

# The Habakkuk 223 Project Report

*For there is still a vision for the appointed time.*

*If the vision seems slow wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.*

## 4 Introduction:

5 In February, 2008 the Directors of the Missouri Mid-South Conference met to review the current  
6 structure, staffing and strategic priorities of the conference. At the conclusion of that meeting  
7 Coordinating Ministry was asked to empower the Habakkuk 223 Project Task Group to engage the  
8 conference in a process to discern a future vision for our ministry together. Individuals were invited to  
9 join the task group and the group was divided into three working groups: Structure (Governance),  
10 Personnel, and Strategic Priorities. The composition of the groups reflects the diversity of our conference  
11 with representation from each association and a faculty member from Eden Theological Seminary. Since  
12 April 2008 the Task Group has met every month.

13 Listed below is an overview of the suggested recommendations from each working group. Also, attached  
14 are the **full reports** from each working group. It is our hope that you will prayerfully review these reports  
15 and then give the Habakkuk 223 Project team your feedback at the regional meetings that are scheduled  
16 throughout the summer.

## 17 Recommendations:

### 18 *Structure:*

19 The Structure Working Group has attempted to address two issues that have continually emerged. First,  
20 there was a pervasive sense and experience that in the current structure of the conference there is no group  
21 with overall administrative oversight of the conference. The second was the sense that in the current  
22 structure decision making processes are diffused and cumbersome.

23 In an attempt to address these concerns, the group proposes the following:

- 24 1) A Conference Council will be established charged with the comprehensive oversight of the  
25 conference as a whole. The council will be responsible for the development of the annual budget,  
26 policies, planning and coordination of the ministries and activities of the conference.
- 27 2) The council will utilize authorized ministries and task forces to carry out the vision and mission of the  
28 conference to do God's work. These ministries will be responsible for program development and  
29 implementation.
- 30 3) The council will have 24 members (including officers).
- 31 4) The council will be divided equally into four standing committees:  
32 a) Leadership Development  
33 b) Finance and Administration  
34 c) Local Church Ministries  
35 d) Wider Church Ministries.

36

37 ***Personnel:***

38 The Personnel Working Group diligently interviewed all conference staff to gather their insight; looked at  
 39 the utilization of personnel in other conferences and also how to best utilize the strengths of volunteer  
 40 leadership within the council.

41 A summary of their recommendations is below:

- 42 1) Develop clear job descriptions and an annual evaluation process.
- 43 2) Operate the conference with a staff of a Conference Minister, two associate Conference Ministers and  
 44 support staff.
- 45 3) Search and call process, church conflict/crisis management and clergy support will be shared by  
 46 Associate Conference Ministers and Conference Minister.
- 47 4) Associations will handle their own clerical/accounting work.
- 48 5) Development and utilization of our many talented and faceted lay and clergy volunteers.

49 ***Strategic Priorities:***

50 The Strategic Priorities Working Group has been very visible during this process. Surveys were  
 51 developed and distributed at Association spring meetings and conference events. A series of Cluster  
 52 Conversations were held during the summer and early fall of 2008 to identify concerns and opportunities  
 53 to best do God's work in our conference. Twelve issues were identified and presented to FaithWorks in  
 54 October. This spring a second round of Cluster Conversations were held to capture what we see as the  
 55 values embedded in our vision of the Church, and in the Conference.

56 The Strategic Priorities Working Group proposes the following priority areas:

- 57 1) *To clarify and strengthen our covenantal bonds*  
 58 The Church is not a building. The Church is not the people who are its members. The Church is  
 59 the relationships which the people who are its members forge with each other and with the  
 60 surrounding community. For these relationships to be strong, and thus for the Church to be  
 61 strong, these relationships must be as clear as possible. We must know what we can expect from  
 62 each other, how we will make decisions together, how we will distribute our resources of all  
 63 kinds and how we will come to each other's aid.
- 64 2) *To discern and live into the newly emerging Church*  
 65 The Church of the past will not be the Church of the future. We live in a world which is rapidly  
 66 transforming. We live in a world where the influence of the Church is declining along with  
 67 membership attendance. Nevertheless, we continue to believe that some association of the  
 68 faithful is essential for the fulfillment of God's will for the human community. We will continue  
 69 to need the Church. The Church will not be what it has been but we do not yet know what God  
 70 has in store for us. We are thus called to discern what this newly emerging Church is to be and to  
 71 create the infrastructure which will support it.

