



We voted on April 6, 2014, to become an Open and Affirming Church of the United Church of Christ. On May 19, 2014, we became the #1192 church in the UCC official listing.

**Board of Trustees**

*Chair:*

Jim McKenna

*Co-Chair:*

Paula Harrington

*Secretary:*

Becky Jones

Kevin Cappy

Chuck Feiszli

Andrea Herzog

Eugene Wright

2 vacancies

**Board of Deacons**

*Chair:*

Karen Dudgeon

*Vice-Chair:*

Bonnie Haaland

Tracy Bertram

Belinda Burtner

Joanne Cincotta

Darci Gumaer

Gary Harrington

Doris Hoffmann

Vicki Johnson

Bill Masterson

Kathy McKenna

Anne Wingard

**Church Staff**

*Interim Minister:*

Rev. Dr. Kathleen Waters

*Director of*

*Christian Education:*

*vacancy*

*Youth Fellowship*

*Coordinator:*

Sherri Masterson

*Sexton:*

Gary Harrington

*Church Secretary:*

Donna Piotti

*Financial Secretary:*

Jan Jeffers



**HOLY WEEK  
WORSHIP  
SCHEDULE**



March 20 at 10:30 am

On this day we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we mark with the waving of palms and singing of Hosanna.

March 24 at 6:00 pm

Intergenerational soup and bread dinner designed to remember the Last Supper of Jesus and will include a time of Holy Communion around the tables.

Following this meal a Tenebrae service of darkness in the sanctuary.



**MAUNDY THURSDAY**

March 25 at 12:00 pm

Community Good Friday Service at the Homer United Methodist Church



**GOOD FRIDAY**

March 27 at 7:00 am

Come celebrate the new life and the empty tomb on the Green as we join in a Community Sunrise Service.



at 10:30 am

Worship on Easter morning with be aglow with color, flowers, and joy for this family service in the Sanctuary.

for more information about worship in March, see page 9

## Stephen Ministry Training Class in Home Stretch



The class of eight Stephen Ministers at the Homer Congregational Church is more than half way through training and will be finished the first week of May. They will be commissioned during worship on May 15<sup>th</sup>.

“Our trainees have worked extremely hard and their dedication is paying off”, says Stephen Leader, Belinda Burtner.

“The course has involved pre-class reading assignments and in-class lecture, discussion, and role playing. Our trainees are showing real growth in knowledge and skills.”

“I’ve found the skill practicing to be the most valuable component,” says trainee Sherri Masterson. “It takes what you’re learning out of the realm of theory and turns it into something you have to apply. It can be very challenging to role-play, for instance, that you’re ministering to a young mother whose husband has just died. It brings out real emotions and tears. But it is extremely helpful because it prepares you for actual caregiving situations. During the skill practicing there has been real ministry going on too. When you learn about and discuss grief, you can’t help but have genuine issues from your own life surface. When that happens, we find ourselves ministering to each other. All of that will help us be better caregivers later on.”

A recurring emphasis of Stephen Minister training has been confidentiality. What a care receiver says to his or her Stephen Minister is held strictly confidential. Even the identity of the care receiver is kept confidential from other Stephen Ministers, and everyone else.

“The emphasis on confidentiality is important for potential care receivers,” says Stephen Leader, Belinda Burtner. “Most people are reluctant to share their problems or situations if they’re afraid of others’ finding out. The confidentiality of Stephen Ministers lets people know that they can discuss difficult concerns without the fear of others’ finding out.” The remaining training sessions will include topics such as: **How to make a first caring visit, Caring for people before, during, and after hospitalization; Ministering to those experiencing grief; & Providing spiritual care.** When these topics are finished, the trainees will be commissioned as Stephen Ministers and receive

their first caregiving assignments. But even then their training is far from over. “Continuing education is an important component of Stephen Ministry training,” says Belinda Burtner. “Our Stephen Ministers will meet for continuing education twice a month, even after they begin meeting with their care receivers. The goal is for Stephen Ministers to continually enhance their skills and learn new ways to care. We want them to provide the best care possible for their care receivers.”



