

## **Addressing the Mission-related Aspects of United Church Mission (UCM)**

**What role should mission/outreach church leaders have in UCM decision-making?** Based on the experience of churches that transitioned to UCM, we strongly recommend that mission and outreach church leaders have a primary role in UCM discussion and decisionmaking. While these people may not necessarily lead the decision-making process, they are a valuable and, indeed, essential part of helping the congregation understand what UCM is and what it might mean for the congregation.

**What are the mission-related aspects of UCM church discussions to keep in mind?** Conversations about UCM in churches reveal how a congregation and its leaders think about mission – how they define it, fund it, and budget for it. They also reveal how they think (and feel) about our denomination and the mission efforts in which it engages. Bringing all these things to the surface will invite questions and conversations about what constitutes “mission,” and about mission spending and budgeting practices.

**What mission understandings in local congregations have helped the transition to UCM go smoothly?**

For many congregations, funding of wider church mission and ministry seems like a different kind of mission spending than, for example, support of the local food pantry. As churches, we tend to think of mission as, primarily, working for and/or giving to particular efforts that will help those who are vulnerable. It’s right and proper that, out of compassion, we should respond with care of the needy. Jesus specifically called us to care for the stranger, and those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, or imprisoned (Matthew 25:31ff.). In their different ways, local churches, Conferences, and the National setting of the UCC all respond to this call to compassionate caregiving. At times, they join together to collaborate in such mission efforts.

However, God’s mission – and the Church’s pursuit of God’s mission – extends beyond this understanding. In addition to calling people to compassionate care, Jesus also sent his disciples to proclaim the gospel (Matthew 10:5ff.) and to make disciples of all people (Matthew 28:16ff.). In fact, the root of the word “mission” means “to send.” As individual followers of Jesus, as local churches, and as the Church, we’re “the sent ones” – those tasked with advancing God’s mission of proclaiming and embodying the good news of God’s love. United Church Mission encourages local churches to embrace this wider view of mission, and those churches that have had the easiest transition to UCM understand and reflect this understanding in their mission spending and budgeting.

**Why does this broader sense of mission help in the church’s transition to UCM?**

While this broader sense of mission affirms that an important part of living into Jesus’ call as a local church is extending compassionate care to people who need it, it also acknowledges that everything the church is and does concerns mission. As theologian Emil Brunner said, “The church exists for mission as fire exists for burning.” His point wasn’t that mission is one of the church’s top priorities or even that mission is the church’s purpose, but that church itself *is* mission. If it isn’t burning, it isn’t a fire; if it isn’t mission, it isn’t a church.

Churches with this understanding of mission and church – because they embrace it in their sense of self and make it manifest in their communal lives – will find it easier to make the transition to UCM. For

example, they will view their church budget as more than a plan to keep the heat and lights on, the pastor paid, and mission dollars flowing to the needy. Instead, they will see the budget as a Mission Spending Plan – the church’s plan for how it will use its resources to be a church that meets concrete needs and, in its life and ministry, proclaims and embodies the good news of Jesus. Moreover, they will also tend to view the wider church – Conference and National – as something that helps them live more fully into this larger sense of missional church. How does the wider church do this? In addition to assisting local churches in carrying out particular mission efforts (i.e., disaster relief), by helping churches do together what they can’t do alone: 1) nurture local churches so they can advance God’s mission where they are and 2) strengthen the connection between churches and the various settings of church life to maximize the effectiveness of their combined effort.

### **Does this larger view of mission have other implications for our church?**

Stressing that the church *is* mission often brings added benefits to the church. Keeping in mind that all they do and are is mission can deepen the local church’s sense of importance, raising spirits and congregational self-esteem, especially in smaller churches that may tend to believe that their size makes them relatively insignificant. In addition, our experience is that churches that act on this broader sense of purpose tend to be more healthy, vital, and resilient. Moreover, all of this may lead to a congregation increasing its giving toward mission efforts, as church members have greater clarity about and appreciation for why these things matter.