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73 **Timeline (Approval and Implementation)**

- 74 1) Draft of Habakkuk 223 Project recommendations posted on Conference Webpage and announcement  
75 of its posting sent out electronically to all churches and current 11 Ministries directors - May 2009.
- 76 2) Churches are asked to make copies available to their delegates and members for review and comment  
77 - May 2009.
- 78 3) Regional meetings will be held throughout the conference beginning in June 2009. All delegates are  
79 asked to attend.
- 80 4) Presentation at Coordinating Ministry meeting July 18, 2009.
- 81 5) Habakkuk 223 Project Team will meet September 12, 2009 to review input and comments from  
82 membership. Report will be updated based on need.
- 83 6) Final draft will be shared with Coordinating Ministry—September 2009.
- 84 7) Final report will be ready for presentation and adoption at the October 2009 Biennial Meeting.
- 85 8) If approved, Nominating Committee will begin development of slate of council members and officers  
86 to be approved at the June 2010 FaithWorks Meeting – January - May 2010.
- 87 9) Transition team will be put together to assist with implementation - January 2010.
- 88 10) Task group will be put in place to review revisions needed to by-laws - January 2010.
- 89 11) By-laws approved at June 2010 FaithWorks/Business Meeting.
- 90 12) Slate of Council member candidates will be voted on at 2010 FaithWorks/Business Meeting.

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## **HABAKKUK PROJECT**

### Structure Committee Report

#### 93 **Issues and Purpose**

94 The Structure Committee has attempted to address two issues that emerged early in our conversations  
95 about the structure of the Missouri Mid-South Conference. First, there was a pervasive sense and  
96 experience that in the current structure of the conference there is no group with overall administrative  
97 oversight of the conference. The lack of a group within the conference structure charged to oversee and  
98 coordinate policy and financial decisions was seen as detrimental to the well-being of the conference. A  
99 second, related issue that concerned the Structure Committee was the sense and experience that in the  
100 current structure of the conference decision-making processes are diffuse and cumbersome. As an  
101 example, it was not clear how the Habakkuk Project itself, when proposed by the Conference Minister,  
102 could be authorized.

#### 103 **Overview**

104 In an attempt to address these two concerns, the Structure Committee has attempted to imagine a structure  
105 which will provide for clear decision-making processes, a centralized body with oversight of the  
106 conference as a whole, and groups authorized to implement the ministries deemed important to the  
107 mission of the conference. In overview, the proposed structure includes the following components:

- 108 1) A centralized body, a Conference Council, will be charged with comprehensive oversight of the  
109 mission, ministries, and administration of the conference. This body would be concerned with policy  
110 development, planning, and coordination of the ministries and activities of the conference as a whole.  
111 Centralized budgetary oversight would occur through this Council.
- 112 2) A number of groups will be authorized by the Conference Council to carry out specific aspects of the  
113 conference's mission and ministry (e.g., stewardship, outdoor ministry, evangelism, new church  
114 starts, justice and social concerns, Christian education, youth and young adult ministries, etc.). These  
115 groups would have a programmatic focus and be charged to implement various ministries of the  
116 conference. The activities of these groups as they develop specific ministries and programs will be  
117 coordinated through the Conference Council and funding will be approved by the Conference  
118 Council.
- 119 3) The proposed structure allows the option for the Conference Council also to create other ad hoc  
120 entities – tasks forces, working groups, or such like – that might be deemed necessary from time to  
121 time to deal particular issues or concerns (e.g., to implement a conference-wide priority for which no  
122 existing group has clear ownership or responsibility).

123 In the process of imagining a structure for the conference, the Structure Committee has also been  
124 concerned with two related issues: a) the officers of the conference, their duties, and their election; b) the  
125 necessity of re-writing the conference bylaws to reflect the proposed structural changes.

126

127 **The Conference Council and Officers of the Council**

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129 The proposed structure calls for a Conference Council. This Council will have 24 voting members who  
 130 must be a member of a local church of the Missouri Mid-South Conference. The members of the  
 131 Conference Council will be elected by the Conference at its annual meeting. The members will be divided  
 132 into three classes of 8 and will be elected to three year terms; members may serve a total of two  
 133 consecutive three year terms (6 years total). The membership will represent a cross-section of the  
 134 conference. No association will have less than 5 members on the Conference Council.

135

136 The 24 members will be inclusive of the four conference officers: a Moderator, Vice-Moderator,  
 137 Secretary, and Treasurer. These officers must be members of the Conference Council. They will be  
 138 nominated by the Nominating Committee (see below) and elected by the Conference at its annual  
 139 meeting. The Nominating Committee may nominate as officers either persons already members of the  
 140 Conference Council; or they may nominate someone not on the Conference Council. (In the latter case,  
 141 the person would first need to be elected to the Conference Council and then, in an immediately  
 142 subsequent election, elected to serve as an officer.) Officers of the conference will serve one 2 year term  
 143 with the exception of the treasurer who may serve 2 two year terms. When a person's term as an officer is  
 144 completed, the person will serve out any remainder of his/her term on the Conference Council. The  
 145 Conference Minister will serve on the board as an ex-officio member without vote.