## The Trustees' Corner

It is nearly a decade since I last served on the Trustees. Some of the issues are different and some are the same, but I am happy to have such a good set of board members to work with. We met on Tuesday evening, February 16, for the monthly board meeting and with Pastor Water’s spiritual guidance discussed and acted on a number of issues:

- Master copy of the By-laws will be maintained
- Modified our financial system to unify our process with the Board of Deacons and establish internal controls, as recommended by the audit.
- Formally established the process for providing reimbursements for church related expenses.

We also discussed ways to inform the congregation about our financial status (watch for summaries in the newsletter and/or bulletin), our insurance policy, board subcommittees, the process for church service cancelation, and consideration of Guiding Principles. With the cold weather the building changes shape and our Sexton informed us that he is regularly finding outside doors that are open. So, if you notice any doors that are ajar, give them a good tug shut.

Please find me or any of the other Trustees if you have questions or want to bring up issues for the board to consider.

Jim McKenna, Chair



**March 2016**  
**Mission Activities and Fun Events**  
**for 7th thru 12th graders**

If you are in the 7<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade, you're invited to join the Homer Congregational Church Youth Group! We *usually* meet the first and third Sundays of each month. Friends are not only welcome, but *encouraged to join in the fun!!* The events are always listed in the monthly newsletter and weekly church bulletins. By attending regularly and helping with at least one fundraiser, you're invited to go on the end-of-the-year trip.

**Sunday, March 13<sup>th</sup> SpudFest at 3:00 pm**  
 We will join in the fun of playing games; eating loaded baked potatoes and having our potato sculptures judged. ***Bring a topping for the baked potatoes to share!***

**Thursday March 24<sup>th</sup> to Friday, March 25<sup>th</sup> - Maundy Thursday Overnight**  
 We will attend the Maundy Thursday service and then spend the night. Prepare to have a fun, spiritual night!

Sherri Masterson (345-4875)  
 Youth Fellowship Coordinator

**Save the Date!** Senior High Sunday school class will be hosting the **Coffee House** on **Saturday, April 30<sup>th</sup>**. More details will be coming in the bulletins and April Newsletter.

During Lent, youth group will have colored strips of paper in the pews for the congregation to write prayers on. Then, on Maundy Thursday during our sleepover, we will read the prayers and make it into a prayer chain to hang in the sanctuary on Easter.

**Recap of February 2016**  
**Deacon's meeting:**

Created Communications Liaison position to help facilitate information to web page, Facebook.

**Elected Officers and Committee Representatives:**

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Chair:                      | Karen Dudgeon                                   |
| Vice Chair:                 | Bonnie Haaland                                  |
| Secretary:                  | Kathy McKenna                                   |
| Communications Liaison:     | Doris Hoffman                                   |
| Finance Liaison:            | Bonnie Haaland                                  |
| Stewardship Committee:      | Gary Harrington                                 |
| Nominating Committee:       | Bill Masterson                                  |
| CEM:                        | Kathy McKenna                                   |
| Worship and Music:          | Bonnie Haaland                                  |
| Global Connectors/Missions: | Anne Wingard,<br>Bill Masterson                 |
| Pastoral Relations:         | Belinda Burtner                                 |
| Personnel Committee:        | Karen Dudgeon                                   |
| Hospitality:                | Joanne Cincotta, Belinda Burtner, Kathy McKenna |

Reviewed and accepted a One Treasurer Plan with many checks and balances.

Working with the current membership list, the Deacons continue the process of contacting members who we have not seen in a long time.

Our Stephen Ministry trainers report the first class of Stephen Ministers will graduate May 7<sup>th</sup>. A Commissioning is being planned for May 15<sup>th</sup>.



*Youth Group would like to thank the congregation for supporting our sub sale fundraiser! We hope you enjoyed eating them as much as we had fun making them!*

*We would also like to thank you for your support of our Souper Bowl mission with your donations to the Aid to Victims of Violence and canned goods for the Methodist food pantry.*



## Senior Fellowship Club

**Next meeting  
March 8 at 2:00**

Members of the Senior Fellowship Club entered the RFR room on Tuesday, February 9th, and saw a lovely array of sparkling red, white and pink Valentine Day decorations, anticipating the celebration of that special day on February 14th. We always love creating a festive atmosphere, and it was delightfully accomplished with the help of Pat Signor and Gwen Hayne. Thanks so much ladies for your help in decorating and in setting up.

