



# Foundations, Findings, and Futures

Christian Faith Formation and  
Education in the  
United Church of Christ

## ***Executive Summary***

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## Introduction and Overview

Like other ministries, the ministry of Christian Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of Christ has changed over the course of the denomination's 55 years of history. In its present form, faith formation is encompassed within many different areas and ministries across the life of the church including, but not limited to:

- Local churches
- Associations
- Conferences
- Covenanted Ministries of the National Offices (Office of General Ministries, Local Church Ministries, Justice and Witness Ministries, and Wider Church Ministries)
- Institutions of higher and theological education
- Resource Centers
- UCC education-focused organizations and entities (including Association of United Church Educators and UCC Outdoor Association)
- Other non-profit religious organizations, both UCC-related and ecumenical (including the Center for Progressive Renewal, Pension Boards, CHHSM)
- Historically Underrepresented Groups (United Black Christians, Council for Hispanic Ministries, Council for American Indian Ministry, Pacific Islander Asian American Ministries, Disabilities Ministries, Coalition for LGBT Concerns, and Ministers for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice)

Because faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ is carried out in each of these settings, in diverse and context-specific ways, it was important to begin to think more deeply and strategize about this ministry as a whole, with the hopes of creating a unifying vision, framework, and collaborative network that supports and guides the formation of faith in the UCC.

In addition, as outlined in the proposed description for the Christian Faith Formation Research Study:

*Churches are caught, today, in the practices of the modern world, struggling with radical shifts in culture, church, and technology of the post-*

*modern world. This struggle includes the changing nature and practice of Christian Faith Formation in the church.*

*The current challenge is an opportunity for the United Church of Christ during a time of transformation in the life of the church. This time of change calls for a significant study of how Christian Faith Formation can best be practiced and shaped to address the spiritual and cultural challenges that the church faces.*

Therefore, the purposes of this study were to:

- Report on the current status of Christian Faith Formation
- Identify where there is energy, insight, and fruits in Christian Faith Formation
- List best practices for Christian Faith Formation
- Articulate a vision for the future of Christian Faith Formation in the UCC
- Develop a strategy for futuring Christian Faith Formation in the UCC, including recommendations on:
  - The development of resource material in the UCC
  - The role and description of any national ministry staff position(s)

The full report was divided into three major sections. After an explanation of the research methodology, the first section entitled “Foundations” offered an overview of the major changes in both church and society that directly impact faith formation and education, along with a brief history of this ministry in the UCC and an introduction of relevant conceptual frameworks to aid the process of contextualizing the research. The second section, “Findings,” highlighted specific surveys and topics of relevance for faith formation and education in the UCC, including the National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation and Education, Conference Ministers’ Partners in Education survey, summary of interviews with ecumenical national staff regarding denominational structures, and best practices in various sub-topics of faith formation. The final section, “Futures,” offered a vision and recommendations for “futuring” faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ, with attention to staffing, support structures, and resource development. Information from each of these sections is briefly provided in this Executive Summary.

## Research Methodology

First and foremost, this study was approached as an act of “*pastoral listening and care in the work of prophetic leadership.*” In her book *Ethnography as Pastoral Practice*, Mary Clark Moschella articulated that deep listening to the narratives of a community, with the goal of lifting up those narratives, can significantly increase understanding and insight into the life of an institution, ministry, or sets of beliefs and practices that inform current structures. This approach was both **ethnographic** (involving the immersion and study of people and groups) and **phenomenological** (involving the immersion and study of events and experiences) in nature and scope.

The research project included the following specific data collection methods:

- Large-scale survey (National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation and Education)
- Targeted group surveys (Conference Ministers’ Partners in Education Survey, Education Consultants’ Survey/Reflections)
- One-on-one interviews with key stakeholders and constituents
- Focus groups
- Site visits/meeting attendance
- Descriptive data
- Educational resources and documents
- Pertinent written reports
- Internet/scholarly research

## Foundations

### *Five Major Shifts and Trends*

It is important to note that the following major shifts are not the *only* ones that affect faith formation; however, they were the most salient themes that were uncovered. While many of these specific themes are directly related to larger religious and cultural trends, every attempt was made to be as direct as possible with regard to the nature of these shifts within the mainline church and, specifically, the United Church of Christ.

**1. Generational Changes.** As a result of the shifting role of institutional religion in American life, there are profound generational changes that have

impacted faith formation in the church as a whole. In addition, with new generations come different ways of doing and being in the world that, in many ways, are not congruent with traditional structures and pedagogies familiar to church life. In particular, younger generations are seeking to transform hierarchical, intellectual, specialized structures and programs into collaborative, experiential, organic, and fluid models of faithful living. However, many younger individuals are becoming increasingly frustrated with their inability to do this within the structure of the church and are looking outside the church for nurture and faith.

