

Together As One:

A New Conference of the United Church of Christ



Imagine.....

It is the year 2030, and people are asking “What happened here in southern New England? This part of the world is more just, more compassionate and peaceful than it was ten years ago. How is it that people are listening to one another more deeply, passing better laws, building healthier communities?”

It’s 2030 and our culture feels like *shalom*. It’s that deep-in-the-bones sense of wholeness, of rightness, of sacredness. This wasn’t something that we did. It was a God thing.

No one saw it coming. Nonetheless, something, somehow, changed. Or you might say that *everything* changed. People might not have been able to put their finger on it, but they knew it. It wasn’t just change, it was *newness*. And everyone felt it.

What happened?

Back in 2018 a core group of people believed that a new conference of churches was needed to follow Jesus in new ways that could transform lives, churches, and the surrounding culture. They all agreed on the vision: “We seek to be a conference in which local churches make disciples, live the love and justice of Jesus, embrace adaptive change, and build covenant partnerships with those who work for the common good.”

A wave of conviction ensued. One local congregation after another began wrestling with God’s call in their church. With bedrock legacies to ground them, these churches began shifting away from self-preservation. They began following the Spirit’s call out into the world.

Many churches blazed new paths. Dinner churches sprang up. Artist gatherings promoted beauty. Healing services, yoga classes, and Centering Prayer were integrated. These churches became braver in their public presence. Some began holding prayer circles on the steps of capital buildings, singing hymns in the streets, attending town meetings, and lobbying legislators. Miracles abounded as love multiplied.

Relationships among local churches were strengthened. Powerful new partnerships formed with other faith and community groups. Leaders listened intensely to those who had been marginalized. Staff and money, time and ideas were shared. Deep and lasting connections were made.

More people noticed the shift. As the number of affordable apartments and safe spaces for children to play went up, the number of shootings and opioid deaths went down. Resisting the pull toward ever-deepening division, these southern New England communities built bridges. Constructive anti-racism trainings took place. More and more churches became ONA. Diverse voices were heard. Vulnerability was risked and trust flourished.

Recognizing the perils of climate change, the towns of southern New England moved rapidly to embrace sustainable solutions. Air and water quality improved as solar and wind installations multiplied. Public transit increased. As more people began relocating due to climate disruption, churches organized to welcome and protect this new migrant community. Newcomers were assisted in finding jobs, homes, and support networks.

What was once a growing economic divide was healed. People began engaging in generous responsibility towards all. Quality schools and affordable health care for all was assured.

Remembering Jesus’ call in Matthew 25, the people of the UCC in southern New England worked together to live out His love and justice. Despite inevitable setbacks and mistakes, they linked arms with many others; claimed a bold, progressive Christian public voice; and moved our region closer to the realm of God.