We proceeded immediately to the main part of our program which was an amusing and informative talk, entitled "Growing Up In Homer" presented by Jaff Harris. Jaff, with the able technical help of Doris Walker, accompanied his talk with great slides of Homer back in the 1930's to the 1950's. He described the depression years of the 1930's, the World War II years of the 1940's, and the "much hoped for peaceful years" of the 1950's, sadly interrupted, as we seniors well remember, by the Korean War. Jaff "tweaked" many memories of those in our group who had grown up in Homer as he discussed each slide and the many changes that had taken place over the years.

Jaff also spoke with humor of his boyhood days and we all especially loved his descriptions of mischievous activities, adventures and his "near escapes". Having had two sons, I do believe that boys, like curious cats, surely must have nine lives. Jaff showed us his family home near Factory Brook and the changes in the schools, stores, and churches over the years. Many thanks to Jaff for a most entertaining and interesting presentation and to Doris for lending us her technical skills

As you all know, we NEVER, NO NEVER skip "refreshment time" and enthusiastically partook of a delicious cake served a la mode along with our usual coffee and tea. Thanks to Pat Signor

and Dottie for providing our treats. We then spent a bit of time on some jokes, announcements and a discussion about our need to attract some new seniors into our group. All of you who are seniors, perhaps newly retired and adjusting to a bit more time on your hands, are invited to attend our meetings. We meet the 2nd Tuesday of every month from 2:00 until 4:00 in the afternoon.

Our next meeting will take place on Tuesday, March 8th. No advance notice is necessary. Our guest will be Mr. William Locke, who will present a cabaret type St. Patrick's Day musical program. We have all enjoyed his previous visits and programs so much, and this will be our third invitation to him. Come with one of our regular members or just come. We would love to have you. **MARK YOUR CALENDARS!!!**

Dottie Kelley

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It's that time again...

*Spud Fest on Sunday,  
March 13 at 3:00 PM*

We'll put baked potatoes in the oven and then play board games until the spuds are done. And yes, there WILL be Mr. Potato Heads available.



*What should you bring?* Your whole family -- from grandparents to little kids (post-nap) and something to share for the baked potatoes. We're providing butter and sour cream. You bring some good topping for baked potatoes. And don't forget -- we're holding a "spud-sculpturing" contest. Bring your entry, and you'll win a prize! So come break up the winter doldrums, and join us for a fun afternoon. We think we'll be done before 6...unless we're having too much fun to quit! See you at Spud Fest!

*Elijah Smith & Vicki Johnson*



To Homer Congregational Church:

On the wall of your sanctuary are words that have guided you for many years. “*The Homer Congregational Church, as part of the United Church of Christ will share God’s love in fellowship, worship, and nurture and offer service to the family of God through missions.*” More attention has been placed on the meaning of these words as you continue the process of moving forward in your search for a settled pastor.

During the Fall Stewardship initiative individuals provided some positive feedback to the question: *How Do You Feel This Church Demonstrates Our Faith?* . I thought you would like to read some of these comments

### ***How Do You Feel This Church Demonstrates Our Faith?***

*The work of the Transition Team*

*Holding onto one another in the midst of a lot of transition. God will see us through*

*Starting Stephen Ministries (x4)*

*When we care for each other*

*When we give generally, to missions both large and small (x2)*

*When we pray together*

*When we work together to grow our church and in turn further our ability to share god's message and love*

*I feel this church pulls together in tough times. We are a close knit church and I feel like it's my second family*

*Only fair. There is a lot of room for improvement. There are many good ideas and a few have been implemented - community meal, considering changes to service and church procedures, etc.*

*The church does it's best to be welcoming to all and to meet the needs of the people both in and out of our church*

*Through outreach like the Brewster House services*

*Through supporting the food pantry (x3)*

*Children's Day*

*The Crop Walk*

*Sunday School and VBS (x3)*

*Space for groups to meet*

*The welcome benches and rainbow flag*

*Not really sure we do a lot of service, beyond supporting food pantry and Christmas giving for families in need*