*The language of “spiritual” versus “religious” is a common theme in religious research and has been studied in youth and young adults. While the use of “spiritual” over “religious” is not always tied to specific generations, the implications of the use of this language among younger groups, both within and beyond the church, is an important trend that affects faith formation. UCC youth/young adult leaders overwhelmingly indicated that the young people they work with were “both religious and spiritual and want to experience God.”*

**2. Technological Changes.** Technology has deeply impacted the way in which relationships are formed and navigated in our culture and has many implications for the church and how we carry out the work of faith formation. The broad use of social networking sites and a constant sense of being in communication with increasingly diverse peoples and ideas are just a few specific phenomena within this major shift.

*The topic of internet-based pedagogical tools and social networking was a major theme found in various types of data in this study. In the course of interviews with individuals, the following sentiments were captured:*

- What we do needs to be online: “I think if there isn’t video from an event posted online, it might as well not have happened.”
- Resources must become interactive (i.e. online, self-taught confirmation, new member courses).

**3. Family Changes.** There are several shifts with regard to the notion and activity of the family in both church and society. The major themes can be summarized in the following statements:

- Families have become less stable, more mobile and more influenced by culture than by institution.

- Families are smaller and more domestically isolated.
- Competing demands on families' time has caused them to consider church as just one of many options for development and growth.
- The role of women within the family unit has changed drastically in the last 50 years.
- As Christian education/Sunday School became a defining feature of spiritual formation in the church, faith formation in the home diminished.

**4. Vocabulary/Language Changes.** Major shifts in this regard are categorized in the following statements:

- *“Church language” is no longer understood by a majority of people in the U.S.* With increasing religious and ethnic/racial diversities in this country, the once common language shared by Christians is not understood (or misunderstood) within a changed context. Geoffrey Black, General Minister and President, commented, “Because of the real diversification of the U.S. population, and the influx of people from around the world, all of that has had its impact on our understanding of Christian faith and has expanded our view to have much more engagement in an interfaith way.”
- *The language of “Christian Education” now connotes more traditional models of teaching and learning and is often understood as and relegated to the confines of children and Sunday School.*
- *Newer models promote the language of “Faith Formation” or “Spiritual Formation” which signifies a more holistic and engaged process of learning and practice throughout all aspects of congregational and daily life.* This new vocabulary and language for how formation is understood and discussed is changing the conversation on this ministry in the church and is opening up possibilities for increased collaboration in the areas of worship, preaching, and other ministries.

**5. Economic/Financial Changes.** The final major shift that has occurred in the last several decades concerns a loss of financial stability and prosperity for U.S. mainline denominations. In part, because of the overall decline in membership numbers, and the economic hardships that existing members have faced in recent years, local churches, Associations, Conferences, and the national offices of the United Church of Christ have experienced losses in terms of funding, staff, programming, and resources. As many expressed in the course of interviews for this study, Christian education and faith

formation is often one of the main casualties when financial losses are experienced.

Fewer resources offer both a challenge and an opportunity to envision new ways of doing the work of faith formation and education in the UCC. Without a reliance on funding to build programs and resources that may or may not have their intended effect, opportunities to practice more authentic, creative, contextually-based faith formation and networking may be possible at this moment in the life of the church.

## **Findings**

### *National Listening Campaign on Christian Faith Formation and Education*

A total of 1,130 individuals responded to the survey. The response rate for the survey (i.e. those who completed the entire survey) was 76.4%. The following demographic statistics were reported:

- 40.7% of individuals were authorized ministers (ordained, commissioned, or licensed) in the United Church of Christ, and 59.3% identified as lay persons.
- Respondents most identified as church education/faith formation staff at 45.7% (23.6% paid staff and 22.1% volunteer staff). Other significant identifiers included local church ministers (30.7%), local church educators/teachers (29.7%), parents of a current child or youth (21.0%), and none of these (21.3%).
- 66.0% of those surveyed identified as female, 32.7% identified as male, and 1.3% identified in other ways.
- The overwhelming majority of respondents identified as Euro-American (83.2%), 3.6% identified as African-American, 2.3% identified as bi-racial/multi-racial, 1.5% identified as Asian-American or Pacific Islander, 1.0% identified as Latino/Spanish, and 0.5% identified as Native American.
- In terms of age, the greatest number of respondents was 50-59 years old (30.7%). The second greatest number was 60-69 years old (25.4%).

Regarding survey respondents' congregational demographics, the following were reported:

- In terms of the theological outlook of the majority of a congregation's active participants, 60.2% of individuals stated they attend a "very liberal" or "somewhat liberal" congregation, 23.5% attend a "moderate" congregation, and 14.6% attend a "somewhat conservative" or "very conservative" congregation.
- A majority of survey respondents attended a church in which the average worship attendance is either 100-299 (38.1%) or 50-99 (32.4%). This is fairly comparable to overall UCC church statistics (41.7% and 22.1%, respectively).

