

Notes from Listening Session at St. John's, Newport – Carl Robinson facilitating March 11, 2018

24 persons attended (approximately 60% clergy), including Carl, John Gantt, Joyce Oyler, and me. Names and email addresses were collected.

No live streaming today.

Carl began with a description of past efforts to restructure and what makes the current effort different. Shared the vision of “One nimble and responsive judicatory that is both faithful in mission and responsible in stewardship.”

Attendees introduced themselves.

Ideal Judicatory – What would it do?

- Mission – doing mission and mobilizing local churches to respond
- Resource for community; organize and support response teams in a variety of areas – ex: ONA, crisis response, stewardship, financial management
- Local church support
- Training events
- “Connective tissue” – connect churches with one another
- Pastoral support
- Search and call, Church and Ministry, MID, ministerial (and church) authorization – what responsibilities come with being a minister or church of the UCC
- Legal support – staff attorney for contracts and other legal matters that local churches confront
- Advice on parliamentary procedure, particularly when a church has conflicts
- IT support, recommendations on software, training
- Combined procurement so that we use our purchasing power
- Assist with crisis management (clergy and congregation)
- Imagination
- Social justice; ways to mobilize local churches’ response on justice issues; stay on the forefront as issues emerge and offering prophetic witness, education, and encouragement
- Building UCC brand identity and working with local churches to tell the story; educate local church members on the UCC and the congregational freedom that exists; share and celebrate good news
- Ceremonial function – help churches and clergy celebrate major events and anniversaries
- Outdoor ministries and other faith formation initiatives

What has kept us from having ideal judicatories?

- Money
- A lack of understanding of covenantal commitment
- Autonomy (balancing autonomy and covenant)
- The 1950's/1960's structure – the political compromise from the formation of the UCC that created this dual judicatory structure

- A decline in clergy collegiality – very few clergy attend ordinations and installations of others
- Churches aren't connecting with each other – no pulpit exchanges, churches are more focused locally and not finding out what others are doing
- Fear about the decline of church participation and focused on survival
- Many churches have part-time clergy who don't have time to do more than the essentials
- Other conferences have more activities that don't exist here – confirmation events, etc.;
- We're weak on what it means to be a covenant member of the UCC – true of clergy and members. "What does membership or discipleship (or "servants") mean?"
- There's an apathy here in Ohio that isn't seen in other conferences.

Three working groups were described: 1) Structure; 2) Stewardship and Finance; 3) Best Practices

- What do you want to say to the group on Structure?
 - An important consideration is how we communicate to the national setting. Who participates in CCM, for instance?
 - If we want church members to understand that we aren't hierarchical, design something that doesn't look hierarchical
 - Consider a "use by date" – whatever we come up with won't work forever; build in a review structure; continuous improvement programs like in business
 - Don't get too detailed – keep it simple and flexible
 - Identify and/or adopt the mission of the conference; structure must support the mission; it would be worthwhile to see whether we can adopt the mission statement of the national setting
- What do you want to say to the group on Stewardship and Finance?
 - When this comes together, give clergy the tools to help interpret to congregations. Help answer the question "what's our fair share?"
- What do you want to say to the group on Best Practices?

What other feedback/input?

- Lots of moving parts and no articulated mission
- Help clergy to share information with congregations, even while the process is underway

Finding a New Name – what are fitting names?

- Ohio River Conference

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