

A Report to General Synod 29

A Theological Forum for the United Church of Christ

Submitted by: The Office of the General Minister and President and Local Church Ministries – A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ

Responding to the Resolution 28 calling for a theological forum for the United Church of Christ a national staff table was convened by the General Minister and President and the Team Leader for Parish Life and Leadership/MESA (on behalf of the Executive for Local Church Ministries). This staff table/ working group, which began meeting in the Fall of 2012, was comprised of representatives from Wider Church Ministries, Justice Witness Ministries, Local Church Ministries, the office for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations, and the Publication, Identity and Communications Ministry(PIC).

A summary of the Resolution reads as follows:

“This resolution calls for the formation of a theological forum to serve as a resource for helping our church in work it has committed to do in our Constitution Preamble: holding fast to the historic Christian faith, “in each generation to make this faith its own” “in honesty of thought and expression.”

Early on in its work the Theological Forum Table determined that its mission was to facilitate theological dialogue within and across the spectrum of theological perspectives in the United Church of Christ. In so doing, the Forum would not do theology. However, it would support and promote the theological work that is ongoing, performed by various entities throughout the United Church of Christ. This would include the UCC Seminaries, theological publications, theological events, local churches and other settings reflective of our life as a church.

Participants in the working group are clear that theological work in the United Church of Christ is abundant. The group wants to help the church to recognize the variety of theological vehicles that we have access to including, but not limited to: Worship Ways, Sunday Bulletin Covers, Sermons Seeds, The UCC Daily Devotional, and PRISM – *The Theological Journal of the United Church of Christ*, as well as the theological dialogues and resources produced by Conferences, Associations, and cohort groups across the life of the church.

The work of the Forum thus far has been focused on building a platform for future Theological Forum activities. To this end the working group has engaged in an ongoing review of basic UCC theological documents, such as the Preamble to the United Church of Christ Constitution and Bylaws, The United Church of Christ Statement of Faith, various aspects of the UCC Book of Worship and a more current document, *“Theological Education for the United Church of Christ – a working paper circulated to the Council for Theological Education and the Council of Conference Ministers.*

The group has also gathered a listing of United Church of Christ professional theologians and a catalogue of entities within the UCC where theological work is being done. Additionally, initial steps have been taken to reach out to specific entities engaged in this work such as PRISM and The Craigville Colloquy.

In response to the Strategic Vision Plan of the national setting of the United Church of Christ, the Forum Staff table has engaged in extensive dialogue in an effort to arrive at consensus regarding how it might best respond to the third goal in the plan: ***Engaged Discipleship – Every UCC person is well equipped to be growing in Faith, be theologically conversant and active in the global mission of the church.*** The outcome of this dialogue, thus far, has been three general affirmations:

1. An affirmation that social media will be used by serve the forum as a medium not a goal.
2. An affirmation that the Theological Forum will engage lay and authorized UCC people using various means and approaches.
3. An affirmation that the Forum will capture and document UCC theological dialogue in order to keep it vital and for future reference.

In addition to ongoing initiatives to lift up, strengthen, and network existing UCC theological entities for continuing dialogue, the Theological Forum Staff Table envisions that the next step in its continuing work will be the creation and initiation of ***a theological theme reflection loop.*** This would be a process that will ask for general feedback on a theme – then share the gathered responses with audiences in places of theological conversation in the UCC such as conference Annual meetings, COREM bodies, local clergy colleague groups, The Order of Corpus Christi or the Justice LED trainers, who would then be invited to engage in critical reflection based on those collected responses. These reflections would be shared with the whole church, thus making way for our next round. We anticipate our first loop beginning with the question, ***“Where did I see God today?”***, building on the energy of the General Synod’s work reflecting on God’s Vision is....

The Theological Forum working group invites your thoughts and suggestions for its continuing work. To reach them, please send e-mail messages to Michell Farrow, Farrowm@ucc.org or Karen Koza, Kozak@ucc.org.

Appendix:

The GS 28 Resolution Calling for a Theological Forum

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the delegates to the Twenty-eighth General Synod request the formation of a theological forum, structured so as to engage the widest possible diversity of perspectives within the United Church of Christ, to promote theological reflection and dialogue within our church and with partner churches, and to be a resource for local churches, local church members, associations, conferences, national leadership, and instrumentalities. This forum would not be a prescriptive council, but a forum for descriptive and diverse theologies across the Church. The delegates request that the structure for such a proposed forum be developed by Local Church Ministries and the Office of General Ministries and brought to the Executive Council, with possible financial details, for approval.