*Even though I have been away from this church for almost 2 yrs., I home again in the area. So many people have stopped by to welcome me back. Thank you.*

*The people*

*Our church leaders*

*The words on the wall of the sanctuary*

*By being welcoming to everyone*

*Through caring - also generosity in offering to 5 for 5*

*The Well*

*Mitten Tree*

*In the past through the Home Store and Youth Center*

*Working hard to keep this a viable church during times of diminishing attendance. Believing that, with God's help, this can be an active church "on the Green" for many years to come.*

*Lunch Bucket campaign*

*Mission trips*

*World missions through UCC Conference*

*I believe it does well for the most part*

*We welcome all who come with smiles and greetings*

*Cake!*  
*Doing good works & service toward others*  
*Hugs!*  
*Working through differences when we don't agree*  
*Religious service*  
*Music*  
*Community Service*  
*Religious education - youth & adult*  
*Making all feel welcome and supported*  
*Attending worship*  
*Wearing a cross*  
*Reading These Days*  
*Contributing to special offerings*

***How can we support this hope through the church, reject doom-saying and remain generous?***

*Somehow we all need to relax and wake up. The stress and fear and clutter are the life of muttering. Michele's voice is the life of God.*  
*Judge not, lest ye be judged. Always look for the best in others and their words and actions.*  
*By inviting others to pray with you. By showing others love & caring in small acts of kindness.*  
*Continue to love and serve one another with prayers and in word & deed.*  
*Food pantry/meal donations*  
*Community dinners*  
*Child care/children's message*  
*Sunday school*  
*worship service*  
*picnic and games on the green*  
*We need to get with the times and become more contemporary to appeal to the younger generations. I thought the baptist church was crazy but look at them now. Hundreds of cars in their parking lot.*  
*Always try to have a positive attitude and this, with God's help will help you get through life with all its joys and problems. Also be thankful and grateful and loving towards others.*  
*Pray alot!*  
*By service and mission work especially in the local community*  
*Really don't know what you're getting at. I do know congregations need to be compassionate and caring and non-judgmental - welcoming would also be a plus*  
*Maintain a positive attitude and make a commitment to focus on having a good outlook and finding the best in our endeavors. Through a positive outlook, generosity is sure to follow!*  
*Through continuing to attend and actively participating, even if you have disagreements/arguments with others.*  
*Work to resolve problems. We can remain generous through contributing our time & talents and money.*  
*What we see so far is going good! Our church is history. We do need to have everyone listen better.*

***What is your personal hope for this church?***

*Unified missions*  
*Using our past as a reference only, but not living and participating in it*  
*Bigger part of the community*  
*We grow as a body and make a difference in the lives of the church family & community*  
*My personal hope for our church is that we will follow our stated mission in our community and the world*  
*Be a place where all people are welcome. Where we embrace our messiness and we still show up anyways.*  
*Where we are all spiritually fed*  
*Continue to share god's love for all people...and no matter who you are...*  
*Personal hope to have many many long term members and also gather in many new members and participants*



*in our church & service and we continue to do more fellowship, worship, nurture service and mission  
Children keep coming with parents to Sunday School and VBS - they are the future  
New members/families might join us whether from local, school, college, businesses, etc.  
Dinners, senior groups, and services cont.  
That God will help us work together as a loving family to find a new pastor. May that person be led to us soon.  
A church filled with people fulfilling our mission statement  
To seek the leading of God's spirit  
For all to come together and embrace change without forgetting to also incorporate the past into that change.*

***What can you personally do to help this church realize God's will for the future of this church?***

*I am unaware of what God's will is. Perhaps "what can we do to carry out that we say we are about" - maybe act on the teachings of Jesus  
Volunteer as much as I can  
Come to church. Pitch in where needed. Be only positive and supportive especially during stressful times  
Keep on attending church and helping where needed  
I'll be teaching Sunday School and working with CEM committee  
Lunch Bucket campaign against hunger  
Welcome others to our church  
Say yes, when asked to do something. And always think the best of others.  
Meet and be with the people, I could do more, but age is shortening what I can do. I can bring scalloped potatoes and ham for the dinner next week. I hope to be there.*

Good work is being done and many congregants are passionate about this congregation's future and refuse to believe that the best days have passed. God has provided ample gifts and resources for vital ministry but there needs to be a continued willingness to adapt and be open to a new way forward. And perhaps, with God, together we will see that some of the best days are still ahead.