146

147 The Council is to focus on policies, planning and evaluation, coordination, and administration for the  
 148 mission and ministries of the conference as a whole. It will have budgetary oversight for the conference.  
 149 However, the Conference Council will not engage in program development or implementation; rather, it  
 150 will authorize other groups for these purposes.

151 In order to carry out its duties, the Conference Council will be divided equally into four standing  
 152 committees the:

- 153 1) **Leadership Development** will coordinate the conference's efforts to recruit, train, and support lay  
 154 leadership; it will promote and develop the conference's relationship between the church historically  
 155 related seminaries and divinity schools; it will assist the Nominating Committee<sup>1</sup> in identifying  
 156 candidates for election to conference positions; it will establish and maintain a conference-wide data  
 157 base of both lay and clergy leadership experience and skills.
- 158 2) **Finance and Administration** will prepare a conference budget for approval first by the Council as a  
 159 whole and then for submission to the Conference; it will develop and implement an investment  
 160 policy; maintain and manage the conference's real estate and tangible property; develop policies that  
 161 support and oversee the stewardship and planned giving efforts of the conference.
- 162 3) **Local Church Ministries** will oversee the conference's efforts to support and make more faithful and  
 163 effective the ministries of the local churches of the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Some of the  
 164 ministries for which this committee will be responsible to plan, encourage, coordinate, and evaluate  
 165 are evangelism, new church development, Christian education, youth and young adult ministry, and  
 166 outdoor ministry.
- 167 4) **Wider Church Ministries** will oversee the conference's efforts to support and make more faithful  
 168 and effective the wider church ministries of the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Some of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Nominating Committee will be composed of the Conference Minister, the previous Conference Moderator, and the chairs of the four standing committees of the Conference Council.

169 ministries for which this committee will be responsible will be to plan, encourage, coordinate, and  
 170 evaluate our interpretation of the policies and program of the General Synod and the boards and  
 171 committees of the national setting of the UCC; promotion and interpretation of OCWM and all church  
 172 offerings; ministries of social justice and witness locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

173 In addition to the four committees of the Council, there will be an Executive Committee consisting of the  
 174 officers of the conference and the chairs of the four standing committees (above). This committee will  
 175 prepare agendas for the Conference Council, have a role in filling vacancies on the Conference Council  
 176 and among General Synod delegates; appoint Council members to standing committees and appoint  
 177 chairs for the standing committees; will function as the personnel committee; and will coordinate strategic  
 178 planning for the conference.

### 179 **Authorized Ministries and Ad Hoc Groups**

180 The Conference Council will be focused on policies, planning and evaluation, coordination, and  
 181 administration for the mission and ministries of the conference as a whole. The development and  
 182 implementation of specific ministries and supporting programs will be undertaken by Authorized  
 183 Ministry groups. Such groups will have a programmatic focus. They will be authorized by the Conference  
 184 Council, receive funding from the Conference Council as part of the annual budget process, and be  
 185 accountable to the Conference Council.

186 There will be a formal process by which the Conference Council will establish Authorized Ministry  
 187 groups. The process will result in a written document stipulating the purposes of the Authorized Ministry  
 188 group, the number of persons who will serve on the Authorized Ministry group and how they will be  
 189 chosen, the accountability of the Authorized Ministry group to the Conference Council; the agreement  
 190 will also include a commitment of financial support of the Authorized Ministry by the Conference  
 191 Council for an initial fiscal year; subsequent funding will be part of the annual budget process of the  
 192 conference.

193 Authorized Ministry groups must all be approved by the Conference Council. The Conference Council  
 194 may take initiative to establish an Authorized Ministry; or, a group of persons from the conference may  
 195 petition the Conference Council for approval of an Authorized Ministry. In the latter case, the Conference  
 196 Council will determine if the proposed Authorized Ministry is consistent with the mission and purposes of  
 197 the conference and if and to what extent the proposed ministry can be supported through the conference  
 198 budget.

199 It is anticipated that when the conference is asked to approve this new structure, the proposal will be  
 200 accompanied by a proposal regarding a number of Authorized Ministries to be approved by the new  
 201 Conference Council immediately after it is formed. Authorized Ministries for which immediate approval  
 202 by the new Conference Council might be sought could include the following (details to be worked out  
 203 over the summer): Planned Giving, Outdoor Ministry, Evangelism and Church Renewal, Justice and  
 204 Witness, Youth and Young Adults, Christian Education, Stewardship and Planned Giving, and Mission  
 205 Relations and Global Partnerships.

206

207 It is imagined that as strategic planning moves forward in the conference and as strategic priorities are  
208 developed, some of these may be assigned to Authorized Ministries for implementation. At the same time,  
209 it is anticipated that from time to time issues will arise within the life of the conference or mission  
210 priorities will be approved for which no Authorized Ministry group exists. In these cases, the Conference  
211 Council may choose to appoint a task force, working group, ad hoc committee or some similar temporary  
212 group to deal with the issue or priority.

