Conference Revitalization Working Group Report

The Conference Revitalization* Working Group met in Cleveland on October 29 and 30, 2014. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the Working Group’s recommendations and findings.

Members of the Working Group: Geoffrey Black (General Minister and President), Dale Bonds (Vice-Chair, UCCB), Matt Deal (Pastor, St. Pauls UCC, Somerset, PA), John Deekenback (Conference Minister, Central Atlantic), Roddy Dunkerson (Conference Minister, Nebraska), Edith Guffey (Designated Conference Minister, Kansas-Oklahoma), Randy Hyvonen (Retired Conference Minister), Susan Towner-Larsen (Minister for Conference Relations), Loey Powell (Executive Associate to GMP), Beth Walker (Member, Old First Reformed UCC, Philadelphia, PA), Elena Larssen (Senior Minister, 1st Congregational UCC, Long Beach, CA), Libby Tigner (Assoc. Conference Minister, So. California-Nevada)

*Note: The Working Group prefers to use “revitalization” instead of “boundaries” so that the emphasis is on vitality, best practices, etc., and not on raising anxiety about existing borders and boundaries.

BACKGROUND AND PREPARATION

In preparation for the meeting the Working Group reviewed:

- A motion from the 29th General Synod entitled: "Restructuring of Conference Boundaries", which served as the basis for our gathering.

- Provisions of the United Church of Christ Constitution and By-laws regarding Conferences

- Reports from the Conference Ministers regarding current conversations within and between Conferences regarding boundaries (Dated February and September/October 2014)

- Collegium/Conference Minister conversation notes (February 2014)

Rev. Susan Towner Larson prepared detailed notes of the Working Group’s conversations.

Please see the Appendices which include the detailed notes from the October 29-30, 2014, meeting and the above mentioned documents (except for the Collegium/Conference Minister conversation notes of 2/14).
AN OVERVIEW

The Conferences of the United Church of Christ come in many shapes and sizes with varied histories. Some are doing relatively well financially. However, an increasing number of Conferences are staffed by a single Conference Minister often with limited administrative support.

In the fifty-plus years of the United Church of Christ, the Conferences have not remained static. They have:

- Added a new Conference (Southwest emerged out of the Southern California and Southwest Conference)
- Seen the departure of a Conference (Puerto Rico)
- Experimented with a variety of interdenominational initiatives (i.e. United Ministries in the Northwest in the 1970's and, more recently, the Disciples Region/Montana N. Wyoming Conference efforts which are now disbanding.
- Maintained a unique relationship with the Calvin Synod, an Acting Conference

Conversations continue in a variety of settings regarding possible Inter-Conference collaboration:

- Shared staff across Conference boundaries
- Joint board, committee and staff meetings
- Administrative support
- Regionalization of certain functions
- Provision of services for congregations ecumenically (i.e. The United Church Insurance Board now provides property and liability insurance for United Church of Christ, Christian Church (Disciples) and Presbyterian Church (USA) congregations. Note: The Insurance Board is "owned" by the Conferences.
- And more...

Some Conferences have relatively simple legal and financial structures while others have complex financial, legal, property, camp/conference center facilities, and/or Trust relationships.

There is wasteful duplication of administrative and congregational support services but little motivation for change from the "current ways" of doing things (except when a crisis occurs).

We heard that the expansion of Conference responsibilities around Church and Ministry matters as well as Search and Call in recent decades has added considerable strain to the system. Some Conferences are now moving toward alternative staffing models and/or multi-Conference procedures for these and other critical functions (such as clergy misconduct Fitness Reviews).

We also noted that it is very difficult in many settings to discuss the Conferences without also discussing the interface and interaction with the 200+ Associations within those Conferences.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Working Group believes that the topic should be reframed from an on-going discussion of Conference boundaries to an examination of Conference vitality and viability.

Further:

1) Each Conference (and/or groups of Conferences) should be asked to evaluate their five year "sustainability" using criteria similar to those offered through the Center for Progressive Renewal's Four Quads. (see Attachment)

2) The Council of Conference Ministers and the United Church of Christ Board should be asked to appoint a Conference (and Association) viability working group to provide models, encourage utilization and receive Viability assessments.

3) Individual and/or groups of Conferences should be encouraged to continue their conversations and collaborative initiatives.

4) MESA and the Council of Conference Ministers should work together to provide alternative models for Search and Call, Church and Ministry committee support, Disciplinary actions, etc.

5) The newly installed General Minister and President should be called upon to give priority attention to these matters and report to the 2017 General Synod on actions taken.
APPENDIX A – REPORTS FROM CONFERENCES

Regional Conversations
As Reported by Conference Ministers
February 2014, Updated October 2014 (at End of Appendix A)

The Southern Region
From Douglas Anders:
The Southern Region of the UCC has had several collaborative conversations (including Conference Ministers and Conference leaders), which are on-going. We have not talked about shared staff except as a possible idea. The conversation and energy has been on what we can do together that will help a specific region of the UCC. So far the two areas of focus have been:
1. Collaborative efforts towards UCC "branding" with a specific emphasis for the UCC in the south. Part of this includes work on a regional UCC website. The hope is to creative specific UCC resources that might help our four Conferences with UCC identity in the south and resources to help us to evangelize-invite-proclaim our open, diverse, progressive identity (especially in the south).
2. Collaborative efforts of how we might be able to share technology and communication methods across conferences.