Serving Christ together,

*Katherine A. Waters*

Interim Pastor

### ***Transition Team Update***

On February 23 members of the Transition Team and the Church Council met to explore how to take the "findings" of the Team and move into a plan for action. They hope that during March four "Dream Teams" will be gathering their hopes and dreams and make specific and realistic goals for the developing the accomplishment of these endeavors. Please consider participating in one of the brainstorming groups. Areas include:



***We are seeking to be a community caring for each other.  
We are seeking to be a community growing in our faith.  
We are seeking to be a community participating in outreach.  
We are seeking to be a community maximizing our resources.***

In addition, on February 4 the Rev. Marsha Williams, Associate Conference Minister, met with members of the Transition Team and Church Council and spoke very positively about the assessment work the congregation has undertaken to move towards the search for a settled pastor. She affirmed the next step of establishing a Pastoral Search Committee and completing a Church Profile.

Good Work Transition Team!!!!

### Easter Flowers Donor Form

Each year, we decorate our Sanctuary with beautiful flowers for Easter. The flowers are dedicated in memory or honor of whomever you wish, and they will be on display in the Sanctuary on Easter Sunday. Your donation will be acknowledged in the March 27 worship bulletin and plants may be picked up after the service. All home-bound Church members will receive an Easter plant to enjoy.



**Easter Flower choices:**

- |  |       |          |              |          |
|--|-------|----------|--------------|----------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6" Purple Hyacinth (3 bulbs)  | _____ | quantity | @ \$9/ea. =  | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6" Red Tulips (6 bulbs)       | _____ |          | @ \$9/ea. =  | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6" Yellow Daffodils (6 bulbs) | _____ |          | @ \$9/ea. =  | \$ _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6-Bloom Easter Lily           | _____ |          | @ \$14/ea. = | \$ _____ |

I will pick up my plant       I will donate my plant

TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

I wish to contribute to the General Flower Fund \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Contribute in memory or in honor of (*please circle one*): \_\_\_\_\_

The donor(s) name in the bulletin should be: \_\_\_\_\_

**Return this form and your donation to the office by Sunday, March 20**

### One Great Hour of Sharing

The United Church of Christ is one of nine denominations that support One Great Hour of Sharing in cooperation with Church World Service. One Great Hour of Sharing is one of the five special offerings in which Homer Congregational Church participates each year. It is a part of our global outreach.



One Great Hour of Sharing works with international partners to provide clean water, food, education, health care, small business micro credit, emergency relief and advocacy/resettlement for refugees and displaced persons. It also supports domestic and international

disaster preparedness and response. One Great Hour of Sharing allows us to share with people around the world. We help children who suffer from disease. We partner with families living in hunger, offering not just food but the tools and training to build a sustainable source of income. We receive the One Great Hour of Sharing special offering throughout the month of March. We hope that you will prayerfully consider a generous contribution. For more information see [www.ucc.org/OGHS](http://www.ucc.org/OGHS).

***Our One Great Hour of Sharing offerings will be received on March 6***

From Bill Masterson and Anne Wingard on behalf of the Board of Deacons



## March 2016 Worship

In addition to our gathering on Sunday mornings during Lent a brief worship service with Holy Communion will take place in the sanctuary each **Wednesday evening from 6:15 to 6:45**. All are invited to use this time as a time of focus during our Lenten journey.

Miss a Sunday and want to review the bulletin? You can find weekly bulletins on our website: <http://www.homercc.com/resources/>. We believe that children of all ages have a place in worship and in the life of the church. Children's bulletin and materials available each Sunday.

**Sunday, March 6** **10:30 am**  
**Fourth Sunday in Lent**



Celebration of Holy Communion

Lectionary Scripture: Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:11b-32b

**Sunday, March 13** **10:30 am**  
**Fifth Sunday in Lent**

Remember to set clocks forward one hour to be able to join us.



Dedication of Church Officers

Lectionary Scripture: Isaiah 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12: 1-8

**Palm Sunday, March 20** **10:30 am**



On this day we remember Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, which we mark with the waving of palms and singing of Hosanna.