### **What mission spending/budgeting practices have helped in UCM transitions?**

Churches that have an established practice of considering OCWM Basic Support and Fellowship Dues as part of their mission budgets generally have an easier time making the transition to UCM. This is because they have become accustomed to thinking about both Dues and OCWM as “mission” and, in general, have acknowledged that the wider mission that happens through Conferences and the National setting of the UCC is important.

**What mission spending/budgeting practices have made UCM transitions *more difficult*?** Churches that have unified budgets (i.e., members make a single pledge to the church and then the church determines the amount given as mission spending), where Fellowship Dues are in the operating portion of the budget, can sometimes encounter challenges to making a UCM transition. The Conference recommends moving the amount formerly allocated for Dues to the mission spending category, a relatively easy budget shift that doesn’t increase expenses. The Conference’s view is that this will more accurately represent the church’s level of mission giving and increase the mission spending percentage of the church’s overall budget. Though, on the face of it, this might seem like a welcome change to mission committees, their reactions may depend on specific circumstances.

If, for example, your church budget has a built-in “percentage of budget” cap on mission spending (e.g., no more than 10%), moving the amount formerly allocated for Dues to the missions budget will require a larger slice of the mission giving pie. This might put those who oversee mission giving in the position of having to make cuts to some of the church’s former mission recipients to ensure that the church can make its UCM commitment. This may create resentment with mission leaders and mission-oriented members, in particular, if they are not fully convinced that wider church contributions represent “real mission.” In this situation, the church will want to consider increasing the mission spending cap so that UCM contributions can be made and other mission giving can continue at historic levels.

**What mission spending/budgeting practices made UCM transitions *most challenging*?** Most challenging from a mission spending/budgeting perspective is when the church has a split pledge (i.e., members make separate pledges to operating budget and mission budget). In this situation, the church has two options. We strongly recommend a transfer to the mission fund of an amount equivalent to the old Fellowship Dues, making no change to the budget bottom line and providing the funds needed for all mission spending. An alternative that we don't recommend would be to continue to confine mission spending to the amount pledged by members. This second option would free up funds in the operating budget, but force decreased mission spending to maintain support for wider church mission.

This is a variation on the challenging situation cited above. If the church decides not to add funds that formerly went toward Dues payments to the mission fund, mission leaders may resent essentially having their dollars for non-wider church missions cut. However, transferring dollars from the operating to the missions fund may be an even more challenging "sell" because the congregation has become used to giving toward operating budget and/or mission budget and now has a fundamental view of them as very different categories of spending. Church members may simply not feel that placing the contribution represented by UCM in the mission portion of the budget is proper.

**Does UCM entail a decrease in funding to the Association, Conference, or National UCC?**

Transitioning to UCM will not decrease funding for either the Association, Conference, or National setting of the UCC.

Allocations of mission dollars between Massachusetts and the National setting of the church are determined by the Annual Meeting of the Conference. Currently, under the old Dues and OCWM approach, 50% of Basic Support and 100% of Conference Fellowship Dues are retained in the Conference, and 50% of Basic Support (but zero percent of Dues) is passed on to the National UCC. For churches using the old approach, the figures can fluctuate slightly, but about 70% of contributions (Dues plus Basic Support) that come to the Conference are retained, and 30% go to National.

For churches who have opted in to UCM, this Conference-National sharing ratio remains the same, currently at about 70% retained in Massachusetts and 30% sent on to the National setting.

In addition, since churches that opt into UCM will not be billed by their Associations for their Association Fellowship Dues, the Conference will remit to Associations an amount that is equivalent to what would have been contributed to them if dues had been assessed.

**What help will I have for increasing my church's understanding of UCM and "mission"?** In addition to providing interpretive resources, Conference staff members are ready, willing, and able to walk with you at every step of the UCM transition process. Conference leaders and staff are also available to visit congregations to help educate the church about UCM and to speak to the missional work that is accomplished through the wider church.