### 213 **Bylaws**

214 The changes that the Structure Committee is recommending will require that the bylaws of the conference  
215 be revised and approved by the conference at its June, 2010 meeting. The conference attorney has been  
216 working with the Structure Committee on this issue. It is the intention of the Structure Committee that the  
217 revised bylaws be written so as not to be overburdened with detail and to allow flexibility. So, for  
218 instance, while a feature of the proposed new structure such as Authorized Ministries will be included in  
219 the bylaws to allow their formation by the Conference Council, the specific Authorized Ministries will not  
220 be specified in the bylaws.

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**HABAKKUK PROJECT**  
Staffing/Personnel Committee Report

223 The Staffing Working Group of the Habakkuk Project of the Missouri Mid-South Conference was  
224 charged with evaluating our current conference staff configuration and making recommendations for any  
225 needed changes. The group began by developing a set of interview questions that were used in  
226 conversations with the Associate Conference Minister and Interim Associate Conference Ministers,  
227 Office Support Staff in Webster Groves, the Director of Outdoor Ministries, and the Director of  
228 Shannondale Ministries. These conversations brought out several common threads concerning the  
229 strengths and weaknesses of the current staff configuration. Based on the findings of these conversations  
230 the Staffing Working Group of the Habakkuk task force makes the following recommendations:

- 231 1) Acknowledging that prayer provides human beings with an approach to God and that prayer is an  
232 intentional time of conversation with God, all people throughout the conference are invited to  
233 support the conference through prayer and study calling on God's presence, love, direction, and  
234 grace as the conference moves forward into the future.
- 235 2) The personnel committee for the conference will be responsible for developing job descriptions  
236 and will establish a consistent process for job evaluations for ALL conference employees. There  
237 are three main purposes served by a thorough job description. One, a clear job description will  
238 force the conference to be specific as to the expectations for a person holding a particular  
239 position. Two, a job description details the desired qualifications for a person holding a particular  
240 position. Three, the job description will provide ample information about the support for a person  
241 in the particular position. To this end, information in job descriptions should include but not be  
242 limited to: title of job; purpose of the job; type of work to be performed; term of the job;  
243 expectations the conference has for a person holding the job; accountability for a person in the  
244 position; relationship to other staff members in the conference; the qualifications that are integral  
245 for success in the job; support for the person in the job and resources available for assistance. A  
246 good job description will help to eliminate confusion and frustration that can occur when  
247 misinformation occurs between a person in the position and the conference. Just the same, timely  
248 job performance evaluations will help all involved to stay connected to the work at hand as  
249 detailed by the job description.
- 250 3) That the conference operates with a Conference Minister and two ACM's. Conference staff will  
251 engage churches actively on a day to day basis. This would include worshipping or speaking in  
252 conference churches a minimum of 2-3 Sundays a month. These visits will be coordinated  
253 through the conference office with each staff member visiting churches of varying sizes. The  
254 Conference Minister and ACM's will receive up to date listings of churches visited. Goal will be  
255 for conference staff to visit all churches within a 2 year time period.

256 The search and call process will be shared by ACM's and Conference Minister and will constitute  
257 a significant percentage (possibly up to 50%) of the ACM's job responsibilities. This will be  
258 coordinated through conference office with staff dividing duties in a way that best serves both  
259 church and conference. Conference staff will receive profiles with profiles sent to churches only  
260 after being read by assigned ACM or Conference Minister. Conference staff will determine the  
261 gifts of applicants and indicate how their gifts fit specific churches. Conference staff will  
262 communicate with the search committee of a church a minimum of every six weeks.

263 Church conflict/crisis management will be coordinated by Conference Minister and ACM's based  
 264 on availability and/or previous associations with said church. Previous associations could include  
 265 working with a particular church in search and call.

266 Attendance at all conference staff meetings and participation in conference wide events such as  
 267 PIM Retreat and Biennial meetings are required (attendance at association and/or cluster meetings  
 268 are ACM responsibilities that will be divided depending on structure recommendations).

269 Clergy support and leadership development will be shared by ACM's and Conference Minister  
 270 including:

- 271 a. Be proactive in shaping a new vision by equipping and facilitating leaders for
- 272 congregational transformation and becoming consultants (resource) for programming
- 273 within the conference rather than the program 'doers.'
- 274 b. Equipping and directing congregations on the importance of their financial support of
- 275 OCWM and the conference.
- 276 c. Promote ecumenical partnerships and programs with the wider church

277 ACM ministry assignments will be based on programming needs and individual work  
 278 assignments as coordinated with the Conference Minister. ACM assignments will not be  
 279 geographically based.

280 Be open to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to new possibilities and new direction that God may  
 281 have in store for the conference.