They took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!"

To celebrate Palm Sunday, our congregation will use eco-palm fronds grown and harvested in the forests of Mexico and Guatemala. Instead of selling to middlemen, those growing and harvesting the fronds capture more of the profits allowing jobs to stay in their communities. As we wave our palms,

we can truly say, "Hosanna in the Highest!" For more information, visit [ecopalm.org](http://ecopalm.org).

Lectionary Scripture: Psalm 118; John 12: 12-16

**Maundy Thursday, March 24** **6:00 PM**



### MAUNDY THURSDAY

Intergenerational soup and bread dinner designed to remember the Last Supper of Jesus and will include a time of Holy Communion around the tables. Following this meal a Tenebrae service of darkness in the sanctuary.

**Good Friday, March 25** **12:00 PM**



### GOOD FRIDAY

Community Good Friday Service  
 Homer United Methodist Church

**March 27, Easter Sunday**

**Easter Sunrise Celebration** **7:00 AM**

Come celebrate the new life and the empty tomb on the Green as we join in a *Community Sunrise Service*.



**Easter Celebration** **10:30 AM**

You won't want to miss being with us in worship on Easter morning as the Sanctuary will be aglow with color, flowers, and joy for this family service

**WORSHIP**  
SCHEDULE  
for March

**Deacon Worship Leader:**  
Bonnie Haaland

**Trustee Verifier:**

**March 6 @ 10:30 am**

Ushers & Greeters –  
Acolytes – Caoimhe Dudgeon, Sophia Wright  
Flowers –  
Nursery – Lori Schmidt, Abby Elkins  
Coffee Hour – Cindy Stout

**March 13 @ 10:30 am**

Ushers & Greeters –  
Acolytes – Abby Elkins, Elijah Smith  
Flowers –  
Nursery – Susan Benedict, Grace Wright  
Coffee Hour – the Choir

**March 20 @ 10:30 am**

Ushers & Greeters –  
Acolytes – Justin Dermott, Jack Bertram  
Flowers –  
Nursery – Sheri Masterson, Abby Elkins  
Coffee Hour – Andrea Herzog

**March 27 @ 10:30 am**

Ushers & Greeters –  
Acolytes – Grace Wright, Maddie Dermott  
Flowers – Easter flowers from the congregation  
Nursery – Kelly Settineri, Molly Ulrich  
Coffee Hour – Deacons



On Saturday, April 23, HCC will host the workshop *A Sacred Conversation on Race* in conjunction with the Susquehanna Association Spring meeting?"



**MARCH Birthdays**

- 1 Isabel Coon
- 4 Ione Niese, Ruth Knickerbocker
- 5 Phyllis Adams, Carl Applegate
- 10 Kelly McKenna
- 11 Terre Dennis
- 13 Stanley Nilsson
- 14 Danielle Lansdowne
- 16 Adam Feiszli
- 18 Janice Bacon, Patricia Signor
- 20 Marguerite DeForest
- 21 Kelly Settineri, Carrie Gumaer
- 22 James McKenna
- 23 Hannah Agate, Johannes Helgren, Daniel Happel
- 25 Douglas Adams, Pat Buchholz
- 27 Gail Benedict
- 29 Amanda (Jeffers) Porto, Stephen Hoffmann, David Hoffmann
- 31 Mary Lansdowne

**It's Time to Update the Church Contact Directory**

We are updating our Church Contact Directory for 2016. If you have new contact information, please let the office know. If you would like to list your email address and/or cell phone number, also please contact the office.

## Homer Congregational Church Dream Team Gatherings

Saturday morning, March 19, 10:00 – 11:30 AM

Session Focus:

*We are seeking to be a community caring for each other.*

*(Belinda Burtner, convener)*

*We are seeking to be a community growing in our faith.*

*(Gary Harrington, convener)*

Sunday afternoon, March 20, 12:00 – 1:30 PM

Session Focus:

*We are seeking to be a community participating in outreach.*

*(Bonnie Smith, convener)*

*We are seeking to be a community maximizing our resources.*

*(Jim McKenna, convener)*



Being guided by the findings of the Transition Team Report regarding our current Congregational and Community Assessment, we will develop specific and realistic goals for the accomplishment of the above four pursuits.

