

October 30, 2012

Dear Conference Ministers and Staff, United Church Education Consultants, Partners in Education, and members of the Association of United Church Educators:

*Greetings in the name of the Stillspeaking God!*

Beginning in fall 2010, Local Church Ministries began a process of preparing for the retirement of the Rev. Ken Ostermiller, Minister for Curriculum Development, by heeding the recommendation of United Church Education Consultants and creating an interim staff position to conduct research, highlight best practices, and make recommendations for futuring Christian faith formation and education in the national setting. Over the past 15 months, the Rev. Dr. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, Minister for Christian Faith Formation Research, has undertaken these tasks and provided a comprehensive report in this regard, which can be found at [www.ucc.org/education](http://www.ucc.org/education).

At the end of September, Education Consultants gathered in Cleveland for their annual meeting, along with representatives of AUCE, 2030 Clergy members, and national staff in each of the Covenanted Ministries whose work relates to faith formation and education. This group spent two and a half days reviewing the report and offering expanded ideas, insights, and commentary on the specific recommendations and strategies from the report. In mid-October, Local Church Ministries' board of directors also received the full research report, as well as the data collected from the Education Consultants gathering. The board unanimously voted to affirm the report and the vision for faith formation that was articulated in the report; and they "encourage[d] staff in the national setting and beyond to work to implement the strategies and recommendations from the report, in order to strive to live in faithful witness to the continually transforming and evolving nature of God's mission in the world."

To that end, I have engaged in discussion and consultation with several staff to begin formulating plans for moving forward with implementation of the report's findings and recommendations. While this will be an ongoing process that will occur over the course of several months, there are some specific ways in which we are moving ahead with the transition and living into the new future the report envisions.

**1. The United Church Education Consultants program will come to a close at the end of 2012.** As highlighted in the report, the nature and scope of this ministry has changed over the past few decades; and the ways in which resource sharing, training of educators, and networking occurs has shifted and is continuing to shift. While Consultants in some regions have been active in supporting the work of Partners in Education and AUCE, other Regions/Conferences do not have active faith formation programs through which Consultants could offer their support and expertise. I am incredibly grateful for their commitment to, and passion for, equipping and training leaders and promoting curricula and resources across the life of the UCC over the 17 years in which this program has been in place; and I am excited about possibilities through which their gifts and talents can be utilized more widely in new and different ways throughout the denomination in the future.

**2. To meet current needs in resource/curriculum promotion and sales at education/training events and conference/association annual meetings, a role that was fulfilled by Education Consultants in several regions, the UCC's Publishing, Identity and Communication Ministry is working on the formalization of a process through which anyone can order from a variety of pre-determined "resource kits" that can then be set up as promotional displays during events.** This process should be in place by January 2013; and a pre-packaged "kit" option of resources with a faith formation focus will be

God is still speaking,



available to order from United Church of Christ Resources (UCCR). This process has already been utilized in several settings and has proven to be both successful and cost-effective.

**3. National resource and training support for the Conference-based Partners in Education (PIE) program will come to a close at the end of 2012.** While PIE will be phased out as a nationalized program, I want to be clear that some Conferences may want to continue their regional programs, with our blessing and encouragement. What is ceasing is our financial support for PIE's national training gatherings and resources. There are several Conferences within the UCC where PIE is thriving, thanks to the dedication of Conference staff and local church educators who have sustained these efforts. These programs should be celebrated, and my hope is that there will continue to be a relationship between these active PIE programs and staff in the national setting.

This may, however, be a time in which Conference-based PIE programs may want to assess and engage in their own assessment, strategizing and visioning regarding their future roles and functions. The faith formation report might be helpful in this regard; and there might also be other forms that an existing PIE group could take within a Conference, such as transitioning to serve as a faith formation ministry team or a more specialized training/networking group for the conference. If there is any way that Local Church Ministries can assist Conferences in these conversations, we are happy to offer support with this transitional piece.

One element from the current Partners in Education program that we have agreed should continue is ***funding for Conference training events for educators and pastors***. Each year, Conferences have been eligible to apply for funding to conduct PIE trainings; this will simply be expanded to include any and all Conference-based faith formation trainings. This allows conferences that do not have active PIE programs to also apply for funds, generally in the amount of \$500. At the end of 2012, Conference Ministers will once again receive information about applying for these funds.