Among Conference Ministers (and the not the regional working group which includes Conference Ministers and Conference leaders), we have discussed the possibility of sharing our experiences, sharing resources, working together in a way that may benefit our Conferences and the region. At this point these areas have been more conversation than any actual real movement or tangible working together.
1. New Church Starts & Affiliation Evangelism
2. Lay Ministry Education (Southeast Conference Pathway's program a leader among us)
3. Disaster Ministry Response Work (Florida Conference work in Disaster Ministry a leader among us)
4. Continued Regional Programing: Regional Women’s Retreat, Regional Youth Event

Our work is hampered by continuing turnover in Conference Minister leadership (currently two Conference Ministers serving as Interim Conference Ministers). In the seven years, I have been in the South Central Conference, there may have been 1 to 1.5 years where there were four settled, called Conference Ministers.

The Western Region
From Mike Denton:

- After conversations over the last couple of years, the Western Region conferences (with the exception of Hawaii) have committed to exploring a shared fitness review process.
- This isn’t conference to conference but still seems relevant: We’ve also begun conversations with our national partners about shared staffing to recruit candidates and review applications for our Young Adult Service Communities (YASC). Our five year plan is to start three more communities in different parts of the conference. Just last week, we also were part of a conversation with our DoC colleagues - who have recently launched a program modeled on the UCC YASC model - about a shared staffing and recruiting model.
From Marc Stewart:
In addition to what has been reported about the West Region Conferences, here is an update from the MT-NWy Conference UCC:

- In this third year of “Partnership” with the Montana Region DOC, Regional Minister Ruth Fletcher and I were granted partnership standing in respective denominations and installed to these ministries at our shared Spring Planting Gathering (Conference Annual Meeting-Regional Meeting). We “partner” through covenant in which we agree to pool our resources to fund the judicatory ministries and offices, and to fund some shared goals (technology sharing, mission, church vitality, leadership training/support, and cluster gatherings). These shared ministries are directed through a Partnership Vision Council which takes plans and budgets back to each Board of Directors (DOC and UCC) for approval. We have had very limited success in doing shared ministry around youth programming and camp programming due to differing leadership styles and different approaches to ONA issues between UCC and DOC. Honestly, we have an uneasy truce that keeps us working together despite (on all levels) power struggles, egos, and differing cultures between our two denominations.

- Ruth Fletcher and I are committed to grinding through these difficulties, but, I do not experience this as “collaborative” as much as “institutional gamesmanship” albeit with a vision to be/do better. We have 32 UCC congregations and 10 DOC congregations. Ruth Fletcher and I are each called to 3/4 positions and we divide the partnership up by east-west geography to serve congregations. When we serve the other’s congregation we have the role of “associate” (i.e. Ruth is my “associate” for working with UCC search committees in her geography). The UCC contributes $197,000 to the Partnership and the DOC contributes ($86,000)…approx. a 70-30 split. The UCC has assets of about $1.2 million, and the DOC has about $1.8 million.

- I have had personal conversations with the Presbyterian executives of one of the 2 presbyteries that covers Montana. Initial conversations (May 2012) indicated an openness to exploring some shared ministries. The latest (Oct 2013) is that they are happy with what is happening in rebuilding the Yellowstone Presbytery and would be concerned about theological issues (such as ONA issues and Biblical authority issues) that would get in the way of their increasingly conservative orientation in this Presbytery.

- Finally, I have planted seeds with our conference board that the MT-NWy Association and Conference UCC may very well be part of a larger entity in the future (perhaps within five years). Part of the strategy in combining our three associations to one association this year was to recognize the cohesiveness of the MT-NWy geography while preparing it to become an association of a larger geography. We did conduct in-person conversations with Northern Plains UCC (Wade Schemmel and moderator Steve Holmes) in July 2012 about sharing ministries, but they were not ready to move in a shared ministry direction with us. I have also had information conversations with all the conference ministers of conferences surrounding MT-NWy to talk about possible interest in shared ministries. One Board member, Jeri Behringer, from the SD Conference was assigned to talk with me by phone and we conversed about MT-NWy interest in shared ministry.

The Mid-Atlantic Region
From John Deckenback:
We’ve had only very informal conversations with neighbors. Given our geography we touch or almost touch eight other Conferences. Nothing formal. Some feelers from Disciples regarding possible collaboration. A Regional Minister is retiring.
From David Gaewski:

There are several "resource sharing" conversations that are underway in New York:

1. The Northeast Region of the Disciples and the New York Conference have been meeting regularly to discern of future together. The Western Area of NY has had a "fusion" with the DOC for over 20 years. Currently, the Conference and the Region have an open door policy for all programing and resource opportunities. The DOC Regional Minister attends the UCC Conference program staff meeting. We may be moving toward a shared communications model as well. We are listening for the leading of the Holy Spirit as to where this may take us, but shared staffing has been mentioned. Our next step is to hold conversations with Montana to discuss how their model might be adapted for the New York context.