Some goals may be scheduled to be completed immediately, some within the next year, some within the next three years (after new pastor starts) and some goals may be identified but the group may determine that no action can be taken at this time. It is hoped that the “dreaming” can be accomplish by the end of March so that a clear plan can be delineated as the Pastor Search Committee begins their search.

Gatherings will be guided by a convener and spiritually centered. All are welcome to participate. A French Clergyman, Francois Fenelon said, "The winds of the Spirit are always blowing, but we must hoist a sail to catch it." Join us as we hoist the sail!

If you are unable to attend you can still be involved by offering a prayer for discernment and passing along your suggestions to one of the group conveners.



February 22, 2016

## A Pastoral Letter from the Conference Minister

"Behold, God is doing a new thing." Several months ago I wrote a reflection on how we may move from being the "United Church of Christ" to the "Uniting Church of Christ." I write to you today to share how the Holy Spirit is moving in our midst toward that end.

Two years ago the New York Conference was approached by the Collegiate Church (Reformed Church in America) in New York City requesting a conversation on dual affiliation with the UCC. The Collegiate Church is one church with five "campuses" in NYC. Four of these are distinct congregations. This meeting was attended by leaders of the National Setting of the UCC, the New York Conference, and the Metropolitan Association. The Collegiate Churches hold a membership of over 4000 and include one of New York's iconic churches, Marble Collegiate Church, the former home of Norman Vincent Peale. These conversations have continued over the past two years.

Last September, I was contacted by the Executive Minister of the RCA New York Regional Synod, Reverend Amy Nyland. The Regional Synod is roughly the equivalent of a Conference in the UCC. The New York Regional Synod is comprised of congregations from Poughkeepsie through Long Island (including the Collegiate Church). The question posed to me was, "Is it possible for a larger number of RCA congregations to dual affiliate, beyond the Collegiate Church?" My response was, "Let's see where God takes us." It is important to note that a significant motivation for these RCA churches to reach out to the UCC is on account of our Open and Affirming historic commitment to the LGBTQ communities. As our conversations have unfolded over these past six months, it has become clear that what is taking shape is much more far reaching than any one issue. Reverend Karen Georgia Thompson, the Ecumenical Officer of the UCC has described this as a deeper living into the *Formula of Agreement* that already exists between our denominations.

There is reason to believe that there is potential for a considerable number of RCA congregations to seek dual affiliation with the UCC. After discussing many scenarios on how this might take place, we are now exploring the possibility of creating a new, tenth, Association in the New York Conference: Reformed Association. This Association will exist solely for the purpose of dually affiliated RCA/UCC congregations and ministers. Churches with membership in Reformed Association will agree to live according to the faith and order of both denominations. This is a "new wine skin" that has never been done before. The New York Conference Board of Directors and the Executive Committee of the New York Regional Synod have both affirmed moving forward in exploring this possibility.

Beyond the creation of a new Association, there are also possibilities for sharing of Conference and Regional staff. Both Reverend Nyland and I intend to explore holding Dual Standing in each of our denominations. Concerns have been expressed as to whether this will over-tax our already stretched conference staff. We do not foresee any further "search and call" responsibilities for our Associate Conference Ministers. We do see an opportunity, as ministerial partners, to offer wider services to one another. In our conversations, we have been transparent that there are positive financial implications for the New York Conference which has struggled for decades with significant deficits.

Both UCC General Minister and President, John Dorhauer, and UCC Ecumenical Officer, Karen Georgia Thompson, have been fully appraised of each development in these conversations. They are both very supportive of the direction in which we are moving.

As this is potentially a significant development for the New York Conference, I am writing to keep all of the UCC in New York up to date on these conversations. It is quite possible that the Conference Board will recommend an action from this year's Annual Meeting to create a new Association within the New York Conference. This may also necessitate some minor revisions to our Conference By-laws to be brought to the 2017 Annual Meeting.

I ask for your prayers that our ministry together may be pleasing in God's sight and may exemplify a bold witness of the unity of the Church.

Faithfully,

David R Gaewski  
Conference Minister  
New York Conference, United Church of Christ