Overall, several statements could be made in summary of the results of the National Listening Campaign:

- Worship and sermons are the most formational church-related experiences for individuals, with service/mission opportunities, choir/hymn singing, Bible and other studies, and justice/peace work also highly formational.
- How to connect faith with everyday life and how to be an agent of transformation in the world are the two most important faith learning desires of UCCers.
- Group-based activities (discussions, retreats, small groups) in which a sense of community and meaning is created are the most preferred formats for individuals' faith formation.
- The vocabulary of "Christian Education" continues to be the primary term used in congregational settings; but individuals' vocabulary is more expansive and varied and includes "Faith Formation" and "Spiritual Formation" at similarly frequent rates.
- People most desire teachers/facilitators/leaders who have a sense of grounding in their own faith and who are empathic/willing to listen. While knowledge is also a high desire, it is not as important as these other qualities.
- Overall, teachers/facilitators/leaders in churches receive basic training (if they receive any training at all) and are usually mentored individually.
- Training programs that individuals are most aware of are Still Speaking/Congregational Vitality and Stewardship trainings, with slightly less awareness of *Our Whole Lives*, regional lay education programs, and Partners in Education programs.
- Curricula that individuals in the UCC are most aware of are *Our Whole Lives*, *Faith Practices*, and *Seasons of the Spirit*.

- UCC resources that individuals are most aware of are *Bad Girls/Boys of the Bible*, Still Speaking resources and studies, Open and Affirming resources, and Justice and Witness Ministries resources.
- Paper handouts and books continue to be the most utilized formats for faith formation programs, with audiovisual resources also highly used.
- About half of all congregations employ Christian education/faith formation staff.
- In terms of support resources, individuals are not nearly as aware of Education Consultants as they are of AUCE and Partners in Education. They are as equally familiar with seminary/college faith formation/education programs, however, as the two programs above and are also highly familiar with conference-based education/faith formation programs and staff.
- Individuals overwhelmingly expressed a need for a national staff position to support faith formation, but opinions were mixed regarding the need for a certification program for educators.
- Notable differences based on age were present in several areas, including increased use of the internet as a learning format and Facebook and texting for communication among younger groups.

### *Best Practices*

With the variety of data gathered throughout this study—interviews, journal and online articles, resource materials, research studies, books, surveys, site visits, etc.—a number of best practices were identified that impact the ministry of faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ. While some of these best practices were previously mentioned and identified in the report, a more succinct, yet comprehensive, listing of these practices was offered below in several major areas. Additionally, where applicable and available, specific congregations and resources were lifted up and offered as models that most exemplified the respective best practices.

#### General Approaches/Pedagogies:

1. Faith formation is a lifelong endeavor.
2. Faith formation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a spirit of adaptation to new challenges.
3. Faith formation addresses the diversity of people's spiritual and religious needs.

4. Faith formation takes place in a diversity of settings in order for faith to be fully integrated into individuals' lives and contexts.
5. Faith formation utilizes a variety of formats and technologies for learning and growing in faith.
6. A network approach is crucial for lifelong faith formation.
7. Faith formation is both a formal and informal, an intentional and an unexpected, process.
8. Faith formation requires intentional intergenerational activity through communities of practice.
9. The role of the Christian educator is not primarily to be a teacher, but rather, a curator.

#### Worship, Mission, Discipleship:

1. There is a strong connection between a congregation's faith formation and its worship.
2. The use of drama, art, and music in faith formation has a profound impact on individuals and congregations.
3. Service and mission provide profound opportunities for conversation and on-going faith formation.
4. Faith formation and education, when understood within the broader context of discipleship, creates a more holistic understanding of the task of this ministry.

#### Children, Youth, Young Adults, and Families:

1. Intergenerational faith formation—bringing all age groups together to learn about their faith—is an effective way to accomplish the goals of lifelong faith formation.
2. Congregations in which children, youth, and young adults are active participants and leaders in the whole life of the church are communities of vital faith formation.
3. The role of the home is critical to faith formation.
4. Vital formational children's ministry is about story, ritual, and relationship.
5. Vital youth faith formation makes connections between a personal God, youths' communal concerns, and their role and agency in their own lives and in world.
6. Faith formation for young adults is different than faith formation for older adults.

7. Vital faith formation for children, youth, and young adults occurs when adults engage their own faith in meaningful ways and serve as models for them.

