

Notes from Listening Session at Congregational UCC, Canton – Mark Frey facilitating February 22, 2018

24 persons attended (at least 15 clergy, 6 retired), including Mark, Joyce Oyler, Rev. Nayiri Karjian, and me. Names and email addresses were collected.

No live streaming today.

Mark gave a short history of the UCC in what became the Ohio Conference and also a summary of the work of the Vision Team. How can we take the six entities that currently exist and create one that is “one, nimble responsive judicatory that is faithful in mission and responsible stewardship.”

Comments

- Smaller churches and communities are disconnected from the judicatories. In the past, EOA had “program districts” (mostly volunteer) that built and maintained connections with the wider church. Ministers in these districts made a point to participate actively. It sounds like this also was a model that existed in the Congregational church pre-UCC.
- The current Conference is much too big for there to be close relationships. EOA has been sub-divided into “areas” (but these have mostly dissolved).
- Questions about what the conference does. Assumptions were Outdoor Ministries, ecumenical relationships.
- One Christian Ed person at a local church doesn’t see value at the conference level other than camp. Another person says that in the distant past, CE responsibilities more commonly were in the associations.
- The conference also maintains relationships with other entities like the German partnership, United Church Homes, wider UCC.
- The question was asked “what does the local church need?” Mission dollars will follow if churches are supported.
- There are things that can be done more effectively together rather than each church on its own. These include ministerial oversight and being active in the world. Some of it requires education of lay people regarding the roles of the judicatory.
- A “community of ministers” is important. Today, there are too many ministers that are entirely on their own and are even somewhat in competition. Local support from a judicatory is important.
- “Form follows function” – Finds that the “pastoral excellence” model is helpful; the association plays a key role in forming groups and suggesting areas of focus. If a key function involves connecting with people locally, then the form needs to reflect that. Wonders whether people fear that if we have a single judicatory there will only be one office in Columbus. Support for clergy is important. How does the structure encourage that?

- Too many lay people don't understand what OCWM means or how it is used. People are so jaded about administrative costs in charities that they question the value of OCWM.
- We need to take pride in the United Church of Christ.
- Climate needs to be considered first, then Mission, then Task. We have been jumping directly to Task.
- There are missions of the church that aren't "local church." Clergy in those missions feel very disconnected from the wider church. There isn't a strong sense of identity as the United Church of Christ.
- Joined the UCC because the family was looking for a place that loved Jesus, affirmed science, and was LGBT welcoming. We need to have the whys straight.
- How does the church connect with people, and offer them ways to connect with others.
- It is very important for the Vision Team to stay in touch with clergy and laypeople, so that when a proposal is presented at the Annual Gathering people have had a chance to consider and respond.
- At Amistad Chapel, there is a very eclectic, young group of people, and their primary need is to gather for worship each week.

ocuccvision@gmail.com – use for any additional thoughts or suggestions