

**Minutes of the 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ  
Connecticut Convention Center, Hartford, CT  
June 16-17, 2017**

**Saturday, June 17, 2017**

The Moderator, Mr. Ian Tosh, called the 218<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ to order at 1:30pm. The Moderator made announcements regarding the order of time and events and use of social media during the meeting. Mr. Tosh then introduced the Vice-moderator, Ms. Linda Mesler; Parliamentarian, Mr. Harry Pape; and Recorder, Ms. Patti Babcock. In accordance with the by-laws, Mr. Tosh announced the appointment of the Business sub-committee, which included himself; the Vice-moderator, Ms. Mesler; the Secretary of the Conference, Ms. Bonnie Fleming; Ms. Marjorie O'Reilly; the Rev. Ms. Elizabeth Magill; and the Rev. Mr. Martin Riekert. He further specified that, as Vice-Moderator, Ms. Mesler served as chair of the Business sub-committee; and that Rev. Magill would be chief timekeeper for the Annual Meeting, with the assistance of Ms. Fleming and Mr. Tracy Keene of the Board of Directors. Ms. Fleming informed the Moderator that there were 206 lay delegates, 180 clergy, 34 visitors and 34 others registered for the Meeting. The Moderator announced that a quorum was present, and that the meeting was officially in session.

The Vice-moderator reviewed procedures for debate, voting and Speakouts. She called the gathering's attention to the Standing Rules beginning on page 18 of the Advance Materials.

Ms. Mesler moved the Consent Calendar from page 17 of the Delegate Materials. There being no objection to any of the items being placed on the calendar, it was seconded. There being no discussion, a vote was taken and passed unanimously.

<b>Consent Calendar 17-AM-01</b>	<i>The 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ adopts Consent Calendar #1 as presented on page 17 of the Delegate Materials (Appendix A).</i>
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Ms. Mesler called the Treasurer, Mr. Rick Lawrence and Assistant Treasurer, Mr. Chip Hamblet to the podium to present the budget, the proposed sale of some land owned by the Conference, and the proposal of a merger between the South Deerfield Congregational Church and the Conference.

Mr. Lawrence spoke to the proposed budget items referenced on page 12 of the Advance Materials. Budget votes were routine this year. The proposed budget for 2018 showed a modest deficit, with resources available to cover it. Mr. Lawrence reported that Conference revenue had declined each year for the last 10 years, as the total number of churches had declined and more churches had experienced financial stress. The Board and staff have been working to develop new kinds of revenue, such as the modest fees charged for Conference events.

Mr. Hamblet shared that the Board works consistently to align all available Conference resources with the Conference mission *"in order to make God's love and justice real, we seek to nurture local church vitality and the covenant among our churches."* To live out this shared mission, the Board asked the Annual Meeting for permission to sell Conference property that is not being utilized. The details of the proposed land sale in Ashland were on page 31 of Advance Materials. Mr. Hamblet reported that there was nothing built on the land, and the Conference had never used it for any purpose. The Annual

Meeting gave its consent for the sale fifteen years ago, but at the time there was no sewer available and the land proved unsuitable for septic. A sewer line is now available. A recent appraisal estimates that eight acres of road frontage would be worth approximately \$800,000. This parcel represents 7% of the property owned by the Conference in Framingham and Ashland. Proceeds of the sale would be added to the general endowment fund of the Conference. The Moderator thanked Mr. Lawrence and Mr. Hamblet for their work.

The Moderator reminded us that we are gathered as a body to discern the will of God, and that we do that by listening to one another. After a brief reminder of the Standing Rules and voting procedures, the Moderator invited Ms. Holly Brauner to report on the hearing on the *Expression of Opposition to Massachusetts Sentences of Life Imprisonment Without Opportunity for Parole*, found on page 30 of the Advance Materials. Ms. Brauner reported that there were many stories discussed during the hearing. One person in the hearing was deeply torn, but the hearing was generally love- and spirit-filled. The majority of those present at the hearing expressed support to carry the resolution forward. The Rev. Mr. George Oliver then moved that Meeting adopt the resolution as presented on page 30 of the Advance Materials, and the motion was seconded. Mr. Oliver spoke in favor of the resolution and testified that the Innocence Project had helped his family member. There were many comments and some questions. A vote was taken to close debate, and it passed. A vote was taken on the resolution, which also passed.

