



## Together, As One (TA1) Creating a New Conference of the United Church of Christ

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In June 2018, the Annual Meetings of the Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut Conferences of the United Church of Christ each voted overwhelmingly to join together and create a new Conference of the United Church of Christ in Southern New England.

**1. Why are these 3 Conferences choosing to come together?**

We are driven by a God given sense of vision and what is possible if we unite our efforts. Our Vision statement focuses on 4 areas of ministry:

- a. Helping the local church make disciples of Jesus Christ
- b. Making God's Love and Justice real in the world
- c. Bringing new life as agents of transformation
- d. Forming covenant partnerships with groups that share our common values

The four components of our vision are captured in a single phrase formed by our consultant, Barbara Lemmel: "To be a Conference of local churches making disciples who live the love and justice of Jesus, embrace adaptive change and make covenant partnerships to work for the common good."

**2. Is this decision driven by financial anxiety or uncertainty?**

While all conferences are facing financial challenges, the primary driver of this decision is to combine strengths to have a greater impact in and through our churches. Our hope is to hear people in southern New England ask 10 years from now, "What happened here? Why are people more compassionate and caring? How did our communities become more just and sustainable?"

**3. What's with the name?**

Together As One is the provisional name. It expresses our intent as we have moved towards this deep ministry collaboration. And it seemed too early to choose a more permanent name. As this new conference more fully embodies and lives into its vision that new name will emerge.

**4. How will this impact my Conference?**

We are the Body of Christ; we are all in this together. We draw strength from the insights, best practices, and resources that we share with one another. As we learn from other Conferences, faith communities, and secular partners, we intend to share what we discover. Collaboration and covenant with our national UCC and across the Conferences of our country and world is a key principle of our vision.

**5. What ministries will a united Conference undertake that the separate conferences could not?**

As a united Conference, we will have a stronger voice for justice and witness in southern New England than we do separately. We will be able to pool resources. We will benefit more fully from the experiences, best practices, staff and Conference leader gifts, and successful initiatives that each of the "historic Conferences" has to offer. And we believe that by breaking down the false boundaries that divide us, we can inspire others to do similarly, modeling for local churches how to collaborate with neighboring churches, other faith communities and secular organizations.

**6. This new coming together as one will concentrate delegate power into a single conference. Massachusetts and Connecticut already are among the largest Synod delegations. Won't this collaboration exaggerate potential influence at Synod and subsequently at the national setting?**

We would observe that our delegates, like all Conference delegates, are free to vote their consciences as led by the Holy Spirit when it comes to Synod decisions. And they regularly do. Whether or not our three conferences formally merge, we are already collaborating in our work, sharing staff and aligning our vision, mission and purpose. Therefore, our delegations are likely to vote in similar ways at Synod whether we are three Conferences or one.

**7. Are any of the other UCC conferences doing anything like this?**

The Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota Conferences now have a single Conference Minister who reports to all three Conference Boards. Throughout the UCC there are many Conferences forming intentional collaborations and resource sharing.

**8. What is this we hear about "Associate Members"?**

This is perhaps the most innovative part of this initiative, seeking to live out the very early vision of the UCC. Congregations and regional bodies from other denominations and faiths as well as secular organizations, will be welcome to partner with the new Conference as Associate Members. Associate Members will be welcome to attend the Annual Meeting of TA1 with voice but no vote. More important, they will be strategy partners as we seek to live out the values and vision of TA1.

**9. What are the mechanics for creating the new Conference?**

There are two separate processes for creating the Together As One Conference

- a. The action of Synod would form a new UCC Conference as an ecclesiastical entity, replacing the historic Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island Conferences in the eyes of the denomination. The Associations of the three historic Conferences, which determine Standing of clergy, will automatically become members of the new Conference.
- b. Subsequently, an application will be filed to create a new non-profit corporation, based in Massachusetts, to carry out the financial and legal responsibilities of the new Conference, such as paying bills and employing staff. The three 'historic Conferences' will continue to exist as legal corporate entities, primarily in order to oversee their endowments.

**10. Where will the new Conference offices be located?**

We don't know yet. This will be one of many matters to be determined by a new Board of Directors.

**11. What impact will the vote to create a new conference have on staffing?**

Once the new conference becomes operational on January 1, 2020, the Conference Minister or Ministers will become accountable to the new Board of Directors, which will have overall responsibility for budget, policy and other matters affecting staffing. Between now and then, TA1 Board of Directors has several committees that are seeking input from a great variety of perspectives to find the best way to configure staffing and resources that will allow the new Conference to embody its values as it lives the love and justice of Jesus.