## **Futures**

This section outlined possibilities for “futuring” the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ and included the beginnings of a vision, framework and definitions, and strategies. More specific options and recommendations were offered around staffing roles and functions, programs and support, and resource development. The Futures section is based on research and findings from the first two sections of this report; but other factors (financial, political, and logistical) were also taken into consideration. A summary of this section is found below.

### *Vision for Faith Formation in the United Church of Christ*

Over the last couple of years, the Collegium of Officers has been in conversation with various settings across the life of the denomination regarding the creation and refinement of a Vision Plan for the United Church of Christ. The Vision Plan was solidified in Spring 2012, and it possesses critical implications for the ministry of faith formation and education.

The Vision Plan contains four central Bold, Inspirational Goals (BIGs), which are as follows:

1. The UCC is a bold, widely-known and respected public voice of Christianity in service of God’s ever-unfolding mission.
2. There is a welcoming UCC community of faith that is accessible to all—no matter who they are or where they are on life’s journey.
3. **Every UCC person is well-equipped to be growing in faith, be theologically conversant, and be active in the global mission of the church.**
4. *The UCC has a wealth of prepared, excellent leaders that reflect the diversity of God’s beloved community.*

Goal #3 speaks directly to the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the UCC and encompasses all three aspects of that particular endeavor. Approaches, resources, and educators/faith formation curators

are needed in order to equip people to be growing in their faith. These same things are needed in assisting individuals to become theologically conversant in their faith. Lastly, as the research in this report demonstrated, acts of service and mission are themselves faith formational, as they provide opportunities for the practice of Christian discipleship.

Goal #4 also speaks to the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the UCC by setting forth a call to both authorized and lay leadership development. Leadership training and development is intertwined with faith formation and education, as there are opportunities for both initial and on-going professional development of which this ministry is related.

Given the centrality that Christian faith formation and education has been granted within the Bold, Inspirational Goals of the Vision Plan, it is only fitting that they serve as an initial guide to the vision of this ministry for the near future (10-30 years, knowing that the goals may perhaps change in that timeframe as well).

### *Vision Statement*

That being said, an overall vision statement for the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the United Church of Christ is crucial in order for the relevant goals of the Vision Plan to be actualized. Rather than re-create an entirely new vision that excludes the faithful, and still relevant, visions of a previous time, these can be adapted for a new time and place. The document entitled “Toward a Vision of Education in the United Church of Christ” (1985) possesses important elements in the reformulation of a new vision; and when combined with the UCC’s Core Values of Continuing Testament, Extravagant Welcome, and Changing Lives, the beginnings of a new vision can be found. The (draft version of this) statement is below.

### ***Toward A New Vision of Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of Christ***

*There is great desire within people to (re)discover meaning and purpose for their lives and to experience a sense of God. The United Church of Christ recognizes the immense societal shifts that have taken place over the last several decades that have affected all people, as well as the values and practices of a church that finds itself situated in the postmodern age.*

*In this context, the United Church of Christ calls for renewed commitment to faith formation and education that will equip all God's people for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12) and will address the urgent need for the spiritual and societal transformation of persons and of our common life.*

*The United Church of Christ lifts up a vision of faith formation and education that actively engages the UCC's Core Values by affirming these fundamental principles.*

### **Continuing Testament**

- *The scriptures and histories of the Christian tradition, and of the United Church of Christ, possess continual wisdom and meaning for our collective life and faith.*
- *In each new age, the church must respond creatively to the spiritual and formational needs that it encounters among people.*

### **Extravagant Welcome**

- *Persons of all ages are nurtured by continual inquiry into Christian faith and experience, as well as by the general search for wisdom, justice, and beauty in creation.*
- *Faith formation and education in the UCC is informed and strengthened by the diversity of its members who offer different approaches, resources, and ways of being for the transformation and learning of all.*

### **Changing Lives**

- *God transforms us through formal and informal, expected and unexpected sources and encourages us to be open to all seekers and servers of truth, justice, and love.*
- *The formation and transformation of followers of Jesus Christ are processes through which lives are empowered to engage in service and mission in a global society, thereby sustaining discipleship and enriching life in all of its dimensions.*

*Specifically, visions of vital faith formation and education in this time and place may perhaps (but not definitively) look and feel something like this:*

- *All generations intentionally worshipping together, engaging in ritual and sacrament with joy and reverence;*