<p><b>Resolution: Opposition to Sentence of Life Imprisonment without Opportunity for Parole 17-AM-02</b></p>	<p><i>The 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ adopts the Resolution of Christian Conviction, “Expression of Opposition to Massachusetts Sentences of Life Imprisonment without Opportunity for Parole” (Appendix B).</i></p>
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The Moderator called on presenters of Speakouts. After several Speakouts, the Vice-moderator explained that because there were numerous items of business, the Business Committee had decided to present the budget-related items as one vote, included in Consent Calendar #2 on page 17 of the Delegate Materials. The other two items, the land sale and South Deerfield merger, appeared on pages 31-33 of the Advance Materials, and would be voted on separately.

The Rev. Ms. Christina Williams reported on the Budget Hearing, which included the land sale and the proposed merger of the South Deerfield Congregational Church with the Conference. She reported that most of those present had expressed support for all the proposals discussed at the hearing.

Mr. Lawrence moved Consent Calendar #2 on page 17 of the Delegate Materials. There being no objection to any of the items being placed on the calendar, it was seconded. There being no discussion, a vote was taken and it passed unanimously.

<p><b>Budget-related Consent Calendar 17-AM-03</b></p>	<p><i>The 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ adopts Consent Calendar #2 as presented on page 17 of the Delegate Materials (Appendix C).</i></p>
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Mr. Hamblet took the podium to introduce the proposed merger of the South Deerfield Congregational Church with the Conference, as presented on pages 32-33 of Advance Materials. Mr. Hamblet moved the vote, and it was seconded. There being no discussion, a vote was taken and passed unanimously.

<p><b>Merger: MACUCC and South Deerfield 17-AM-04</b></p>	<p><i>The 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ approves the proposed merger between the Congregational Church of South Deerfield and the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ (Appendix D).</i></p>
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Mr. Hamblet then moved the proposal to authorize the Board of Directors to sell Conference land located in Ashland, MA, as presented on page 31 of the Advance Materials. The motion was seconded, and discussion followed. After discussion, Mr. Tosh called for a vote and the motion carried.

<p><b>Authorization to Sell Land in Ashland, MA 17-AM-05</b></p>	<p><i>“The 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ authorizes the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ to sell and convey rights, title, and interests in Conference property consisting of legal house lots along Winter Street in the town of Ashland, Massachusetts. The determination as to what property or properties along said Winter Street shall be sold, the determination of fair market value of each such property sold, and the determination of the terms and conditions of each such sale shall all be reasonably determined by the said Board of Directors.</i></p> <p><i>Any two of the following: Minister and President, Treasurer, and Secretary are authorized to execute all documents, deeds, and agreements necessary to carry out this vote. The net proceeds of any such sale and conveyance will be added to the General Endowment fund of the Conference.”</i></p>
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Mr. Tosh introduced the proposed *Vote to Affirm the Resolution on an Invitation to Create a New Conference*, found on page 20 of the Advanced Materials. Mr. Vard Johnson, Chair of the Board of Directors, took the podium and moved the resolution, which was seconded.

Mr. Johnson reported that the proposal had gone through several iterations and had been the focus of much discussion and a 30-day prayer vigil by the Board. The Directors decided it would be too soon to propose details of a merger at this meeting. Rather, the Board sought affirmation from the gathering of the concept of a new, unified Conference, and consent for the Board to take a year to develop details to be presented for a vote in 2018.

There was much discussion, including concerns regarding differences in culture among the three conferences, and the importance of maintaining a Conference presence close to local churches. There was support for doing a new thing, and mention of the responsibility to reform the church for each new generation cited in the UCC Constitution. It was pointed out that Synod supports this kind of collaboration. A vote was taken halfway through discussions to cut off debate, and it failed. Later, there being no more discussion, and after a moment of silent prayer, a vote was taken and it passed.

<b>Resolution on Invitation To Create a New Conference 17-AM-06</b>	<i>The 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ adopts the Resolution on an Invitation to Create a New Conference (Appendix F).</i>
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The Moderator invited the Rev. Dr. Jim Antal to speak. Dr. Antal expressed gratitude for all present, saying that all were there to fulfil God’s mission. He thanked the Conference staff and Board of Directors, and named three new initiatives: the new Associate for Racial Justice, Mr. TJ Harper; the collaboration between the Episcopal and UCC churches in western Massachusetts; and the environmental emergency resolution that will be voted on at Synod. Mr. Antal thanked all for making God’s love and justice real in a time such as this.