2. Four of the New England Conferences are in conversation with New York regarding the model of the New York School of Ministry (NYSOM), which is our Lay Academy program. We are sharing our model and exploring the possibility of transforming NYSOM into NESOM (North East School of Ministry). Conversations have taken place and are on schedule to continue.

3. New York Metropolitan is always looking for opportunities to partner with the New Jersey Association around issues of COM training, Rapid Response Training, etc.

4. We have had structured conversations with the RCA Collegiate Churches around joint ventures in New Church Start opportunities. There are continued scheduled conversations between the UCC and RCA Collegiate Churches on our potential future.

The West Central Region

From David Felton:

Representatives of the SD Conference Board of Directors have been in conversation with our neighboring conferences to discover if there are ways we can work together. We are also encouraged by the West Central Regional plan for a gathering this spring of the leadership of our 7 conferences – date yet to be determined.

The Great Lakes Region (and Beyond)

From Sheldon Culver:

There have been very informal conversations between KOUCC, MMSUCC and ISCUCC at the leadership level concerning ways that Illinois South and KO might provide support during the transition in MMS. Nothing to report in this arena at the moment.

The New England Region

From Jim Antal:

Regional Partnerships Already Underway in New England: (this may be only a partial list)

- Since 2007, Conference Ministers in New England have discussed - and in a variety of ways pursued - regional partnerships that are benefiting the UCC churches of New England.
- Examples:
  - New Hampshire and Maine share a staff person who oversees the Outdoor Ministry of both Conferences;
  - New England Search and Call staff meet once or twice a year, often inviting MESA staff to join us.
  - New Hampshire ACM often sits with MACUCC search and call monthly meeting
  - The Pastoral Excellence Program that originated in Mass. now is taking root in four of the other five New England Conferences.
For three years the environmental ministries activists from all six New England conferences have meet regularly, producing:

- The Ecumenical Lenten Carbon Fast,
- “Partnering with a Green God” conference featuring Bill McKibben, and
- In April 2013 a “Climate Revival” featuring Geoffrey Black, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church and both Desmond Tutu and Bill McKibben via video.

Ongoing Conversation about New Forms of Partnership and Cooperation:

- Massachusetts and Connecticut are investigating the possibility of sharing technological approaches to both data base as well as search and call (Rhode Island is welcomed into this conversation)
- Connecticut proposed in 2013 that the six New England conferences share a youth ministry coordinator
- The Conference Minister of CT has attended the Board meeting of the Mass. Conference, and the CM of MA will attend the Board meeting of CT in February 2014. (Rhode Island would, of course, be welcomed into this conversation)
- New Hampshire has invited the CM’s of the other 5 New England Conferences to attend its 2014 Annual Meeting

Possible benefits of a more robust UCC partnership across Rhode Island, CT and Mass.:

- **Enhanced Support for Church Leadership:**
  - Providing church leaders (lay and ordained) access to more resources and participation in programs. This will enhance their leadership abilities and give them a sense of being part of a larger, vital whole.
- **Economic benefits:**
  - Economic benefits would result from sharing staff and implementing best practices across the region.
- **Honest engagement of current realities:**
  - Embracing an adaptive plan to expand our partnership in incremental steps will provide all stakeholders with a sense that they are engaging in a preferred future.
- **Proactive leadership that prepares for a vital future:**
  - Among the many reasons to create and pursue a robust partnership is to assure that 15 years from now, a vital expression of the progressive church movement is alive and well in America.
- **This would impact the whole UCC:**
  - This would be enormously beneficial for the whole UCC – initiating such a partnership exemplifies leading from strength to provide for a more vital future.

*From Gary Schulte:*

To be precise, NHCUCC has two agreements that bring excellent resource persons into our programs from neighboring Conferences:

- We utilize the expertise of the CTUCC’s ACM for Endowment Ministries in working with our Investment Committee to review performance and oversee the manager of our Consolidated Investment Fund. Cost to NHCUCC for this collaboration is about $10,000 annually.
• We have an agreement with the Maine Conference to provide “active management” of our ministry at Horton Center (NHCUCC’s camp site). Among other things, the agreement bring MECUCC’s Director of Outdoor Ministries and Associate Director of Outdoor Ministries to NH. This has expanded the marketing for both Conferences—our camp is on a mountaintop; Maine’s camp (Pilgrim Lodge) is on a lake. NHCUCC no longer employs a Director of Outdoor Ministries. This three-year agreement needs to be reconsidered in 2014. Cost to NHCUCC for this collaboration is $98,000 annually.

Additional Clarification:
• The NHCUCC’s ACM may no longer have time to attend monthly S & C meetings in Framingham. We have appreciated the opportunity to join with the good colleagues in MACUCC over several years.
• Invitation has been extended to 5 CM’s and to Geoffrey to attend and participate in NHCUCC’s Annual Meeting (October 2014). So far, we are on Geoffrey’s calendar, and one CM is able to attend—given scheduling issues in other Conferences. All are welcome!

