

# Southern New England Conferences of the UCC

## WHAT'S NEW AT ANNUAL MEETING 2019?



### 1. Hearings

Rather than happening as part of the meeting itself, all hearings on matters to be discussed and/or voted on at Annual Meeting **will be held ahead of time, as webinars**. Recordings will be posted on line for those who are unable to tune in.

#### *Why?*

- a. *The Steering Team wants to allow time for more focus on local church ministries. (See "Storytelling", below.)*
- b. *They also want to make hearings accessible to people who can't get to Annual Meeting by midafternoon on Friday.*

[Please see this article](#) for a schedule of hearing topics, times and dates. Note that **you will need to register for hearings** in order to receive the link to the webinar.

### 2. Guidelines for Gathering

The four Boards of Directors have each voted to recommend a **common [Behavioral Covenant and new Rules of Procedure](#)**, to guide all plenary sessions at the meeting. The Rules of Procedure differ from those used in the past in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

- Rather than "pro" and "con" microphones or paddles, delegates who wish to speak about a motion will be asked to select one of three colored paddles, representing "**I believe...**", "**I wonder...**", and "**I pray...**"
- "I believe" allows for definitive "pro" and "con" statements for those who are clearly for or against a motion.
- Moderators will pay close attention to make sure diverse perspectives are heard.
- Points of order and parliamentary questions will be heard at a separate microphone designated for this purpose.

#### *Why?*

- a. *The Behavioral Covenant is to help us remember to treat one another well during the meeting.*
- b. *The new paddles are to allow more room for participants to express nuanced perspectives, in the hopes of allowing more room for discernment of the will of the Holy Spirit.*

### **3. God's Love Alive! Stories from our New Conference**

We have a compelling [Vision](#) to guide our new Conference, but we are not waiting until January to start living it out! Congregations throughout Southern New England are already carrying out faithful and innovative ministries embodying the new Vision, while our new Conference inherits vibrant covenant partnerships from its predecessors. In Friday afternoon breakout groups, delegates will hear stories of these ministries, and be invited to share their own.

#### ***Why?***

- a. The Vision is the impetus and focus for the new Conference; we want to keep it 'front and center'.*
- b. Local churches are where disciples are made and where most ministry happens. We have spent the last two meetings more focused on larger institutional matters; it's time to turn more attention back to our congregations and the way they are living out God's love and justice.*
- c. Historical conference partnership teams are eager to share their longtime international covenantal relationships with the wider circle of the new conference.*

### **4. Three Plenary Sessions, All Together**

On Friday evening, after opening worship, each historic conference will have business to accomplish. Rather than taking the time to shuttle people in and out of the main meeting room in turns, delegates will be asked to stay together in a single plenary session, pray for one another, and learn about one another by listening to their deliberation and decision-making.

### **5. Bi-Color, Two-Sided Vote Cards**

Delegates will be voting on some items related to their historic conferences, and on other items that relate to the new conference we are forming. Voting cards will therefore be two-sided. All cards will be white on one side, for taking action related to the Southern New England Conference. The reverse side of each card will be one of three other colors representing the three historic conferences; these will be used on Friday evening only, for actions relating to historic conferences.

### **6. No Budget Votes**

This is not new for those in the Connecticut Conference, but it is new for Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The plenary session will include a budget report, but not a budget vote. The 2020 budget has already been approved by the Board of Directors.

#### ***Why?***

- a. The bylaws of the new Conference give the Board authority to set the budget, which is where this responsibility lies in most nonprofit organizations.*

- b. *It has been the observation of your meeting planners that relatively few people at Annual Meeting are interested in budget details, and that there has been almost no debate about budgets for many years.*

Note that there will be a hearing on the budget prior to Annual Meeting – see “Hearings”, above.

## **7. No Resolutions**

Although the Board of Directors will propose a vote on Foundational Justice Commitments for the new conference, there will be no resolutions on justice issues presented at this Annual Meeting.

### ***Why?***

- a. *This has been largely a matter of Board ‘bandwidth’. In the past seventeen months, the Board needed to determine new staffing patterns, new bylaws for historic and new conferences in compliance with all legal and ecclesiastical requirements, a unified budget, new Annual Meeting guidelines, and a search process for Executive leadership. They also needed to complete a due diligence process, recruit dozens of people for various committees, and prepare for the General Synod vote to create a new conference. The Board has not yet turned its attention to the question of how the new conference might best engage with justice issues.*
- b. *The three historic conferences have all had somewhat different procedures in the past. The Board is eager to be informed but not limited by past practices in thinking about what might make sense for the future.*

It is the Board’s hope to engage with this issue between November and June, and to bring to the June meeting a proposed process for the new Conference. Note that this means that there will likely be no Resolutions presented in June 2020.

## **WHAT ELSE WILL BE NEW IN THE SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND CONFERENCE?**

### **8. New Staffing Model**

A committee of the Board of Directors has been working for over a year to research and develop a staffing model for the new Conference. They sought perspectives and wisdom from other conferences and denominations, other nonprofit leaders, organizational consultants, and current staff. Their goal was to determine an innovative model, fully aligned with the Vision of the new conference, which will allow the new Conference to be flexible and effective in carrying out the Vision.

The committee brought a proposed staffing model to the Board in September. The Board approved the model with enthusiasm and gratitude, with the understanding that details may

still need to be modified. The model is now being reviewed to ensure that it adequately staffs all key functions, and that it can be supported by the projected budget.

There will be a webinar hearing on the Staffing Model prior to Annual Meeting (see above).

**9. A New Way of Giving to the New Conference - Proportional Giving**

Proportional Giving will be the new model for funding or common mission through the Southern New England Conference. Rather than being asked to pay Per Capita Fellowship Dues and Basic Support (OCWM), and Local Missions in Rhode Island, local churches will be asked to give a percentage of their total annual income to support our shared ministries in the Conference and National settings of the UCC. The initial proportion asked will be calculated based on the church's current giving through Dues and Basic Support.

This topic is complicated enough to warrant its own Annual Meeting handouts and [web page](#). But the concept is based on an understanding of generosity rooted in scripture. It is familiar to many through local church stewardship efforts, which ask individuals to give proportionally. It is faithful, covenantal and aligned with our Conference's mission and core commitments. For more information, see the web page or attend a hearing (see above).