The Moderator invited the Rev. Ms. Sally Norris and Ms. Jane McCord of the Volunteer Development Committee to recommend the slate of nominees listed on pages 27-31 of Delegate Materials. Rev. Norris expressed appreciation for the willingness of so many to say “yes” when called upon to lead the church. Rev. Norris and Ms. McCord moved the vote. It was seconded and, there being no discussion, a vote was taken and the motion carried.

<b>Nominating Slate 17-AM-07</b>	<i>The 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ adopts the Slate of Committee and Board Members, General Synod Delegates and Officers as presented in bold type on pages 27-31 of the Delegate Materials.</i>
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The Moderator commented that the resolution relating to immigration, printed in the Advance Materials, was informative and required no vote by this Meeting. The Vice-moderator announced that all business was finished and that the meeting would be adjourned after brief words from Dr. Antal.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:15pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patti Babcock,  
Recorder

Bonnie Fleming,  
Secretary

**Appendices to the Minutes of the 218<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the  
Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ  
June 16-17, 2017**

**Appendix A:  
CONSENT CALENDAR  
*Procedural Votes***

Consent Calendar #1 - Procedural Votes

1. The 218th Annual Meeting adopts the Standing Rules as printed on pages 16-19 of the Advance Materials.
2. The 218th Annual Meeting adopts the Order of Time and Events as printed on pages 2-3 of Delegate Materials.

**Appendix B:  
A RESOLUTION OF CHRISTIAN CONVICTION  
EXPRESSION OF OPPOSITION TO MASSACHUSETTS SENTENCES OF  
LIFE IMPRISONMENT WITHOUT OPPORTUNITY FOR PAROLE  
*Presented by Christ's Community Church, Chicopee and  
First Congregational Church, UCC, Ashfield***

WHEREAS the desolation of hopelessness is recorded in the book of Lamentations, "He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and all that I had hoped for from the Lord'," (Lamentations 3:16-18);

AND WHEREAS hope comes to prisoners from Jesus' reading of the Isaiah scroll, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18);

AND WHEREAS our Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ aspires to bring about the justice of Jesus;

AND WHEREAS the sentence of life without opportunity for parole is known as "Life without Hope" or "The Other Death Sentence," or, in the words of the late former governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, in defending his position against the death penalty, "Death by Incarceration";

AND WHEREAS while federal death penalty trials are still held in Massachusetts, there is little interest among Massachusetts citizens for reviving the Massachusetts death penalty, which has not been responsible for executing anyone since 1947;

AND WHEREAS former Annual Meetings have passed resolutions opposing the death penalty in our 163rd Annual Meeting (1962), 164th Annual Meeting (1963), 183rd Annual Meeting (1982); 191st Annual Meeting (1990), 192nd Annual Meeting (1991), and in our 199th Annual Meeting (1998);

AND WHEREAS 1,035 inmates in Massachusetts prisons were serving the sentence of life without opportunity for parole, on January 1, 2016;

AND WHEREAS a major expense of our Massachusetts prison system is the care of elderly inmates who would be unlikely to commit a crime if released, and whose incarceration costs may increase from \$50,000/yr. for a healthy inmate to up to \$150,000/yr. for a seriously ill inmate;

AND WHEREAS Massachusetts people are serving the sentence of life without opportunity for parole for convictions resulting from a first degree murder, for being an accomplice to a felony in which a person was unintentionally killed and where the accomplice played a minor role (e.g. get-away driver); for a third felony conviction for 18 various crimes not resulting in a death but which carry a possible sentence of up to life even when the first two felony convictions were for lesser crimes; and for being wrongfully convicted of murder though factually innocent;

AND WHEREAS commutation for those sentenced to life without parole are very close to non-existent, the last such commutation in Massachusetts occurring in 1997;

AND WHEREAS Massachusetts people serving life without opportunity for parole, their families, loved ones and communities are organizing against this sentence;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the 218th Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ go on record in opposition to the sentence of life without opportunity for parole, urging that all life sentences include parole opportunity;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Massachusetts Conference distribute this resolution to all member churches of the Massachusetts Conference, to all members of the Massachusetts legislature, to Attorney General Maura Healey, and to Governor Charlie Baker.