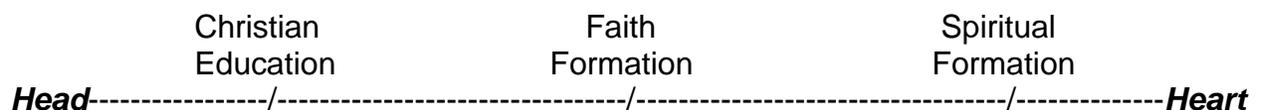
- *People sharing their stories with one another, discovering meaning together and connecting them with God’s stories;*
- *Individuals and groups practicing their faith through embracing spiritual practices or through intentionally integrating faith into everyday lived experiences;*
- *Generations engaging in acts of service and mission within communities and with purposeful reflection;*
- *Faith experiences and learning taking place in a variety of customized formats and settings based on shared interests;*
- *Facilitators, practitioners, educators, and other leaders engaging in continuing learning and dialogue through a number of formats, both physical and virtual;*
- *A decrease in the need for “experts” and an increase in the need for co-nurturers within groups in which all possess equal wisdom;*
- *Individuals and groups utilizing resources based on ease of access, user-friendliness of content, and appeal to different styles of learning.*

### **Framework and Definitions**

The vocabulary of “Faith Formation and Education” has been used throughout the report, as it seems to offer the most inclusive and accessible language to describe this ministry. While recognizing that the use of Christian Education cannot be eliminated completely due to its continued prevalence within congregations, it is recommended that Faith Formation be the primary term used to describe this ministry in the national setting. Spiritual Formation is also a helpful term, although the connotation of this term is a bit different than the other words used to describe this ministry.

All in all, however, the relationship between these concepts is one worth explicating; and a preliminary diagram is offered below.

### **Vocabulary Framework**



As articulated previously, the language of Christian Education connotes more traditional models of teaching and learning, patterned after the secular schooling system in the United States. The association for this

term, whether perceived or real, is with an attainment of “head” knowledge and facts. On the other end, there is the vocabulary of Spiritual Formation, which usually relates to practices of devotion and a focus on the inner work of the soul. The association for this term, whether perceived or real, is with an occurrence of an experience/encounter, or “heart” knowledge.

With this in mind, Faith Formation can then be understood and defined as “an engaged process of learning and practice integrated throughout all aspects of congregational and daily life.” This definition allows for the combining of “head” and “heart” knowledge into a more holistic understanding and embodiment, rather than creating a dichotomy between the two concepts.

Now that a definition has been proposed, a framework for what the ministry of Faith Formation includes is presented. While there are many other settings and spaces for faith formation, this provides a basic framework to envision all action, both within and beyond the church setting, as faith formation.

### Faith Formation Framework



It is important to note that other ministries such as stewardship and evangelism are subsumed under many of these categories. Additionally,

faith formation occurs through a variety of formats that are both virtual and face-to-face including: individually, with a peer/mentor, in a small or large group, or within the larger communal context in informal and formal, expected and unexpected ways. In this manner, John Roberto's approach to faith formation as a network is most fitting.

When putting together any particular program or experience for an interest group, this framework is essential to keep in mind in ensuring that a network of complementing options are open and available for individuals and families to engage in. Creativity and an adaptation of content and format to meet the needs within one's context are crucial in this new model of networked faith formation.

### *Strategy for the National Setting*

The following recommendations provide a foundational strategy to assist in carrying out the vision for the ministry of Christian faith formation and education in the national setting of the United Church of Christ. This strategy has implications for all settings of the church, including local congregations, associations, conferences, related organizations and groups, resource centers, seminaries, and so on.

Therefore, based on the research presented in the full report, it is recommended that:

1. The national setting of the UCC ***re-commit*** itself to proclaiming the ministry of Christian faith formation and education as vital to the life and mission of the church in this age, by considering its place in both current and future budgets and structures.
2. The national setting of the UCC ***share*** in the ministry of faith formation with all other settings across the life of the church, serving as a partner in content curation and relational networking, not necessarily as a content generator and trainer of specialists (which is already occurring in many other settings of the church).
3. The national setting of the UCC work to ***identify and lift up*** "Centers of Excellence" with regard to Christian faith formation and education, to serve as models for the whole denomination, congregations and settings in which best practices and strategies are being successfully implemented.

4. The national setting of the UCC ***partner*** with related centers, seminaries and theological schools, organizations, regional education/training programs, resource centers, and judicatory bodies to coordinate and/or promote online platforms that allow pastors, educators, youth workers, and other leaders to share best practices and resources, as well as coordinate and/or promote online capabilities for learning.

5. The national setting of the UCC ***coordinate*** communication and organization among national staff engaging in the development and administration of faith formational and educational resources, trainings, and programs of the various Covenanted Ministries, as well as other related ministries.

6. The national setting of the UCC ***develop*** resources for faith formation and education that are simple in format, yet contain theological depth, allowing individuals and groups to explore questions and grow in their faith. It is especially helpful if some of these resources promote intergenerational formation and engagement with other faiths in relation to the Christian faith.

### ***Staff Roles and Functions***

It is recommended that any future staffing configurations in the national setting work to implement the above strategies, as it would be best if some of these tasks be identified within the scope of specific job descriptions and overall expectations.