**4. The ministry of faith formation in the UCC's national setting will be shared among several individuals who will be part of a larger Faith Formation Table/Staff Team.** The hybrid/integrated model of staffing that was lifted up in the faith formation report is a model that will best serve the various needs of this ministry moving forward. While this piece will not be finalized for several months, it is our hope that the team will include: Current national staff whose portfolios possess a significant faith formation component, three Children and Families Ministers to be hired in the next year, as a shared staffing partnership with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), representation from AUCE, and a couple of contracted individuals who possess certain gifts to carry out specific tasks for this ministry. The goal is that this team will be in place by the end of July 2013.

**5. A web-based network will be developed through which all educators and pastors can offer and receive information about resources and programs/trainings, share best practices and other information, and network with others engaging in faith formation ministries.** While the logistical details for the creation of this network are not yet finalized, this resource will allow individuals across the life of the denomination to share their learnings, questions, events, resources, and practices in a way that is inclusive and accessible for a broader community of people engaged in this work, both as generalists and specialists. The network would also encourage and allow for the national settings to communicate directly with interested persons about training and program resources as they become available, as well as identify and lift up resources and best practices that are cultivated in local church and regional settings.

**6. With regard to resource production, there are several projects that will be, or have already been, implemented.**

**First**, we have set a goal of completing production of *Faith Practices*, the UCC's all-encompassing congregational resource, by the end of 2012. [www.faithpractices.org](http://www.faithpractices.org)

**Second**, production of the *2012-2013 Church Education & Faith Formation Catalog* was completed and distributed earlier this year. It greatly enhances understanding of and accessibility to UCC's breadth of faith formation resources. Take a look: <http://issuu.com/theucc/docs/ucc-edu-2012-catalog-finalv1-9x9s/1>

**Third**, the weekly *edUCCators' epistle* e-blast was created this past summer, providing a form of direct communication with church pastors and educators on a regular basis regarding UCC resources and

curricula. There are several hundred subscribers, with the hopes of intentionally growing this list in the next six months.

**Fourth**, as a direct response to the recommendations in the faith formation report, Local Church Ministries has expanded its understanding of “curricula” to include small group resources, studies, books, DVDs, and other materials. In this spirit, we have been actively pursuing the selling of specific resources mentioned in the report that were highlighted as progressive and cutting-edge (but not UCC-produced) and have begun selling several of those products through UCC Resources.  
[www.uccresources.com](http://www.uccresources.com)

**Fifth**, new congregational resources that unpack the report in more accessible ways will be developed in coming months. We hope the information and best practices gathered in the report will be user-friendly for local churches and will encourage churches to envision new possibilities for their faith formation and education ministries in light of this report.

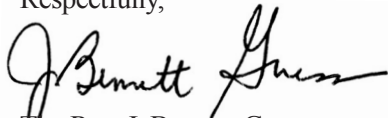
**7. We hope to create an intentional partnership with AUCE to mutually support and uplift the ministry of faith formation in the United Church of Christ.** This is another recommendation that is yet to be fully realized. This partnership may include a number of possibilities for mutual collaboration and support. AUCE is currently in the process of further clarifying and discerning its own focus and ministry in preparation for discussions with Local Church Ministries in this regard. We look forward to these forward-focused conversations.

**8. One or two national faith formation events will take place in 2013 at identified churches — “centers of excellence” — to highlight resources and best practices cultivated in local or regional settings for the benefit of the wider church.** There are several potential locations for this type of gathering, which will be similar in scope to the Bless! Event held at Old South Church in Boston, UCC, in November 2011. These events will not be traditional “how-to” conferences; rather, they will be experiential learning labs where attendees will experience effective faith formation models and practices, and then reflect together on that effective local church’s intent, design, and replicable possibilities. Details about these events will be forthcoming.

I pray that these details regarding the UCC’s ministry of Christian faith formation and education have offered some clarity regarding the direction that we are taking over the next several months. **To help guide this transition, Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi’s contract has been extended through the end of July 2013, with the expressed task of putting in place many of the above-mentioned plans.**

As with any transition, there is a sense of anxiety, loss, and grief around “what is” or “what was.” In the midst of this, however, there is also a great deal of excitement, energy, and possibility around “what will be” in this ministry as we seek to better adapt and utilize technologies for learning and networking, resources for support and partnership, and gifts and talents from the rich diversity of educators and pastors in the United Church of Christ. More than anything, I deeply value your commitment to faith formation ministries in the UCC and beyond, and I look forward to our continued collaborations as we seek to be faithful to the gospel of Christ and God’s mission in the world.

Respectfully,



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