Updates on Regional Conversations
September/October 2014

The New England Region
From Jim Antal, September 2014:

Regional Partnerships Already Underway in New England: (this may be only a partial list)
Since 2007, Conference Ministers in New England have discussed - and in a variety of ways pursued - regional partnerships that are benefiting the UCC churches of New England.
Examples:
• Maine provides “active management” for NHCUCC’s camp site, including expanded marketing for both Conferences. This three-year agreement needs to be reconsidered in 2014. Cost to NHCUCC for this collaboration is $98,000 annually.
• CTUCC’s ACM for Endowment Ministries consults with NHCUCC’s Investment Committee to review performance and oversee NHCUCC’s manager.
• New England Search and Call staff meet once a year, often inviting MESA staff to join us.
• The Pastoral Excellence Program that originated in Mass. now is taking root in four of the other five New England Conferences.
• Since 2010 the environmental ministries activists from all six New England conferences have meet regularly, producing:
  the Ecumenical Lenten Carbon Fast,
  Partnering with a Green God” conference featuring Bill McKibben, and
In April 2013 a “Climate Revival” featuring Geoffrey Black, the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church and both Desmond Tutu and Bill McKibben via video.
A core-group of ecumenical environmental leaders continue to meet
In Jan. 2014 we launched a regional exploration of initiating a New England School of Ministry in conjunction with the NY School of Ministry.

Intentional Exploration of Interdependence:
NHCUCC’s Annual Meeting (October 2014) will include Geoffrey along with all 6 New England CMs.
Embracing Interdependence in Southern New England UCC:

1) Governance / Leadership Interdependence:
   a) December 7, 2013: Kent Siladi attends MACUCC Board meeting
   b) February 27, 2014: Jim Antal attends CTUCC Board meeting
   c) March 2014 Super Saturday w/CTUCC attracted 689 people!
   d) May 2, 2014: Board chairs and CMs of CT-RI-MACUCC gather for lunch
   e) Oct. 17-18, 2014 Jim Antal attends CTUCC Annual Meeting
   f) October 2014 Super Saturday w/Rhode Island
   g) Joint meeting of CT-RI-MACUCC Boards on November 15, 2014

2) Technological Interdependence:
   a) CTUCC is modifying and will soon use the database that MACUCC has been using since 2010. (Rhode Island is welcomed into this conversation)

3) Staff Interdependence:
   a) CTUCC and MACUCC search and call staff met in spring 2014 to compare approaches
   b) CTUCC and MACUCC are in conversation about sharing 2 staff positions in 2015 or 2016

4) Recognized Benefits of a more Robust UCC Partnership Across Rhode Island, CT and Mass.:
   a) Enhanced Support for Church Leadership (e.g. Super Saturday and Pastoral Excellence)
   b) Economic benefits (e.g. sharing staff and implementing best practices across the region)
   c) Honest engagement of current realities:
      i) Embracing an adaptive plan to expand our partnership in incremental steps will provide all stakeholders with a sense that they are engaging in a preferred future.
   d) Proactive leadership that prepares for a vital future:
      i) Among the many reasons to create and pursue a robust partnership is to assure that 15 years from now, a vital expression of the progressive church movement is alive and well in America.
   e) This would impact the whole UCC:
      i) This would be enormously beneficial for the whole UCC – this partnership exemplifies leading from strength to provide for a more vital future.

From Mid-Atlantic Region
From Alan C. Miller, October 2014:
The Pennsylvania Southeast Conference and the Penn Northeast Conference continue to hold conversations and find ways to share in joint programs. The Staffs are also continuing in their conversations about new models for the future.

From the West Central Region
From Roddy Dunkerson, October 2014:
The Iowa and Nebraska Conferences have been involved in a model that I would call “yoking” for several years and each Conference Board has been aware of the conversations. Rich Pleva and I presented an overview of the discussion to the Annual Meeting of the Nebraska Conference this summer. In addition, we have attempted to retain the relationships with other Conferences in the Region who were involved in these conversations over the last five years.

From Rich Pleva:
Here’s a slightly elaborated (but hopefully not contradictory) take on the Iowa/Nebraska/South Dakota conversation – as compared to that which Roddy has already sent:
• Informal conversation about a more organic relationship between the Iowa and Nebraska Conferences is now a couple years old. During the current calendar year the conversation has taken a more formal turn.

• Early during 2014 Nebraska CM Roddy Dunkerson and Iowa CM Rich Pleva met with a small group of individuals representing the South Dakota Board of Directors. During the meeting Dunkerson and Pleva shared ideas about cross-conference sharing that focus on two areas:
  o Shared executive leadership (that is, a potential model wherein conferences maintain distinct identity – functionally and legally – but share one executive who serves as staff to all three Boards of Directors and serves of head of staff to a combined staff of the cooperating conferences, and,
  o Integrated and shared support functions. This would likely mean one office which handles financial accounting, professional staff support, recordkeeping and IT support, and support for the various vehicles of communication – traditional and social media based.

At the Nebraska Annual Meeting in June, Iowa CM Rich Pleva made a verbal presentation similar to that offered to the South Dakota board. Then in October, a presentation of essentially the same content was made to the Annual Meeting of the Iowa Conference. None of these presentations were styled as proposals, but were instead characterized as invitations for further thought and evolution of the concept. South Dakota has expressed interest in the model and intends to continue to explore the concept with Nebraska and Iowa while still moving ahead on their current CM search. There are some obvious challenges attendant to that decision – but all the parties are aware of those challenges and still committed to the ongoing conversation. This conversation isn’t about boundaries, per se, but is about substantive functional sharing.