282 4) Associations will handle their own clerical/accounting work. No copying or mailing for  
 283 associations or the keeping of financial records will be done at the conference office by  
 284 conference staff. It is suggested that volunteers do this work within associations and that  
 285 associations determine ways to cover cost of such work.

286 5) The Conference Minister will continue to develop and improve communication with conference  
 287 staff recognizing that effective communication in the church empowers people for ministry and  
 288 helps build a sense of understanding and community.

289 6) The conference staff is encouraged to identify volunteer resources to cover specific tasks in order  
 290 to relieve workload and promote efficiency. Conference staff or working groups will discern the  
 291 areas of need where additional support can be accomplished through the use of volunteers. A  
 292 process for recruiting volunteers will be developed (i.e. a conference wide time and talent sheet)  
 293 where individuals - both lay and clergy, churches and businesses with connections to the  
 294 conference will be identified. Specific recruiting for volunteers may be considered for tasks as  
 295 well. Volunteers will be trained and supervised for the assigned tasks by the person/group  
 296 needing support. The training will ensure there is a clear understanding of the work that needs to  
 297 be done and the techniques/skills needed to accomplish the work. All volunteers for the  
 298 conference will fill out a volunteer application and participate in some level of screening to  
 299 determine the most appropriate match with volunteer opportunities. Safe church practices and  
 300 policies will be followed for volunteers working in situations with children, youth, adults with  
 301 disabilities, and as deemed necessary in other volunteer situations.

302 7) The conference staff designates time annually for planning and for visioning with the hope of  
 303 having continued emphasis on proactive approaches engaging people and churches in the mission  
 304 of the conference.

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## **HABAKKUK PROJECT**

### Strategic Planning Working Group

307 The Strategic Planning Working Group of the Habakkuk Project of the Missouri Mid-South Conference  
308 recommends that the Conference adopt as its priorities for the next biennium two issue areas: to clarify  
309 and strengthen our covenantal bonds, and to discern and live into the newly emerging church.

#### 310 **History and Process**

311 The Working Group began in April of 2008 by developing a survey of the members of the Conference  
312 which was distributed to attendees and delegates at each of the Association Spring Meetings and to other  
313 Conference events, most notably the Women's Retreat. These surveys were gathered and the results  
314 considered by the Working Group along with data which had been collected as part of the process for  
315 calling the Conference Minister.

316 Beginning in July of 2008 the Working Group facilitated a series of Cluster Conversations designed to  
317 identify the issues which arose for members attending one of these conversations. The goal was not to  
318 repeat what had been done through the surveys, but to observe that the way the Holy Spirit can speak to  
319 and through us when we are in conversation with others allows us to discern God's will in a fresh way.

320 These conversations concluded in September and the Working Group then took the results and fashioned  
321 a list of twelve issue areas which it presented to FaithWorks in mid October. The Issue Areas were  
322 distributed on paper but were also posted on a wall in the exhibit area and attendees were encouraged to  
323 "vote" their concerns by placing a small orange sticker on the newsprint for the issue they found most  
324 compelling.

325 This "voting" was only instructive, not determinative of the process as we know that FaithWorks is not a  
326 microcosm of the Conference. Nevertheless, the feedback we received was very helpful and we were able  
327 to make some important refinements of the Issue Areas.

328 In February and March of 2009 we held a second round of Cluster Conversations using the twelve Issue  
329 Areas as a starting point. The goal of this second round was to clarify the vision we have collectively for  
330 what the Conference would be if it were more fully embodying the will of God as we discern it. This was  
331 necessarily a very practical conversation as it had as its starting place the pressing issues we have already  
332 identified, but it was also an attempt to capture what we see as the values embedded in our vision of the  
333 Church, and in the Conference as an expression of the Church.

334 During this second round of conversations the Working Group met to try to identify the themes which we  
335 saw arising from these conversations. This report is a summary of what we discerned as the two dominant  
336 themes coming from all of the cluster conversations.

#### 337 **Overview of the results**

338 In all slightly less than two hundred people participated in the second round of conversations. By far the  
339 largest participation came from Western Association. One of those conversations saw 80 people show up,  
340 some traveling for hundreds of miles to get there. The smallest participation was from the St. Louis  
341 Association where there were only two conversations (another one was cancelled for lack of registration)  
342 each with a bit more than a dozen in attendance. The clusters have not really functioned in St. Louis  
343 Association for a long time so each event was open to all.

344 Despite the relatively larger participation from the western end of the conference, it would not be fair to  
 345 assume that the priorities are skewed in favor of their concerns. For one, the process of the Working  
 346 Group was not one of counting the votes of the conversant, but of listening to the themes arising in all of  
 347 the conversations. And for another, the themes were not markedly different in different regions of the  
 348 Conference. Specifically, one would not be able to read a response sheet from the conversations and  
 349 identify the region from which it came. The lone exception to this is that Western and Eastern  
 350 Associations greatly prize the relationships they have through the clusters and there are no functioning  
 351 clusters in St. Louis.

