

Western Association Missouri Mid-South  
Conference United Church of Christ  
Chairperson Annual Meeting Report  
Bethel UCC Concordia MO  
April 18, 2009

**“Treasure in Earthen Vessels: Embracing Hope in Change and Challenge”** is the theme today. The challenge of “Change” has been a matter of life style for many of us.

I happened to be teaching choral music in Topeka Kansas at Highland Park High School in the late 60’s and the early 70’s. This was a time of social unrest through out the United States. Certainly the aftermath of Brown vs. the Topeka Board of Education weighted heavily on the minds of Topeka Kansas school teachers, administrators and community leaders when my school’s auditorium stage was set on fire during a student race riot.

Connie Menniger was serving on the Topeka Board of Education at the time. As a healing measure she arranged for a number of teachers, administrators, and community leaders to participate free of charge in a three day work shop which had been developed by the Menniger Foundation for Cooperate CEOs and others who could afford an expensive retreat addressing Psychological Change in Human Beings. I was honored to be excused from my teaching responsibilities and sent to the retreat. The subject of childhood and adolescent psychology was not all together new to me being a college grad in Music Education. However, the lectures on adult developmental stages of life were new and very interesting. Ones life journey encompasses many challenges of change.

Paul Osgood and Rev. Patricia Glover, members of the Conference Strategic Planning Committee, have met twice this past year with many with you in your area clusters. These meetings have been a part of the Habakkuk Project designed to address needs and establish priorities for restructuring the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Reported Common Themes throughout the Western Association were as follows: (I quote, theme 1/etc.)

- (1) There is a real love for the United Church of Christ, and the participants were glad to be a part of these discussions. They feel they are having an impact on the future direction of the Missouri Mid-South Conference.
- (2) They see a need to strengthen the Clusters for working on justice issues, organizing youth and young adults, and delivering services to the local churches.
- (3) There was an understanding that they were the Conference. Very seldom did we here them refer to the Conference as *THEY*. The participants want to be a part of the solution.
- (4) There was an understanding that because of the budget problems they should expect less from the Conference, but they still wanted the services. We need to look at how we, as members of the UCC, can help deliver services.

- (5) More of a Conference presence in the local churches...not just at times of transition and times of crisis.
- (6) Youth and Young Adults should have an active roll in worship and in planning worship.
- (7) Really have churches where All are Welcome. (End quote)

Twelve Priority Areas were established at the first round of meetings: (Again, I quote.)

1. Church Growth and New Church Starts:
2. Clarifying Covenantal Relationships and Understanding UCC:
3. Clergy Support and Development:
4. Conference Budget:
5. Engaging Young Adults:
6. Engaging Youth:
7. Evangelism:
8. Helping Churches in Crisis:
9. Justice Witness Ministry:
10. Lay Leadership Development:
11. Nurturing Safe Diversity:
12. Outdoor Ministries:

(End quote.)

These twelve issues were discussed and prioritized by the Western Association for the Habakkuk Project at the second round of meetings. It was determined that the top two priorities were of equal importance. They are: Engaging Youth and Lay Leadership Development. For lack of one vote the third priority would have resulted in a three-way tie; it is: Engaging Young Adults. Special thanks and appreciation to all of you that made the effort to get together with Paul and Pat at the Habakkuk Project Cluster Meetings. These Cluster meetings can serve as a model of how we will all need to engage in decision making as we move forward.

The UCC churches in the Western Association like those all around the nation have faced many changes in the past and certainly face some challenging changes presently. One of the unique attributes of the UCC is that our governance is democratic. Everyone here today is serving a local congregation. Some of you were elected or appointed to vote on behalf of your local congregation today. A number of us plan to attend the United Church of Christ Synod in Grand Rapids, Michigan this summer. Again some will be there as delegates representing all of us from the Western Association. These elected delegates will be asked to make decisions on our behalf for the United Church of Christ.

As the Western Association strives to move forward and strengthen Covenantal relationships let us recognize and consider our strengths. We have some very active clusters in the Western Association. Some have for a long time engaged both Clergy and Laity leadership. Others it seems have evolved to a more Clergy based organization. It

appears that the UCC Covenantal efforts would be better served if all the clusters included Lay leaders.

The Western Association Committee on Ministry was recognized as one of the most effective in the region when called upon to adjudicate a serious misconduct allegation involving a UCC Conference Minister. This committee made up of women and men/clergy and laity worked hard to address this matter with the same due diligence they have customarily applied to their many other responsibilities.

These are but two excellent leadership models already established within the Western Association. Budget realities are forcing paid conference staff reduction at a time when leadership needs at best remain the same if not even greater. We can draw on these models as we strive to restructure and address necessary Covent needs. The UCC we have come to know and appreciate has been led by decision makers who were committed to serving Jesus Christ and His church. You and I have been and hope to be committed to the UCC in ways no less important or no less committed to serving Jesus Christ and His church today. With prayer and contemplation of God's will and not that of our own will the UCC will move on into the 21st Century **"...Embracing Hope in Change and Challenge."**

Thank you,

Jerry H. Cundiff, Chair  
Western Association Missouri Mid-South Conference  
United Church of Christ