

# The Future of the UCC

## DISCERNING OUR PURPOSE, MISSION, VISION, AND STRATEGIC VISION

### prepare

#### What's behind all this?

As President and General Minister John Dorhauer articulates, “We [in the UCC] all bear responsibility for living out our shared mission. We will not achieve our full potential--nor maintain our full capacity for health, vitality, and relevance--without a clear sense of missional purpose and calling. This effort to identify that was a critical step in the direction of our future health and vitality--but it will only matter if we can all find common cause in this and commit fully, with passion, and without reserve to its undertaking.”

With this understanding and hope, a process for discernment began. To create the UCC's purpose, mission, and vision statements, the national setting brought together dialogue partners from the UCC board, national staff, the UCC Historical Council, the Council of Conference Ministers, and youth representatives over the course of a year for discernment. Additionally, they incorporated survey results from thousands of voices across the life of the denomination. What emerged was a clear focus on the love of God and love of neighbors.

The UCC Board of Directors overwhelmingly affirmed the statements during their fall business meeting in October 2016.

The UCC **purpose** statement comes from the Gospel of Matthew: To love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and our neighbor as ourselves.

The **mission** statement: United in Spirit and inspired by God's grace, we welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all.

And the **vision**: United in Christ's love, a just world for all.

The Rev. Sue Artt, conference minister of the Rocky Mountain Conference UCC and moderator of General Synod 2017, believes the statements offer a renewed sense of unity to the UCC. “As spiritual beings created by God to be God's hands in the world, hearing this purpose, mission, and vision really articulates our sense of calling as God's servants,” Artt said, “It's a deeply satisfying way in which we are called into action.”

#### *As you prepare for this session*

- Check the length of any videos
- Make a timeline for this session
- Choose your “engage” activity/activities
- Double-check the materials needed

#### *Where is this going?*

Participants will explore the UCC's purpose, mission, vision, and strategic vision statements and explore what these statements mean for the denomination as well as their local congregation.

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The vision of a just world for all people will guide and shape the future work of the UCC. “Every week I travel the globe witnessing what it looks like when the United Church of Christ commits itself to love and justice,” Dorhauer said. “I call upon every covenant partner to embrace fully this call to love and justice, and to share with leaders in the church what that expression of love looks like in their ministry setting.”

-Adapted from the reporting of Anthony Moujaes, October 24, 2016

In collaboration with the discernment about the purpose, mission, and vision of the UCC, came the work of articulating a strategic vision. In March 2016, the UCC Board of Directors affirmed the following vision statement based on the research of over 3,000 people under forty to answer the big question, “What does a relevant UCC look like in 10 years?” What also evolved was the question, “What does a transformative UCC look like in 10 years?”

From that research, the strategic visioning team developed a 10-year strategic vision. Meant to work in concert with the succinct statements of the UCC’s vision, mission, and purpose of the UCC, this vision further informs the goals, development, and ministry in the UCC moving forward. There are three areas of focus:

### **Christ-Driven Connection**

Striving to imitate the life of Christ, the transformative United Church of Christ will encourage authentic connection and compassion between individuals, local communities, and the world using creative, agile technologies, and partnerships.

### **God-Centered Action**

In ten years, the United Church of Christ will be committed to building deep partnerships in community that produce collective social action. We will boldly and actively endeavor to bring justice for all. We will be invitational as well as self-reflective, engaging the internal work of welcoming radical difference and truth-telling against systems of oppression that have held God’s beloved people captive.

### **Spirit-Led Leadership**

In ten years, the transformative United Church of Christ will be an innovative, nimble, and credible source of institutional support, moving with Spirit and intention, able to vision courageously and respond swiftly to/for the communities and world in which we live for the sake of the gospel.

## Participants’ Perspectives

- Some participants will be curious about how the purpose, mission, and vision were developed and how it impacts their local church. It may be important to help them understand that these statements were developed for the sake of steering ministry in the national setting and gaining clarity about the ministry to which the UCC, as a whole, is called.

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- Some participants may be resistant to the idea that a representative body set the purpose, mission, vision, and strategic vision of the denomination. It may be helpful to review how our polity in the UCC is covenantal, meaning that all settings of the Church work in collaboration, listening to one another, and ultimately determining how the work of other settings will or will not be lived into in their own context.
- For some participants, these statements will be familiar; for others, they will be new. It may be beneficial to spend time unpacking what they mean.

## encounter

### Video

#### 1. Warm Up

Hand out a sheet of paper to each participant and have crayons or markers available to use. Ask participants to imagine what the UCC will be like in 10 years. On one side, ask them to depict what they imagine ministry will look like in their local congregation in 10 years. After they have finished, flip the paper over and ask them to depict what they imagine ministry will look like in the wider UCC in 10 years.