## 352 **Proposal**

353 The Working Group proposes the two following Priority Areas for the coming Biennium.

### 354 *To clarify and strengthen our covenantal bonds*

355 The Church is not a building. The Church is not the people who are its members. The Church is the  
 356 relationships which the people who are its members forge with each other and with the surrounding  
 357 community. For these relationships to be strong, and thus for the Church to be strong, these relationships  
 358 must be as clear as possible. We must know what we can expect from each other, how we will make  
 359 decisions together, how we will distribute our resources of all kinds, how we will come to each other's  
 360 aid.

### 361 *To discern and live into the newly emerging Church*

362 The Church of the past will not be the Church of the future. We live in a world which is rapidly  
 363 transforming. We live in a world where the influence of the Church is declining along with membership  
 364 and attendance. Nevertheless, we continue to believe that some association of the faithful is essential for  
 365 the fulfillment of God's will for human community. We will continue to need the Church. The Church  
 366 will not be what it has been but we do not yet know what God has in store for us. We are thus called to  
 367 discern what this newly emerging Church is to be and to create the infrastructure which will support it.

## 368 **Issue Areas:**

369 Listed below are the twelve issue areas which formed the starting place for the Round Two Cluster  
 370 Conversations. After each narrative about the issue are notes in **bold** about how the vision and values  
 371 identified by the Round Two Cluster Conversations can inform the implementation of a process to  
 372 respond to these two priorities in the life of the Conference. These items were taken from the Reporter's  
 373 Worksheets from the conversations and summarized. There were many duplications between  
 374 conversations and in some cases it may be that the notes contradict each other as not all small groups  
 375 shared the same vision for the Conference.

### 376 **1) Church Growth and New Church Starts:**

377 The membership of our congregations is shrinking to the point that some have found it necessary to  
 378 close and many are struggling to maintain their budgets and their program. We are looking for the  
 379 Conference to find or develop and then promote and support programs to turn this tide. This would  
 380 include programs like the Church Vitality Initiative and Ready, Set, Grow.

381 While the housing market is currently in a slump, the fact remains that new home developments  
 382 continue to be built and those homes will hold families who need the resources of a church home.  
 383 Even in already developed areas there are people who cannot find a faith community close by which  
 384 speaks to them. Can we plant the seeds for the growth of the Church into the 21st Century by starting

385 new congregations? What can we do together as a Conference to foster the growth of existing and  
386 new local congregations?

387 **a. Covenant:**

388 **i. The vitality and viability of the congregation depends upon clear**  
389 **accountability at all levels.**

390 **ii. We must develop relationships in which new churches are seen as enhancing**  
391 **our own vitality, not as competitors which may hurt our own viability.**

392 **b. New Church:**

393 **i. We need to discover models for vital and revitalizing congregations. [house**  
394 **church, base church, worship centers]**

395 **ii. New Churches are not just new congregations but new forms for**  
396 **community.**

397 **iii. New Churches are appropriate for all settings, rural, suburban, and urban.**

398 **2) Clarifying Covenantal Relationships and Understanding the UCC:**

399 The United Church of Christ has a polity; that is, a way of structuring the ways we make decisions  
400 together, which is very different from most other churches. These differences are both a source of  
401 strength and pride, and of confusion. While we have an autonomy which most denominations do not  
402 enjoy, we also have less clear lines of accountability. We are confused by the actions of General  
403 Synod and we aren't sure what our responsibilities are to our sister congregations. Can we clarify how  
404 we intend to be in our relationships with each other and share that vision in a clear and constructive  
405 manner?

406 **a. Covenant:**

407 **i. There are many levels of relationship within the Church. These are peer**  
408 **levels, as member to member, local church to local church. And they are**  
409 **between levels, as local church to Conference and member to General**  
410 **Synod. Each of these relationships is important and is worthy of**  
411 **clarification.**

412 **ii. One level of relationship which is vital to some in the Conference and absent**  
413 **for others is the Cluster. This level of organization is a source of great**  
414 **vitality where it exists and could potentially enhance both our sense of who**  
415 **we are, and our ability to create and deliver services to our churches and**  
416 **members.**

417 **iii. We may discover new relationships or reshape existing ones between**  
418 **Conferences and shifting the boundaries of Associations.**

419

420 **b. New Church:**

421 **i. In many instances the process of clarifying covenantal relationships may**  
 422 **mean the creation of a new relationship or creating new qualities in existing**  
 423 **relationships.**

424 **ii. One of the things we must discern is the degree to which an awareness of**  
 425 **and involvement in the larger Church, that is the Church beyond the**  
 426 **worshiping congregation, is a hallmark of the emerging church.**

427 **3) Clergy Support and Development:**

428 The Search and Call process is one of the most prominent ways that local churches experience the  
 429 presence of the Associations and the Conference through the work of the Associate Conference  
 430 Ministers. At the very time when the congregation is feeling most uncertain, the soothing presence of  
 431 the ACM is most appreciated. While some folks are concerned that the process is cumbersome and  
 432 takes too long, everyone sees it as an essential aspect of the role of the Conference. However, once  
 433 the pastor is in place, there are so many demands from the job that it is hard to get continuing  
 434 education and support from peers. How can we do a better job of supporting our clergy?