Based upon the research, there are a variety of configurations that are possible for how the ministry of faith formation and education can be carried out in the United Church of Christ. The following three models are offered as the best possible configurations for the stated needs and recommendations; but all decisions regarding staffing are dependent upon current funding and the availability of resources.

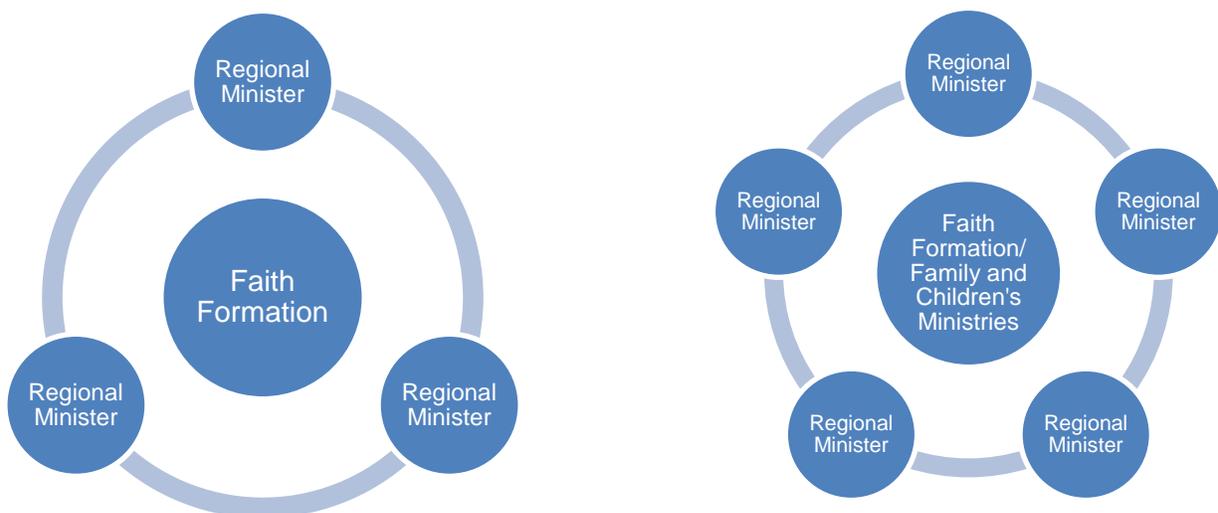
**Model 1: Regionally-Based Ministry Team.** This model involves the hiring of several regional ministers who would carry out the above recommendations, not within the actual offices of the national setting in Cleveland, but from various regions around the country. The logistics of these positions can vary (part-time, full-time, salaried, or contracted); but the tasks and duties of the team would be divided depending on each

individual's particular strengths (e.g. someone able to develop web-based platforms and resources vs. someone able to content curate and network to identify Centers of Excellence).

Positive aspects of this particular model are that it allows for a broader applicant pool, as individuals would not need to relocate in order for their gifts to be utilized. Additionally, the possibilities for individuals already engaged in the work of faith formation in their local and regional contexts in order to lift up best practices and simultaneously maintain connections in that particular setting would enrich the depth and scope of possibilities for creative partnerships and collaborations.

*It is important to note that this model is already being implemented within the national setting of the UCC with regard to Family and Children's Ministries.* In the next year, three part-time regional ministers will be hired to serve as part of a regionally-based ministry team; and these positions will be shared positions with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) denomination. As the work of faith formation and education is so closely related to ministry with families and children (as the research in this report has suggested), a similar model, or an expansion of the model to incorporate faith formation into the newly developing team, might be an appropriate course of action for the future.

### Regionally-Based Ministry Team Configurations



These regionally-based faith formation positions might also be shared with a denomination such as the Christian Church (DOC) and would promote increased collaboration and development of resources. Overall, this model, while less centrally situated within the traditional roles of previous denominational staffing structures, offers possibilities for a network approach to faith formation that allows increased creativity and new ideas to emerge from contextualized settings.

**Model 2: Minister of Faith Formation and Education.** A more conventional staffing approach is the creation of a single staff position in the national UCC setting. There are several benefits to this model, including: the ability of one individual's efforts to be solely focused on the ministry of faith formation, the ability to (perhaps) better coordinate faith formation efforts across all of the Covenanted Ministries and partner bodies, and the presence of a "go to" person for all things related to this ministry. Many denominations currently function with staffing structures such as these; however, these individuals are largely employed within the publishing divisions of their respective organizations.