\*MA DOC Prison Population Trends 2015

## **Appendix C:** **CONSENT CALENDAR** *Budget-Related Votes*

### Consent Calendar #2 - Budget-Related Votes

1. The 218th Annual Meeting determines that 50 % of OCWM Basic Support received in 2018 be retained by the Conference.
2. The 218th Annual Meeting sets 2018 Fellowship Dues at \$19.50 per church member as reported December 31, 2017.
3. The 218th Annual Meeting adopts a 2018 budget with income of \$2,201,250, expenses of \$2,276,250, and a transfer from operating reserves of \$75,000.
4. The 218th Annual Meeting determines that 30 % of United Church Mission support received in 2018 be forwarded to the National United Church of Christ.

**Appendix D:**  
**MERGER BETWEEN THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**  
**OF SOUTH DEERFIELD AND THE MASSACHUSETTS CONFERENCE,**  
**UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

*Presented by The Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ*

The Board of Directors recommends:

WHEREAS The Congregational Church of South Deerfield, Massachusetts (hereinafter the “Church”) was organized in 1891; and

WHEREAS the Church is a member of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ (hereinafter the “Conference”); and

WHEREAS both the Church and the Conference are public charities incorporated in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; and

WHEREAS, from a high of one hundred thirty (130) members in the last twenty-five (25) years, to a current membership of fewer than forty-five (45) members, and normal Sunday attendance of between 18 to congregants, the Church has determined that its ministry as a parish church is ending; and

WHEREAS the Church and the Town of Deerfield, Massachusetts have agreed to a transfer of the real estate owned by the Church as a gift to the Town of Deerfield, Massachusetts to allow for the continuation of the long existing local community outreach programs of the Church; and

WHEREAS the Church has agreed that if it cannot transfer its real estate as a gift to the Town of Deerfield, Massachusetts for the stated purposes, then the Church will sell its real estate in the ordinary course of business, 22 and add the sale proceeds to the Church’s unencumbered and unrestricted assets; and

WHEREAS, in addition to said real estate, the other assets of the Church as of the end of February, 2017 (to be updated to the latest available month end values as of the date of the Annual Meeting date) comprise an Endowment Fund invested in cash and short term cash investments of approximately \$136,000.00 and unencumbered and unrestricted assets invested in cash and short term cash investments of approximately \$180,000.00; and

WHEREAS the said members of the Church are desirous of transferring seventy-five (75%) percent of the value of its Endowment Fund and of its unencumbered and unrestricted cash and short term cash investments to the Conference; and

WHEREAS such transfers to the Conference are consistent with the language, the intent of, and the vote of the Church relative to The Gifting Endowment Fund of the Church; and

WHEREAS the remaining twenty-five (25%) percent of the assets of the Church are to be distributed to qualified local charitable organizations chosen by the Church; and

WHEREAS upon the merging of the Church into the Conference, the Conference shall be the surviving entity and the Church will thereafter no longer exist as an entity,

NOW THEREFORE the Members of the Conference take the following actions:

VOTED:

To authorize the receipt of the entire cash and short term cash investments comprising Endowment Fund of The Congregational Church of South Deerfield, Massachusetts and such other unencumbered and unrestricted cash and short term cash investments of The Congregational Church of South Deerfield, Massachusetts as is equal to seventy-five percent (75%) of the value of the assets of the Church to be added to the Conference's unrestricted funds and endowment funds as mutually agreed and in a manner that assures compliance with the intent of the original donors, and

To authorize and agree to the merger of the Church and the Conference in accordance with an Agreement of Merger in form and substance satisfactory to the President and the Treasurer of the Conference, and in accordance with the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 180, Section 10, with the Conference being the surviving legal entity with an effective date being the latest of (a) the date of the adoption by the members of the Church as required by said Chapter 180, Section 10, (b) the date of the adoption by the members of the Conference as required by said Chapter 180, Section 10, and (c) the transfer by the Church of its real estate by gift to the Town or Deerfield or by sale; and

To authorize and direct the President, the Treasurer, and the Secretary/Clerk of the Conference to execute all documents necessary to carry out the intent of this resolution, including but not limited to an Agreement of Merger and Articles of Merger, to be filed with the Massachusetts State Secretary.