More from some of the Conferences re: the Conference Boundaries Resolution:

Florida (Jim and Sandy Boler): We are new on the scene and consider ourselves the parentheses between the Interim and the Called CM. Talking with leaders in the conference we gather that the Board of Directors has discussed this issue and supports collaboration with the other conferences in the Southern Region but not a changing of boundaries. It seems that we are seeking new ways of being the UCC in Florida and being the UCC in the South but that changing conference boundaries doesn’t now seem to be the core issue. Sharing resources (especially human resources) is.

Southwest (John C. Dorhauer): I have had a variety of conversations about this with my Board and CM colleagues.

A common refrain out west is that geography inhibits thoughts about making the Conferences larger. There has been talk that imagines 3 or 4 regional judicatory staff doing what 8 CMs currently do, maintaining current Conference geographies, and supplementing with Associate staff deployed in the Conferences - but that has not gone very far, and is little more than creative thinking that hasn’t caught hold of anything substantive yet.

The West Region looks to be very close to regionalizing the Fitness Review process - and I would say there is a very good chance that the technical pieces needed to complete this will be in place for a launch of this initiative sometime in 2015.

There has also been talk about, but not yet to my awareness any concrete follow up with, sharing parts of our support staff: payroll services, accounting services, youth ministry, etc.
Rocky Mountain (Sue Artt): What The Good Rev Dorhauer said, and...
1) Presence of CM makes a difference when UCC churches are so spread out as they are out in Colorado, Utah and Wyoming. Hard to imagine taking in more geography and keeping the relational aspect vibrant.
2) Centers of Expertise (office support) are clearly possible: accounting, info tech, etc. RMC is ready to have this conversation.

Northern California-Nevada (Ken Iha): I would concur with John’s comment about how geography in the west inhibits thoughts about reconfiguring boundaries. Not much exploration/conversation in NCNC.

Pacific Northwest (Mike Denton): We’ve had some conversations about some of the pieces John’s mentioned but, honestly, I’m not sure how to best help them/us have more of this conversation. If the call for this was coming from within the conference - as it has been about some of the collaboration conversations - there would be a clearer way to move the conversation forward but it’s not. At this point, I think what I’m hearing is that it’s not clear to folks that changing conferences boundaries is a better way to go as opposed to simply a tradeoff of one set of problems for another equal set of problems. Nor do they see this as a real "solution" to any of the problems they see in their congregations and conference. I’m finding hard to inspire more conversation with all the "ifs" and "might’s" that I have to say.

Vermont (Lynn Bujnak): In Vermont our Board is aware of the resolution and the efforts of our neighbors to the south (MA and CT). They are open to looking at ways we can more closely collaborate across conference boundaries. One concrete example of that is our participation in shaping and supporting the Northeast School of Ministry. As I have said before we are actively engaged in shared ministry with the Episcopal Diocese of Vermont and looking for more ways to partner with them.

After reading other comments I would like to expand on what I reported. Much like what Mike has said, our leaders do not see a benefit in changing conference boundaries. In a conference where it is hard enough to help congregations have a connection to anything beyond themselves, moving the point of contact and assistance further away is not seen as helpful, particularly if the wider entity is located out of northern New England. There is more interest in finding ways to collaborate across lines than change the boundaries.

Kansas-Oklahoma (Edith Guffey): KO leaders are very interested in this resolution and would welcome both exploration and action, even small steps. There was one meeting with the Moderators of MMS and ILS and KO where the possibility of sharing staff was discussed, but nothing more beyond that one meeting. There was an agreement to make any programing available to neighboring conferences. The KO Conference and Western Association of MMS are planning on joint meeting next fall; it will be KO’s Annual Meeting and the Fall Association meeting for the Western Association of MMS.

Minnesota (Shari Prestemon): I’m afraid this is a conversation the MN Conference has not really tackled. I did raise the issue at one Board meeting early on in my short time here thus far, but we have not given it any real time in our strategic planning or thinking. I have also not had any conversations with other Conference staff in our neck of the woods about collaborating on particular ministries or attempting any common services.

The only minor exception to this would be that Keith Mills and I both met with a group of pastors serving on both sides of the North Dakota-Minnesota boundary, and those pastors have now decided to meet jointly in a clergy cluster.
I’m certainly open to this conversation and greatly appreciate what others have shared about their efforts in this regard, but quite frankly we’ve had so many major moving parts in the MN Conference in my first year that this one simply hasn’t risen to the top of the pile yet.

**Michigan** (Campbell Lovett): No Board action in Michigan. We have some very initial conversations with folks in IK about doing some lay ministry training together, and with Ohio about doing some joint annual meeting (via technology) together. Most of our efforts right now are with the Ontario Conference of the United Church of Canada and the Michigan Region DOC.

**Indiana-Kentucky** (John Vertigan): The Board of Directors of the IKC has expressed a willingness to talk with anyone who wants to talk re: the issues at hand. There has been no direct action to date.

**Wisconsin** (Michael Obenauer): There have been no discussions in the Wisconsin Conference concerning Conference Boundaries. We have discussed together how we might share some of the rich gifts of this Conference with others outside our boundaries -- gifts such as Outdoor Ministries and Lay Academy. We also might have the capability and potential to share our accounting and financial management capabilities with other Conferences.