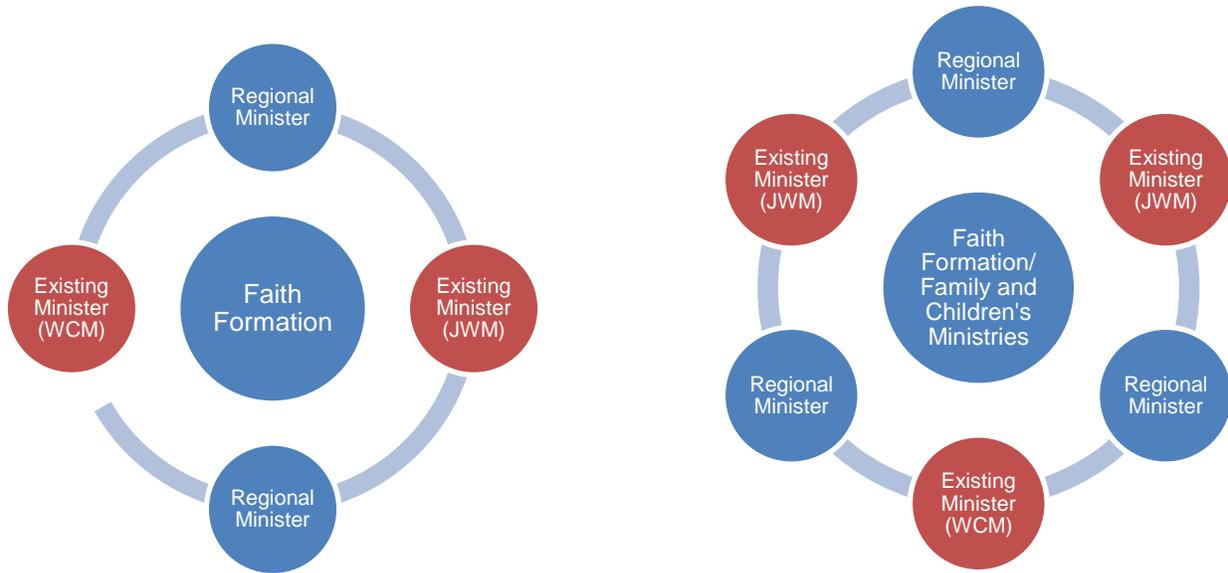
If this particular staffing model were implemented, it is crucial to note that the individual would need to possess a wide range of gifts and strengths to undertake the tasks previously outlined, including technological, content curating, communication, networking, and resource development skills.

**Model 3: Hybrid/Integrated Ministry Team.** This model combines the approach offered in the regionally-based ministry team model with existing staff in the national setting whose work is already focused on faith formation and specific curricula and training programs. As was articulated in this report, there are several national staff among the four Covenanted Ministries who have been charged with the work of faith formation and education within their respective bodies and have both developed and coordinated highly successful curricula and training programs for the denomination and beyond (for example, the Justice LED curriculum program is staffed by a full-time individual and currently has 300 trained facilitators). Other curricula and training programs are equally successful across other Covenanted Ministries.

Therefore, in full acknowledgement and support that the ministry of faith formation and education is thriving in areas throughout the national setting, in varying ways, this "third way" model is offered in the hopes that a more

integrated system can emerge. Below are some possible configurations for such a model.

### Hybrid/Integrated Ministry Team Configurations



All of the above models offer strengths and challenges, and they all have the potential to be successful. ***With any approach, it is recommended that the staff person(s)/ministry team report to their own respective team within their particular Covenanted Ministry, as well as the current publishing and communications team.*** It is important to ensure greater communication within the ministry of faith formation and education as a whole by recommending multiple reporting structures, particularly for the coordination of marketing and resource production. This also serves to prompt increased collaboration and network building as a result of shared interests.

#### ***Programs and Support***

The following recommendations on programming and support structures for faith formation and education are offered below and are based on the research in this study.

**1. It is recommended that the UCC Education Consultants program come to a close at the end of 2012.** For the past 17 years, the Consultants have faithfully served in this ministry, promoting UCC

resources and curricula, training educators, and supporting Partners in Education. Unfortunately, as the needs and priorities of churches, associations, and conferences have shifted, their work level has largely decreased in most areas. In addition, with a large portion of UCC resource sales occurring online, face-to-face promotion of curricula and resources have not garnered the same results as in previous years.

**2. It is recommended that national support for the conference-based Partners in Education program also come to a close at the end of 2012.** While Partners in Education programs in several Conferences within the United Church of Christ are thriving, this is due in large part to the energies of Conference staff and dedicated regionally-based volunteer educators who have sustained those efforts. (In this manner, Conferences are free to continue these programs if there are energies and successes occurring as a result.) For the most part, however, this program is not currently meeting the needs of congregations, due to the cultural and ecclesial shifts highlighted earlier in this report. There are many highly gifted Partners in Education in the United Church of Christ; but their gifts can be lifted up in more effective ways, as many are either under-utilized in their current roles or are committed to faith formation positions and responsibilities in their own congregations.