## **Appendix E: VOTE AUTHORIZING SALE OF LAND IN ASHLAND**

*Presented by The Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ*

*For the past ten years, the Board of Directors has been working to align all resources of the Conference with its mission: "In order to make God's love and justice real, we seek to nurture local church vitality and the covenant among our churches."*

*To this end, the Board has sought and obtained Annual Meeting permission to sell properties which the Board's research and discernment have shown to contribute minimally to that mission. In a time when many local congregations are struggling financially and level-funding or reducing contributions to the wider church, new endowments generated by these sales are helping to sustain the robust shared ministry of our Conference of churches.*

*The vote below would authorize the Board of Directors to sell land in Ashland which has never been used by the Conference at all. The land is located at the far west end of the property on which the Framingham offices are located, well beyond the area used by Pilgrim Day Camp. In 2002, the Board sought and received permission from the Annual Meeting to sell this land in order to raise funds to renovate Edwards House. (Edwards House is the meeting and retreat center near the offices.)*

*However, at the time, there was no sewer service available, and the land proved unsuitable for septic tanks, so the sale was never accomplished.*

*With a sewer line now available, the Board is in the process of seeking an appraisal and considering possible sale of the land in order to expand the General Endowment of the Conference. In effect, they would like to take an asset which is not contributing to the mission, and convert it into an asset which would generate income for Conference ministries. The proposed vote would allow them to sell the property for this purpose if and when they deem it prudent to do so.*

The Board of Directors recommends to the 218th Annual Meeting:

“The 218th Annual Meeting of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ authorizes the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ to sell and convey rights, title, and interests in Conference property consisting of legal house lots along Winter Street in the town of Ashland, Massachusetts. The determination as to what property or properties along said Winter Street shall be sold, the determination of fair market value of each such property sold, and the determination of the terms and conditions of each such sale shall all be reasonably determined by the said Board of Directors.

Further, that any two of the following: Minister and President, Treasurer, and Secretary be authorized to execute all documents, deeds, and agreements necessary to carry out this vote; and further, that the net proceeds of any such sale and conveyance will be added to the General Endowment fund of the Conference.”

**Appendix F:**  
**VOTE TO AFFIRM THE RESOLUTION ON AN INVITATION  
TO CREATE A NEW CONFERENCE**

*Presented by The Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ*

The Board of Directors recommends: “The 218th Annual Meeting endorses the following resolution passed by the Board of Directors:

**RESOLUTION**

Be it resolved that the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ adopts the following statement of intent:

Grateful for the 2015-2016 time of discernment, we believe that God is calling our Conference to live into increased interdependence with the other two UCC Conferences of southern New England, that we make an impact by ministering and witnessing together, and that we live in a time when God is calling us to do a new thing.

As of today, we commit our Conference Board, staff and designated representatives to work with our counterparts from the other two UCC Conferences of southern New England to engage in a visioning process that includes (among other things) reasonable sharing of records and information, due diligence in sharing financial information as well as cultural and operational practices, encouragement of our members, churches and Associations to participate in each other’s programs and initiatives, and

responding to each other's inquiries – all focusing on the creation of a proposal that would be brought to a joint annual meeting of the three southern New England Conferences of the UCC in June 2018.

Our time of discernment has led us to imagine that this proposal will be to create a new Conference:

- i) with a single Board of Directors made up of diverse members coming from the three Conferences.
- ii) This single Board would also act, as necessary, as the Board of Directors for each of the Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island Conferences.
- iii) The proposal would allow for the three historic and legal Conference entities of Connecticut, Rhode Island and Massachusetts to remain in place;
- iv) The proposal may also recommend a transition to a unified budget and a new staffing structure.
- v) The proposal recognizes that Conference boundaries – including changes in Conference boundaries – are determined by vote of Synod and we anticipate that if this proposal is approved by the joint annual meeting of the RI, CT and MA Conferences in June 2018, we will appeal to Synod in 2019 for recognition.
- vi) The proposal may also provide a common table for other faith communities, both historic and those coming into being, to share in common vision.

We also recognize that the planning process we now begin may lead us to respond to God's call and increase our interdependence through other means.”

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Presented by The Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ

In January 2017, the Boards of Directors of the Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and Connecticut Conferences of the United Church of Christ each voted unanimously to approve a resolution calling for the creation of a new Conference of the United Church of Christ in southern New England. The following FAQs respond to some of the questions that Conference leadership has heard regarding this resolution.

### **1. Why are we moving in this direction?**

Simply put, we believe that God is calling us to greater collaboration, interdependence, and unity. As a united and uniting church, we are convinced that we need each other to navigate the changes we are all experiencing — globally, nationally, locally, and within our congregations. With the Prophet Isaiah, we hear God saying, “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43:19). With the Apostle Paul, we believe that “just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12). With our forebears who created the United Church of Christ, and with Jesus himself, we continue to pray “that they may all be one” (John 17:21). By moving forward Together, As One, we are following the impulse of connection that is part of our DNA as Christians, and we are living out our faith in new ways for a new time.