**RI, CT, MA** (Kent Siladi): The covenantal partners of Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Connecticut have been and are continuing to engage in dialogue about mutual ministries. There has been some very early thinking about the possibilities of a federation (in contrast to a merger). This is only a concept at this point in time.

There will be a joint Board of Directors meeting among the three conferences on Saturday, November 15th. At that meeting we will be sure to reference this resolution - and we will report out whatever fruit might be born from this important gathering.

**Penn West** (David Ackerman): No conversations yet, but I’d be open to them.

**Central Atlantic** (John Deckenback): There have been some very preliminary probes by a couple of our neighbors (we have 7 or 8)... We are working toward a 3 way conversation on racial/ethnic ministries with CAC/NY/CT sometime next year. Various Penn SE folks probed our willingness to take them in or accused us of wanting to... We have enough mischief on our side of the Delaware River... I suspect these initiatives had more to do with events in Penn SE than anything in CAC... Southern Conf. staff came for a two-day visit to see how we do what we do...very friendly, cordial... Nothing really substantive is happening in this arena.

**Southern California-Nevada** (Felix Villanueva): This resolution doesn’t really apply to us in SoCal Nevada. We haven’t any discussions about it.

**Maine** (Rick Cowles): We are not discussing the Conference Boundaries Resolution in Maine. “You can’t get the-ah from he-ah”, don’t you know!

- We are discussing a major change in our governance, staffing and ministry models within the conference.
- We are continuing our relationship with the New Hampshire Conference in Outdoor Ministries under slightly different terms than over the last 3 years.
- And, we are integrally involved in discussions to create a consortium of regionally based ministry formation programs in what is presently the six conferences of New York, Vermont,
New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Maine. The working name of this consortium is the Northeast School of Ministry.

- I also enjoy having coffee and conversation with Gary Schulte every so often.

**Montana-Northern Wyoming (Lynne Simcox):** There has been some conversation with South Dakota about the churches in Eastern Montana. I don't think it has gone very far.... Having served Pacific Northwest, Montana Northern Wyoming and Rocky Mountain (all in all about 17 years) I think I can safely say that there are some Conference "business" functions that could be done jointly but the reality of the distances involved means that staff presence, leadership training and clergy support would be hard to do on a wider regional basis.

**Southwest (John C. Dorhauer):** I have had a variety of conversations about this with my Board and CM colleagues.

A common refrain out west is that geography inhibits thoughts about making the Conferences larger. There has been talk that imagines 3 or 4 regional judicatory staff doing what 8 CMs currently do, maintaining current Conference geographies, and supplementing with Associate staff deployed in the Conferences - but that has not gone very far, and is little more than creative thinking that hasn't caught hold of anything substantive yet.

The West Region looks to be very close to regionalizing the Fitness Review process - and I would say there is a very good chance that the technical pieces needed to complete this will be in place for a launch of this initiative sometime in 2015.

There has also been talk about, but not yet to my awareness and concrete follow up with, sharing parts of our support staff: payroll services, accounting services, youth ministry, etc.

**South Central (Douglas Anders):** Our Board of Directors spent three meetings (Board of Directors only) working on a response to the resolution and has sent it to Geoffrey Black and all other Collegium members (before the composition of this committee was known). If that Board response needs to be sent to others beyond Geoffrey, please let me know and I will inform my Board secretary.

**South Dakota (David Felton):** We have had conversations with Northern Plains and are presently in conversations with Nebraska and Iowa.
APPENDIX B: TALKING POINTS FROM REGIONAL CONVERSATIONS

- What observations or learnings do you have regarding the regional and conference conversations/actions that have been shared? What excitements? Concerns?

- What needs have the Conferences/Regions identified that will “assure a sustainable and thriving future for their ongoing missional responsibilities” and ministries?

- How would you summarize the conversations/actions to date?
APPENDIX C: GENERAL SYNOD RESOLUTION ON “RESTRUCTURING OF CONFERENCE BOUNDARIES”

1

RESTRUCTURING OF CONFERENCE BOUNDARIES

Approved As Amended

A Prudential Resolution

TEXT OF THE MOTION

Therefore be it resolved that the 29th General Synod invites each of the 38 conferences and their covenant partners (such as associations, local churches and authorized ministers) to engage in a prayerful process of discernment in order to assess what they may need to assure a sustainable and thriving future for their ongoing missional responsibilities as well as effective ministries; and

Be it further resolved that the 29th General Synod calls upon the Collegium of Officers to work collaboratively and pastorally with any and all conferences and their covenant partners in a mutual process of discernment in order to develop viable proposals designed to revitalize conferences, share resources among them, and/or reconfigure conference boundaries in ways faithful to our church’s calling and which make practical sense; and

Be it further resolved, that any such proposals from conferences and a report from the Collegium will be transmitted to the 30th General Synod for further deliberation and approval as necessary.

FUNDING

Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.
APPENDIX D: UCC CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS RELATED TO CONFERENCES*

44. A Conference is that body of the United Church of Christ which is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area, all Ordained Ministers holding Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partnership in its Associations or in the Conference itself when acting as an Association, and all Commissioned Ministers and Licensed Ministers in its Associations.