Once they have completed their depictions, invite folks to share their work and their imaginings. How are their imaginings similar to or different from the way ministry is currently practiced in each of these settings? Is there a continuity of the purpose and mission of the ministry in these settings?

#### 2. Watch

“The Future of the UCC: Discerning Our Purpose, Mission, Vision, and Strategic Vision”

#### 3. Unpack

- What is the purpose of the UCC? How does this reflect the UCC today? How might this shape ministry in the UCC as we live into the future?
- What is the mission of the UCC? How does this reflect the UCC today? How might this shape ministry in the UCC as we live into the future?
- What is the vision of the UCC? How does this reflect the UCC today? How might this shape ministry in the UCC as we live into the future?
- In these statements, what stands out to you? What is exciting? What ideas within them give you hope?
- Connect the purpose, mission, and vision statements to earlier

### Materials:

- Ability to show video
- Paper
- Crayons or markers

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conversations about UCC theology. How do these statements demonstrate a unique aspect of UCC theology?

- Connect the purpose, mission, and vision statements to earlier conversations about UCC history. How do statements demonstrate a continuation of the trajectory of the UCC's historical moments and movements?

## engage

Choose one or more activities to explore the session's themes.

### Activity One: Relevant and Transformative

In the video, the host shared that the strategic vision was created in response to one question: "What does a relevant UCC look like in 10 years?" This question evolved to also include the question, "What does a transformative UCC look like in 10 years?" Ask these same questions of your group.

Return to the drawings participants created before the video. Do their drawings reflect answers to those questions? Why or why not? Because Church and culture are changing rapidly, it can be difficult to imagine the Church so far into the future, but continually invite participants to a spirit of play and dreaming. This is serious work, but liberating people to ask the big questions allows them to be open to the ways the Spirit might be moving.

Compare participants' answers to the big question and their depictions from the drawing exercise to the strategic vision of the UCC. What similarities and differences do you notice? How does the strategic vision for the UCC compare with your strategic vision in your local congregation?

### Activity Two: Identifying Purpose, Mission, and Vision

Ask participants if their local church (or association or conference) has an articulated purpose, mission, or vision, and/or has a strategic vision statement or outline that guides their ministry.

If so, discuss with participants what the purpose, mission, vision, and/or strategic vision are and invite them to explain them in their own words or how they see them being lived into. Spend time reflecting on the origins of the statements and the process by which they were developed. Consider whose voices and perspectives were a part of the process and whose were not. Be curious about whether the development was a process of discernment, a decision by committee, written by the pastor, or created by another means. How did their process affect the outcome? Also ask what role the church's articulated purpose, mission, vision, or strategic

#### *Materials:*

-Copies of purpose, mission, vision, and/or strategic vision statements of the congregation

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vision currently play in their ministry. Invite participants to then compare their statements with the UCC's purpose, mission, vision, and strategic vision. In what ways are they similar? In what ways do they differ? What accounts for their differences? How might the UCC's statements guide or influence (or not) ministry in their local church? How might these statements help the church become a place of transformational ministry now and in the years to come?

If participants' local church (or association or conference) does not have an articulated purpose, mission, or vision, nor does it have a strategic vision statement or outline that guides their ministry, invite participants to be curious about what their purpose, mission, and vision are. These statements are usually developed over the course of an intentional period of discernment, but you might choose to use some of this time to ask if the community has at least an implicit sense of its purpose, mission, or vision. What words might they use to describe those for your congregation? How are they similar to the UCC's purpose, mission, vision, and strategic vision? In what ways do they differ? What accounts for their differences? How might the UCC's statements guide or influence (or not) ministry in their local church? How might these statements be used to help the church become a place of transformational ministry now and in the years to come?

### Activity Three: Delving into Discernment

These statements were developed through an intentional process of discernment and with careful attention to both the UCC today and future iterations. Similarly, your congregation may be at a time and place where it is discerning its own purpose, mission, and vision for the future or is discerning how to incorporate the UCC's purpose, mission, and vision for the future into its local context.

Discernment requires more time than just the span of this lesson. Consider developing an intentional discernment process within your congregation around this question: How will our local congregation live into the purpose, mission, vision, and strategic vision of the UCC?

Use this time for conversation about what discernment really means and the processes that the group might use. There are different resources available to teach and guide you through processes of discernment located in the resource folder of this lesson. Review the different resources and use the group time to determine which format or style fits your context.

#### *Materials:*

-Copies of discernment resources

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### wrap-up

#### Regroup

Gather to share and reflect on what you've discovered and learned today.

Questions for conversation:

- What was one new learning for you today?
- What do you want to think about more?
- What will you do in response?

#### Closing

Close time together by having each participant share one thing they are grateful for from their time together.

#### Sending

Offer a prayer of thanksgiving for the UCC and its hope to be a Church that fosters transformative ministry, now and in the future. Offer a prayer of blessing for each of the participants as they strive to love God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength and to work for a just world for all.