### **2. How did we decide to move in this direction?**

Our three conferences have been engaged in a process of discernment and increasing connection for many years. This has included collaboration among conference staff, sharing of resources (such as

Fitness Reviews, Boundary Training, and Racial Justice Training), and creation of joint programs for learning and mission (such as Super Saturday, joint General Synod caucuses, and the RIMACT youth delegations to General Synod and National Youth Event). As we have collaborated, we have discovered the strength and joy that come from pooling our resources and joining with our siblings in Christ to accomplish more together than we can ever do alone.

We have also engaged in an intentional process of discernment. Following several years of increasing collaboration, in November 2014, the three conference Boards of Directors held a joint meeting, followed by a joint conference staff meeting in January 2015. In September 2015, the three Boards of Directors voted to enter into a year-long Season of Discernment, which included opportunities for in-person feedback at Association and Conference meetings, Super Saturday, and other events, as well as an online survey. The three Boards and the planning team carefully considered all the input we received as we discerned our way forward, leading to the unanimous votes by the three Boards in January 2017 to move forward in creating a new conference together.

You can learn more about all that this process has entailed by reviewing the timeline at [www.macucc.org/timeline](http://www.macucc.org/timeline).

### **3. Are we just creating a new conference with the same structure, but on a larger scale?**

No. While staying true to the deep roots of our faith, we are inviting God’s Spirit to guide and inspire us in creating a new thing — new patterns and structures that will enable us to make the extravagant love of God known in dynamic and innovative ways, both in southern New England and beyond. We recognize that the world has changed in the 60 years since conference boundaries were established at the creation of the United Church of Christ in 1957, and we believe that new ways of organizing ourselves to do ministry together will best serve our local churches as they serve the world in Christ’s name.

### **4. Isn’t this really about money and membership?**

No. At its root, this initiative is about our ongoing effort to be the church God is calling us to be, the church the world needs for this time. It is also true that there are financial and numerical realities facing our Conferences, as there are for many of our local churches. We are seeking to respond to those realities in a proactive fashion based in faith and vision, rather than waiting until we reach a point of crisis and then making changes out of desperation.

### **5. How will this amplify our impact in southern New England and beyond?**

By modeling interdependence and collaboration, we will set an example of new ways to live and serve in faith that may inspire and enliven our local churches and their members. We will also practice the kind of relationship-building that will strengthen us for partnership and collaboration with like-minded people of other faiths and of no faith. By speaking out together, we will have a louder and stronger voice as we work together to make our region, our nation, and our world a more just and loving place, a place that more closely resembles God’s realm.

### **6. What will this mean for my local church?**

We anticipate that coming together for a future of shared ministry will mean that local churches across southern New England have greater access to the resources that have traditionally been divided along state lines. Each conference brings particular areas of expertise from which we all can learn — for example, Rhode Island has a great tradition of local and global mission partnerships, Massachusetts has done extensive work around creation care and climate justice, and Connecticut has developed pioneering curricula and programs to advance racial justice. By coming together across the boundaries that have divided us, we will be better able to match expertise with need, creating a stronger network of disciples working together for the good of the world.

## **7. What will this mean for my pastor?**

In the same ways that we believe this initiative will benefit local churches, it will also offer greater access to resources for pastors. Clergy will be connected to a wider network of expertise, advice, reflection, and support, as well as resources for professional development and problem-solving for their ministries.

## **8. What will this mean for my association?**

Associations will not be changed by this initiative. If associations wish to build on this spirit of interdependence and join together in collaboration with one another, they are and will remain free to do so. But their structure will continue to be determined by association boards, committees, and members, according to their own bylaws.

## **9. Where will the new conference offices be located, and what will the staffing configuration be?**

We don't know yet. We are taking this process one step at a time. First, we focused on discerning the direction in which God is calling us to move, making sure we are clear about the "why." Having clarity there will help us as we work out the details of "what" and "how." We have precedent for this approach in the founding of the United Church of Christ, which happened in a similar fashion, with a vote to unite followed by a period of working out the details. As we live into this new thing that God is doing, we will build together a structure that best serves our congregations and our communities.

We know that for clergy and congregations, it is very important to know who to call when resources are needed. Although we cannot yet describe the details of our new organizational structure, we are committed to maintaining and deepening the resources available to local churches, and we will be proactive about communication to make sure everyone knows how to access those wider church connections.