45. Subsequent to the initial organization of Conferences in the United Church of Christ, the boundaries of any new Conference, or any adjustment of boundaries between Conferences, shall be determined by the Conferences concerned with the approval of the General Synod. The standing of a Conference as a body of the United Church of Christ is determined by the General Synod.

46. A Conference may retain or secure its own charter, and adopt its own constitution, bylaws and other rules which it deems essential to its own welfare and not inconsistent with this Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.

47. A Conference is related to the General Synod as described in the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.

48. When a Conference meets, its voting membership includes lay delegates selected by and representing the Local Churches of that Conference, all Ordained Ministers holding Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partnership in its Associations or in the Conference itself when acting as an Association, and all Commissioned Ministers and Licensed Ministers in its Associations, and such additional members as may be specified by the Conference.

49. Meetings of the Conference are held annually and at such other times as may be necessary for the discharge of its responsibilities.

50. Conferences Acting as Associations

51. A Conference may exercise the functions of an Association when they are delegated to it by an Association or where no Association exists.

* This is the language being proposed to GS 30.
APPENDIX E: NOTES FROM THE OCTOBER 29-30, 2014, MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP

CONFERENCE BOUNDARIES WORKING GROUP
Notes from meeting 10/30/14
Cleveland, OH

Present: Geoffrey Black, Dale Bonds, Matt Deal, John Deckenback, Roddy Dunkerson, Edith Guffey, Randy Hyvonen, Susan Towner-Larsen, Loey Powell, Beth Walker
On the phone: Elena Larssen

The meeting was called to order by Geoffrey Black, who opened with introductions, prayer, and an overview of the day. He indicated that part of the process would utilize a discernment mode for our discussion.

Comments from a review of the GS resolution, its history, and specific outcomes hoped for from this meeting:

- Structure can get in the way of relationships. Can we maintain and nurture relationships and let administrative functions and structure “be” for a time?
- Can we find structures and ways of administrating that are beneficial to all?
- The Essential Conference Ministry Fund has been repurposed in recent years for use in developing innovative programs/projects/experiments (source of funds has been offerings taken at Synods in the past, conferences, Local Church Ministries, and conference annual meeting offerings)
- Need to be clear about what the needs are, acknowledging the fears and vulnerabilities
- We are not necessarily taking about redrawing conference geographical boundary lines but rather talking about new ways to coordinate/consolidate functions and resourcing
- There are many fears among UCC members about what might be lost if their conference identity is changed
- What are universally valued and “wonderful” are the opportunities to gather as UCC, as the church in a particular locale.
- Should this resolution and/or effort be renamed “Conference Revitalization”?
- Should we find more ways to support what’s already being experimented with and transformed?
- Need to honor the cultures of our respective geographical settings and places (i.e., Maine is not Southern California)
- We have 38 + “administrative silos.” Each cannot be sustained.
- There is meaning for many when they gather as conference “family”
- The sense of urgency about this issue is often, easily lost.
- Several “costs” should be identified: the cost of our current way and reality, and the cost of what we are not doing because we are doing it this way.
Outcomes desired by our group:

1. A draft of a report to go to General Synod that:
   - Encourages innovation and experimentation
   - Identifies and encourages action steps
   - Names the urgency
   - Names the primary issue and the many related issues, including “boundary” concerns vs. revitalization vs. sustainability.
   - Examines the purpose of Conferences and their relationship to local congregations
   - Defines what is meant by some of the terminology in the resolution, such as: “revitalization,” “resources,” and “boundaries.”
   - Affirms that the United Church of Christ is indeed a church, not just a structure

2. A resource that engages local congregations in the conversation and the experimentation

3. A long range “charge” to the Conferences regarding identifying what will promote and/or be needed for sustainability and fair, equal sharing of resources across the life of the UCC

Comments from discussion of information shared from Conference Ministers about what is happening in their Conferences and/or regions:

- Western region (but not including Hawaii) is close to agreeing to instituting a regional fitness review process for authorized ministers
- We need to talk about revitalization first as the context for any recommendations
- The most vulnerable/fragile Conferences are located in the mid-section of the country and some of these may not be viable in 5 years
- The Conference Ministers of the New England region conferences were all present together recently at one of their annual meetings (in NH) along with Geoffrey
- Discussions among African American churches from CAC and NY are underway (NE churches as well?)
- Learnings about what is working needs to come from those creating the changes, not from the top down
- Need to assess how many services are being duplicated unnecessarily and ask the question about the feasibility of some functions and resourcing for conferences being consolidated in fewer “centers” without eliminating conferences as separate entities (ex., could there be one central office for all 4 PA conferences that handled search and call, accounting, resourcing for stewardship, youth ministry, fitness review, etc.?)
- Need to lift up the models that are working – we will not have a “one size fits all” approach to this given the disparate needs and realities of our conferences
• How can we create administrative savings for all the conferences? Can we calculate what those costs are and project what the savings could be if there was consolidation? Could this release more funds for ministry and mission?
• Conferences as an aggregate receive $36 million in support from UCC churches (this does not reflect all the income that conferences access, however)
• The national setting receives $6 million in OCWM
• Need to clarify what are the distinct, essential functions of the conference office in the same way that this question is being asked of the national setting
• It was recognized that some local churches have almost no relationship to the conference in which they are located
• Do conferences have the capacity and willingness to do 5-10 year fiscal projections? There will always be unforeseen circumstances that can affect such projects, such as significant giving churches leaving the UCC or the receipt of a large bequest

