meeting. Approvals will be sought from the current judicatories when we reach a point where changes are to be made to the legal structures.

NEXT STEPS

- ✓ At Annual Gathering offer Friday sessions to explore the research and recommendations of three “working groups;” and, on Saturday revisit that information briefly before seeking a consensus which will direct the Vision Team to continue developing recommendations to implement this proposal, or to seek a different course.
- ✓ NOTE: It is anticipated that full implementation in areas of staffing, financial management, adjusting administrative and legal matters, and development of shared program elements will be phased in as they are developed and approved, probably over a period of two-three or more years.

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