## **10. How will we handle legal, financial, and governance issues that may arise as we come together?**

Conference staff and Board members have begun a process of due diligence by sharing information and identifying details that will need to be addressed as we create a new structure together. This process will continue and deepen in the coming months. We also anticipate engaging the services of a consultant with expertise in these areas to help us navigate the transition and create a structure that will best serve our ministries moving forward.

At present, we envision establishing a single Board of Directors, made up of diverse members coming from each of the conferences, which would govern the three historic and legal conference entities of

Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. We are in consultation with Heather Kimmel, General Counsel to the United Church of Christ, as we work through the logistics of this change, and she sees no legal obstacles to our current direction.

## **11. Where do we go from here?**

The next step is for the delegates to the Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut Conference Annual Meetings (to be held jointly in Hartford on June 16-17, 2017) to vote to ratify the votes of their Boards of Directors to move ahead in the process of creating a new conference of the United Church of Christ in southern New England. If this vote is successful, the conference Boards and staff will continue working out the details of the proposal, which will be presented for a vote at the 2018 Annual Meetings. The new conference structure would then be presented for approval at the 2019 UCC General Synod.

### **CASE STATEMENT**

#### **Presented by The Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Conference, United Church of Christ**

“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?” Isaiah 43:18-19a

“In the midst of new dimensions, in the face of changing ways, Who will lead the pilgrim peoples wandering in their separate ways?  
God of rainbow, fiery pillar, leading where the eagles soar, We your people, ours the journey now and ever, now and ever, now and evermore.” In the Midst of New Dimensions, Julian Rush

#### **We believe it is time for a change.**

We believe that God’s Holy Spirit is inviting our congregations, our clergy and our denominational leaders to become active partners in the creation of forms of Christian community which are so new that, as yet, we can only glimpse them. We believe we are called to be midwives to a new spiritual movement which is already being born. At the same time, we believe that our more traditional, familiar call maintains its claim upon us. Thus, we are also called to partner with God in making sure that healthy, faithful, effective congregations of the United Church of Christ continue to discern God’s vision and transform our communities throughout southern New England.

This mix of familiar and new work calls for new means of organizing our people and resources. We believe the Holy Spirit is inviting us to embrace a new covenant among our three conferences. Over the past year, through the unanimous support of our Board of Directors, we have come together in a variety of ways to discern where the Spirit of God might be leading us. In an online survey, in local churches, in Association gatherings, in Conference Annual Meetings and at Super Saturdays as well as in myriad smaller conversations, we have spent time conferring with one another about the possibilities for a new conference of the United Church of Christ. As a “united and uniting” church we are convinced that we need each other to navigate the changes that we are all experiencing. If we are to encourage and transform the church we know, even as we help to birth a church for future generations, we believe we must transform our denominational structures as well. It is both an exciting and a challenging time to be a part of the United Church of Christ here in southern New England.

**The centrality of the word and witness of Jesus Christ will not be changed in this proposal for a united ministry.**

We believe we find ourselves in the midst of a critical moment in the life of Christianity. Like our pilgrim forebears who crossed the ocean confident that more light would break forth from God's Holy Word; like the four distinct traditions joining together in 1957 to form the United Church of Christ with a belief that unity in Christ transcended their differences; like the national setting which in 2013 streamlined its own structure to create a nimbler approach to mission and ministry; we believe that discipleship in a new era requires boldness and change. We believe the time for the creation of a new conference has come.

**We are mindful of the changes that are taking place in our congregations.**

These changes invite us to practice adaptive behaviors to the circumstances of our time. Some of our congregations are lively places of vitality. Some of our congregations feel as if they are "stuck in neutral."

Other congregations are wondering about their survival and still other congregations have had to make the painful decision to no longer continue as a church. A good number of congregations are aging, declining in membership and no longer financially able to support the very mission field that lies at the heart of their calling. In the latest national statistical report of the UCC it is noted that in the last ten years we encountered a loss of 696 congregations and 318,897 members. Congregations are also becoming smaller in membership nationally. 41% of UCC congregations are 100 members or less. As local churches encounter this change, the support for the wider church declines and the pains of change are apparent. As many of us are familiar with this narrative, it is not a surprise.

**We do not believe that the narrative of decline should define us.**

We are not a people who live without hope. We believe that the transformative message of the Gospel invites us into a deeper proclamation of that which unites us through the core values of the United Church of Christ:

To proclaim that God is Still Speaking;  
To provide an extravagant welcome to all of God's children; and  
To be personally transformed by the inclusive Love of God in Christ to work to change the world in which we live.