We paused for discernment, read together the UCC Statement of Faith in doxological form, and responded with those words or phrases that came to mind:
• creating and renewing your church
• you call us into your church
• you set before us the ways of life and death
• let us not fear
• cost and joy of discipleship
• eat at his table
• hospitality
• no church structures are named
• courage

What is God yearning for our conferences and congregations?
• to be relevant to express God’s love, presence, and meaning for today
• to be together to do this, to enflesh God’s saving work, for the wholeness and healing of the world
• salvation = abundant life and wholeness = God’s saving work
• to draw people toward yet more excellent things, which may involve sacrifice and fear
• there is sacrifice in this (cost of discipleship) but we are not to sacrifice our church
• God still delights in the diversity of our world, in the many expressions of the Christian church
• we are called to be courageous, to maintain our diverse voice in the culture
• we are not done being the UCC – a progressive Christian church yet
• we are called to believe
• we are being called to accept profound change and sacrifice
Other ideas tossed into the mix:

- We need to be bold, take heart!
- We need to identify how the voice of the UCC going will be present, continued, supported
- We need to identify and “put flesh on” what the essential roles of the Conferences are: such as authorization for ministry and equipping for excellent church leaders and pastors
- Do we need to create a non-geographic conference which could meet distinct needs of UCC people, or those who would seek to be UCC?
- How will the UCC continue to be present in the middle of the country and in the southern region?
- How do we encourage gatherings that could replace former associations/conferences, etc., meetings if there is a change in how this happens?

What have we heard so far today?

- We value being the community of faith, being in relationship with each other, and all that builds up/binds together the community of faith in our culture today.
- That we need each other – expertise exists around public voice, advocacy, search and call, etc.) but we need to identify HOW we need each other and what setting of the UCC is most appropriate to provide leadership in which area
- That the relevance and purpose of institutions exist on one hand and the mission/ministry exists on the other – not always connected to each other
- There is a sense of shamefulness around squandering precious resources
- Crucial question remains: how do Conferences utilize their resources to strengthen local churches and the wider community/world?
- Need to return to/lift up line #177 of the Bylaws that involves consultation re: OCWM
- We need to identify/consult/develop a “business plan” – including a specific dollar amount that is the actual, recommended percentage of our resources that should be spent on administration/administry
- We can’t wait 5 years to set priorities for the drop to 4% draw
- Need a plan for giving
- We need to identify optimal number of administrative centers.
- We need to share things that are happening and identify what our potential is.
- Whose money is it anyway? How does allocation of dollars get decided?
- We need a time line. We want to be able to say:
  - In 5 years will want to re-organize ....
  - Because we are called to....
  - We have these resources...
    - We can spend ___ on administration...
    - We can spend ___ on mission and ministry....
Recommendations for next steps:

There is a sense of real urgency about the issues related to conference revitalization and viability. We do not want to revisit the same conversation about “boundaries” and configurations but propose the following next steps.

- This conversation should be reframed as Conference Revitalization
- The point person for moving this forward should be the next General Minister and President. To that end, Geoffrey will write a memo to the GMP Search Committee as they prepare to consider and interview candidates that this issue needs to be a priority focus during the first 18 months of the new GMP’s tenure and to shepherd for the first 4-5 years.
- A report of progress on conversations and actions taken concerning conference revitalization will be submitted to the UCCB in 2016 which summarizes the hoped for outcomes of this whole discussion:
  - Conference revitalization
  - Developing and sharing new models of collaboration among conferences and regions to accomplish the mission and ministry of the conference (leadership development, fitness reviews, continuing education, skills training, committee on ministry, etc.)
  - New partnerships that have been or are being formed (across traditional conference boundaries, regionally, ecumenically)
  - A clearer understanding of what those boundaries are - functions, mission, ministry, regional, local
- Geoffrey will work with the Council of Conference Ministers (through the Cabinet, most likely) to communicate and develop this work
- We will call on all Conference Ministers and Conference leaders to report to UCCB in 2016 on actions they have taken to assess their own sustainability. (as a separate report or included in above?)
- There needs to be a clear assessment of the administrative functions of conference offices and steps taken to determine just how many administrative centers are needed to handle these functions of the 38 conferences.
- John Deckenback and Loey Powell will draft an initial report of this meeting (10/30/14) for wider circulation by the first week of December. Such report will contain more background and history of conference “boundary” discussions and issues, and more of the facts which make this an urgent issue now for the church.
- A survey/questionnaire will be developed to gather additional information from both congregations and conferences (might use the 4 quadrant model that CPR offers to how strong a conference thinks it is) on their self-assessment of viability, what they are doing now to enhance vitality in their churches, etc.
- Will follow up on a suggestion to bring key conference leaders (lay and/or volunteer) together to increase the stakeholders engaged in this conversation and problem-solving.
- Message will be sent in the report to GS 30 that we cannot continue to sustain 38 conference administration centers/offices.