435 **a. Covenant:**

436 **i. Given the need for ongoing professional development, what is the role that**  
 437 **affiliated organizations, like Eden Seminary, might play in professional**  
 438 **development post ordination?**

439 **ii. Laity should have a clear understanding of the difference between an**  
 440 **Interim and a Called Pastor.**

441 **iii. Conference has a different role to play than that of the local congregation.**

442 **b. New Church:**

443 **i. As we move to a more Internet enabled world, can we develop Web based**  
 444 **resources to aid in the labor intensive process of Search and Call?**

445 **ii. In general, the Conference can do better as a distributor of resources than a**  
 446 **developer of programs.**

447 **4) Conference Budget:**

448 We are currently operating under a deficit budget. We are spending more than we are bringing in. We  
 449 have to gather more and spend less to create a balance. We will need to both encourage congregations  
 450 to support the Conference through Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM) and find other sources of  
 451 income as well as cutting our current expenses. Can we develop a process to secure the funds we need  
 452 to further the mission of the Conference?

453 **a. Covenant:**

454 **i. We are seeing the income side of the budget decline for reasons of falling**  
 455 **membership generally, but we also have confusion about what OCWM is for**

456 **and why we should support it. We expect that our members will support**  
 457 **that which they feel ownership of.**

458 **b. New Church:**

459 **i. We may be shifting away from the model of having everyone pitch into the**  
 460 **pot to pay for all of the services. We may want to establish fee for services so**  
 461 **that Conference activities are more self-sustaining.**

462 **5) Engaging Young Adults:**

463 Young Adults live in a very different world from their elders. We want to include them but don't  
 464 know how. We want to create a church which welcomes them but we also want to preserve the church  
 465 we have known and loved. Social networking for young adults looks very different from what we do  
 466 at the typical church social. What would a church look like which engaged young adults and would  
 467 we want to be that church?

468 **a. Covenant:**

469 **i. While young adults are grossly underrepresented in most of our**  
 470 **congregations, they are not totally absent. How does their relatively small**  
 471 **number speak to the matter of our mutual responsibilities? Are there ways**  
 472 **they want greater participation and if so, doing what? What do we need**  
 473 **from them?**

474 **b. New Church:**

475 **i. There is a world-wide movement which is sometimes referred to as "the**  
 476 **emerging church." [see the entry in Wikipedia] This is a movement which is**  
 477 **largely one of Young Adults. Any consideration of what the church is**  
 478 **becoming will have to take this movement into account and perhaps become**  
 479 **a part of it.**

480 **ii. By opening ourselves to a consideration of the interests and abilities of**  
 481 **young adults, we will discover what the new church may be.**

482 **6) Engaging Youth:**

483 Our congregations are aging. Even those with a vibrant ministry with children see those youth fall  
 484 away from active membership when they are confirmed. The teen years are potentially a time of  
 485 profound faith development. But as youth are moving out of their families as they mature they are  
 486 also moving out of the family of their own local church. How can the Conference do better at creating  
 487 a larger faith context into which youth can naturally develop?

488 **a. Covenant:**

489 **i. Youth grow up in the church and get confirmed but then don't have a clear**  
 490 **sense of their place or their purpose.**

491 **ii. Older members know that youth are no longer children, but don't know how**  
 492 **to appropriately include them into the leadership of the congregation.**

493 **b. New Church:**

- 494 **i. Youth tend to be much less attached to the way we have always done things,**  
 495 **and thus can provide leadership in discerning the New Church.**

496 **7) Evangelism:**

497 A central task of the Church is to proclaim the Good News. We are to remind ourselves and each  
 498 other of the saving acts of God in history and in our own lives. We do this because our faith demands  
 499 it but also because it lifts our hearts and offers to others the source of energy and intelligence which  
 500 derives from our faith. What tools and supports might the Conference offer to aid us in this central  
 501 task of being the Church?

502 **a. Covenant:**

- 503 **i. Central to the articulation of our faith is the ability to speak to who the**  
 504 **Church is; that is, who we are to each other.**

505 **b. New Church:**

- 506 **i. We will have to discover a new more at ease articulation of our faith, free of**  
 507 **jargon only the initiated understand. We have to know why our faith is**  
 508 **important, relevant, and vital and have the words to make this faith clear to**  
 509 **others.**

510 **8) Helping Churches in Crisis:**

511 We help our sister congregations when there is a pastoral vacancy through the Search and Call  
 512 process and we help when there is a natural disaster as with a storm or a flood. But there are less  
 513 visible crises which arise when a congregation experiences deep divisions between members or when  
 514 divisions arise over the role and function of the leadership of the congregation. What more can the  
 515 Conference do to identify and address these crises in a manner which promotes the healing and  
 516 wholeness of the local congregation?