We bear testimony that an awakening is in progress. The Holy Spirit is active in and among our congregations. It can be seen through local churches that welcome into their midst the gay and transgendered, that invite with loving hearts the refugee and the citizen newly returned from prison. It can be seen through shared meals and knitted scarves and stitched bedrolls for street people. It can be seen through the engagement by a local congregation with cutting edge issues that adversely affect a suffering people in its community. It can be seen through reconciling meetings between the police and members of the African American community. It is seen every time a congregation undergoes a visioning process, designed to reinvigorate mission and respond to the call of Jesus to make an impact. It is seen through transformative experiences where the heart takes the lead in believing.

**The awakening to which we bear testimony is not confined to our congregations.**

Faith leaders and writers such as Diana Butler Bass and our own General Minister and President John Dorhauer have documented the growth of new kinds of spiritual communities with deep Christian roots and remarkable resonance with UCC values and theology. Some of our own congregations are hosting and sheltering experimental faith communities which look very little like the church of our forebears, but through which the Holy Spirit is transforming lives.

**We are a people who are bound together by covenant.**

We are aware that among some of our congregations the sense of connection with one another is not always recognized or affirmed. We are aware that along with the great and important history of those who have walked before us, we have placed our love of autonomy as a more important value than the ties that bind us together. At this moment in time we are convinced that both a reclamation of our understanding of covenant and the embrace of a new covenant is an act of faith that will allow us to increase our impact in southern New England. We believe it to be the role of the conference to help local congregations discern the ministries to which they are called and to provide a way to connect congregations to one another. The conference setting is “uniquely positioned to be the center for congregational interdependence” (On Covenant, a paper by Sue Phillips).

**We believe that the creation of a new conference will increase the impact of the United Church of Christ in southern New England.**

We are aware that in our culture today the dominant Christian voice is equated with judgment, dogma and a restrictive view of the world. Our voice would be strengthened through this new covenant. It will enable us to become a stronger, bolder witness. We inhabit small states in close proximity with similar demographics and history. There is power and value in shared resources, knowledge and expertise.

**We believe there are compelling reasons to move towards the creation of a new conference.**

Those reasons include:

- Building on what each conference does well (sharing assets) and creating new vistas yet untouched.
- Increasing congregations’ access to resources, programs and consultations.
- Creating a new, more nimble institutional platform better positioned to support new forms of ministry with and to new generations.
- Developing a more robust technological capacity to share our mission and develop connections among our congregations.
- Facilitating the building of relationships in a wider context. A new conference would have greater influence in the wider community simply because of its numbers. It would strengthen the mission and ministry of the UCC in this part of the country and would serve as a model for other Conferences needing to take bold action to adapt themselves.
- Eliminating the artificial boundaries of state lines – and likely challenging other boundaries as we come to see them as unnecessary and limiting.
- Providing greater prophetic public voice; stronger collective support for churches; greater clarity about the direction and ministries of the national setting; strengthened outreach and mission capacity to meet the challenges before us; and support for new ways of being the Church in our time.
- Creating conversations and initiating new strategies for the sharing and implementation of “best practices.”
- Embracing this act of interdependence will prepare us to work with other like-minded Christian denominations and people of faith. We believe this alignment will help us establish the building

of a progressive Christian movement. We also believe that interreligious work will be increasingly important in the future.

- Embracing the belief that as the body of Christ we can be a sign of the visible unity of the Church in our time.
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**We propose to enter into a new covenant together.**

The Boards of Directors of the Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island Conferences recommend the creation of a new conference. We recommend this be a two-step process.

The first vote in June of 2017 would be to embrace the intention to create a new conference. If affirmed by each conference, the three Boards of Directors would put into place the plan for the creation of the new conference. The plan would include a single Board of Directors with diverse members coming from the three conferences. This single Board would also act and as necessary conduct its work as the Board for the Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island Conferences. This proposal would allow for the maintenance of the historic and legal conference entities to remain in place. A second vote would take place in June of 2018 which, if approved by the Conferences, would ratify creation of the new conference.

This proposed change would allow the UCC in southern New England to maintain three historic conferences while conferring flexibility and adaptability and establishing economies of scale.

We believe it is time for a change. We are ready to embrace a new covenant to further the mission and ministry of the United Church of Christ in southern New England. May it be so.