Some of the ways in which the gifts and talents of Partners in Education can be better utilized may include: creation and editing of resources, consulting on resource development, creation and editing/consulting on current curricula and training programs (Justice LED, MMI, etc.) for improved effectiveness, identification and resource creation regarding Centers of Excellence for faith formation and education; and development of online platforms and programs for education and training.

**3. It is recommended that the Association of United Church Educators (AUCE) be granted additional support to continue building a network of educators, pastors, faith formation curators, families and children's ministers, youth and young adults leaders, and outdoor ministries coordinators.** Because of AUCE's history and legacy as a networking organization for faith formation ministries, it is fitting that AUCE continue this work with more formal support from the national setting, in the forms of designated funding, resource use, and overall promotion. As staffing and funds continued to decrease over the years in the national offices, AUCE carried forward much of the work that was discontinued. The regional

structures that AUCE currently has in place, as well as the annual conferences and retreats for professional development that occur each year through the organization, serve to support faith formation leaders. These activities and events can be energized through these resources, in order that AUCE can become a more visible and central part of the network of faith formation ministries in the UCC, as well as continue to be a separate, but collaborative partner with the national setting.

**4. It is recommended that, within the next year, a national faith formation event take place at an identified Center of Excellence, in order to gather together individuals engaged in the ministry of Christian faith formation to reflect on the research study and the vision and to engage in learning, networking, and sharing of best practices.** Through this research, two congregations have been identified as possible locations for such an event: First Congregational UCC, Washington, DC, and United Church of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC. With technological capabilities, sessions can be recorded and broadcast so that learning and sharing occurs across the life of the denomination. In essence, this effort will serve to “launch” a new vision for faith formation and lift up this ministry in new ways for both seasoned practitioners and individuals who are not as familiar with this ministry.

### *Resource Development*

*It was recommended above that the national setting of the UCC develop resources for faith formation and education that are simple in format, yet contain theological depth, allowing individuals and groups to explore questions and grow in their faith.* It is especially helpful if some of these resources promote intergenerational formation and engagement with other faiths in relation to the Christian faith.

In addition, it was also stated that any future position(s) possess a direct reporting line to the publishing and communications team of the national setting, so that recommendations regarding the creation of future resources and curricula can be succinctly received, vetted, and then developed.

With those things in mind, there are a few additional recommendations that pertain to the development and promotion of resources.

**1. It is recommended that no new undertakings for the development of large-scale curricula be executed within the next few years.** Current sales and survey trends (as reported in the study) indicate that congregations can no longer afford these types of resources and are drawing from a number of cost-effective, internet-based materials, as well as adapting and creating their own curricula and programs.

**2. It is recommended that current curricula being sold through the UCC website continue, but that an exploration regarding the sales of other curricula and resources occur in order to ensure that the denomination is promoting the most relevant, theologically-progressive materials.** A listing of some possibilities of other curricula and resources is highlighted within this report.

**3. It is recommended that a broader approach to and understanding of “curricula” be embraced within the UCC, to include such resources as Still Speaking Bible studies, the *Caffeine* series for youth, and other short-term, small group resources.** Local congregations are looking to purchase these smaller, more affordable resources as opposed to larger curricula, as these are the types of materials that appeal to individuals in churches given hectic schedules and multiple priorities.

It is important to note that with the possibilities of a regionally-based team for faith formation ministries that might also be related with another denomination, the creation of future larger curricula may be possible and more cost-effective, allowing sales to increase.

**4. It is recommended that the national setting become more aggressive in identifying and insourcing locally-developed (or locally-developing) faith formation curricula, approaches, and resources that are already being successfully, even professionally, conceived, produced and implemented in UCC churches or by para-church organizations.** Types of resources can include confirmation materials, Sunday School or mid-week modules, or small group methods and resources (such as *Living the Questions* or studies from Darkwood Brew). These and other resources could be supported financially by the national setting (perhaps at a much more modest investment) and then (re)published, (re)branded and marketed for/to a much larger national UCC audience. Such an approach would be consistent with the emerging Centers of Excellence model that encourages innovative and effective

churches to lead in teaching/modeling best practices for other congregations.

**5. It is recommended that the intentional, scheduled promotion of UCC resources and curricula to educators and pastors continue through both print and virtual formats.** This year, with the creation of the UCC Education and Faith Formation Catalog (available online and in print) and the “edUCCators epistle” (bi-weekly e-blast to church educators and pastors), increased communication and awareness of the availability of resources for congregations is occurring. These efforts should not be halted and will hopefully assist in increasing sales overall.

In conclusion, the above vision, framework, definitions, and strategies/ recommendations are only preliminary offerings based on the research in this report. Decisions regarding these “futuring” ideas will be made in the coming months and years.