517 **a. Covenant:**

- 518 **i. Can local congregations identify sources of support when they are having**  
 519 **difficulty? To what degree can we count on neighboring churches,**  
 520 **Association committees or the Conference staff to be there when we need**  
 521 **them? What is the responsibility of the local church to ask for help?**

522 **b. New Church:**

- 523 **i. As crisis can be both *danger* and *opportunity*, we may be able to discern a**  
 524 **new way of being the Church out of the difficulties which are arising for us.**

525 **9) Justice Witness Ministry:**

526 The history of the UCC and the history of those churches which formed the United Church of Christ  
 527 is a history of prophetic witness to a God who calls for justice. We are called to speak up on behalf of  
 528 the oppressed and marginalized in our society. But we have no mechanism within the structures of the

529 Missouri Mid-South Conference to authorize such a witness. Indeed, any voice which some  
 530 experience as prophetic will be a voice others hear as heresy. How do we honor our prophetic  
 531 tradition and call without sowing division and destruction in the church?

532 **a. Covenant:**

533 **i. We are not all answering the same call. We must identify the call to which**  
 534 **we are responding, trusting that God calls each of us uniquely; seeking**  
 535 **allies, not converts.**

536 **ii. We will be able to speak with the greatest power when we speak with one**  
 537 **voice. We will not find that voice without a clear understanding of who we**  
 538 **are to each other.**

539 **b. New Church:**

540 **i. The future of the Church lies in being God's agents for justice. It is in being**  
 541 **prophetic that we will be known as the Church.**

542 **ii. Acting out a prophetic vision is engaging and exciting and revitalizes the**  
 543 **Church.**

544 **10) Lay Leadership Development:**

545 While we honor the efforts of our clergy, the vitality of the Church depends primarily on the  
 546 leadership which laypeople offer to the mission of our local congregations, Associations, and  
 547 Conference. If we are going to be a more vital Church, it will be because of the efforts of laypersons.  
 548 How can the Conference recruit, train, and equip people for lay ministry at all levels of the Church?

549 **a. Covenant:**

550 **i. What are the expectations of local churches for the participation of**  
 551 **members? Can one be a full member if one only warms a pew and places**  
 552 **money in an envelope? Are there opportunities and encouragement for**  
 553 **greater involvement? How can the Conference support such recruiting and**  
 554 **training?**

555 **b. New Church:**

556 **i. Whatever forms the New Church may take, we can trust that it will remain**  
 557 **true that people are most invested in those associations in which they are**  
 558 **most active, in which they provide leadership.**

559 **11) Nurturing Safe Diversity:**

560 We live in an increasingly complex world. We have much closer relationships with people who are  
 561 very different from us than ever before, and certainly in a manner that is very different from our  
 562 parents and grandparents. We not only tolerate those who are different from us; we know that  
 563 learning from those who are different enriches the experience of our own lives. Our God has created a  
 564 world of rich diversity and we need to be able to embrace that richness. Still, we are uncomfortable

565 with those who are different, and especially uncomfortable with those who see us as different. Can we  
 566 learn to not only tolerate diversity, but to embrace it?

567 **a. Covenant:**

568 **i. Sometimes we feel as though we are invisible to others within the UCC.**  
 569 **Sometimes it doesn't feel safe to be seen. Can we be so clear about who we**  
 570 **are to each other that it is safe to be seen?**

571 **b. New Church:**

572 **i. We suspect that it is just from this rich diversity that the New Church will**  
 573 **emerge. Growing the capacity to turn diversity into pluralism will fuel the**  
 574 **emergence of the New Church**

575 **12) Outdoor Ministries:**

576 As much as we all get great satisfaction from the programs of our local congregations, anyone who  
 577 has participated in the programs of Outdoor Ministries knows the depths of fellowship and the  
 578 spiritually transforming power of an extended experience of community in an outdoor setting. As rich  
 579 as these experiences are, they are also very costly. Can we find the resources to preserve and expand  
 580 our Outdoor Ministries into the future?

581 **a. Covenant:**

582 **i. The shared activities of the Conference, including all of what is done under**  
 583 **the banner of Outdoor Ministries, is a primary way in which we know each**  
 584 **other within the Conference. It is a creator of community.**

585 **ii. To what degree does each of the members of the Conference know about**  
 586 **and have a commitment to these shared activities?**

587 **b. New Church:**

588 **i. Outdoor Ministries is a primary source for the development of new leaders**  
 589 **and new worship forms.**