

United Church Mission (UCM)
Leading a Decision-Making Conversation in Your Church

Who in our church should make a decision about whether or not to join UCM?

We've found that it's best for churches to begin their decision-making about UCM by consulting their church bylaws to determine who in the congregation has the authority to make this kind of decision. For some churches, the Church Council, Board of Trustees, or Budget Committee may have this authority. For many, however, this decision will have to be made by a vote of the congregation. Many churches that have opted in had a Church Council recommendation brought to the congregation, either by vote on a specific warned article, or, more commonly, folded into a budget proposal brought before the congregation at a regular annual church business meeting.

Who should be involved in discussions about possibly moving to UCM?

Based on the experience of opt-in churches, these discussions go best when church leaders take into consideration the varied perspectives of church members. For example, within most UCC congregations there are finance folks who will want to know the effect UCM will have on the budget; mission or outreach committee members interested in the implications of UCM from a missions perspective; and denominational defenders (and detractors) who may want to have their say. All of these and more have legitimate questions about the transition and how it might affect them and the things they care about most. For these reasons, we strongly recommend that you intentionally include these key constituencies in making your church's UCM decision.

What should we expect to happen when we have discussions about UCM?

While you will undoubtedly hear support for at least some of the named advantages to UCM promoted by the conference (see the UCM Fact Sheet for details), you should also expect that discussions of UCM will be marked by questions and confusion. It will be important for you to be prepared for the various questions that may be asked. In addition to reading the materials about UCM provided by the Conference, we encourage you to talk to Conference staff as you move forward with UCM discussions in your church.

In addition to many questions, you should also expect that there may be resistance to UCM. Some may object to the concept generally, or to the details of how it works. Some may simply be resistant to any change to the way things are currently being done. This may be true even in congregations where support of and affinity with the wider United Church of Christ are strong.

What circumstances in local congregations helped the transition to UCM go smoothly?

We've found the most support for transitioning to UCM among those churches that have 1) a generally positive view of the wider church (Conference and National), 2) a reasonably strong history of wider church giving (Dues and OCWM), 3) an understanding of mission that goes beyond helping the needy, and 4) an established practice of considering OCWM and Dues as part of their mission budgets.

What circumstances in local congregations made the transition to UCM challenging?

Things that have most impeded the transition to UCM on the part of local congregations include 1) a skeptical (or even hostile) view of the wider church, 2) a persistent (but false) view that the portion of UCM contributions that was formerly represented in Fellowship Dues didn't fund "real mission" but Conference services and administrative expenses, 3) a narrow view of mission spending as funds to help the needy, and, 4) a split pledge – where members make separate pledges to operating and mission budget – and where Fellowship Dues appeared as operating expense rather than mission spending.

Where there were significant questions and/or resistance, what helped move UCM discussions forward?

Sharing more information about UCM with more people in the congregation, more often than you might think necessary, is going to help make your decision-making about UCM go as well as possible. In addition to using the resources provided by the Conference, churches that opted in to UCM often had informational visits from Conference leaders. Conference staff are ready, willing, and able to answer questions and to be with you in your church's decision-making at any stage in its process.

Is it possible to join UCM mid-year?

For unavoidable Conference accounting reasons, technically speaking, it is not possible for churches to join UCM mid-year. If your church makes a decision to transition to UCM midyear, you should be aware that the Conference will only be able to officially receive you as a UCM church at the turn of the calendar year.

What is the deadline for churches to opt in to UCM for 2018?

The deadline for notifying the Conference that your church would like to opt in to UCM for 2018 is December 15, 2017. However, if you need a vote of the congregation on UCM and your next annual church business meeting isn't until January or February of 2018, it is not necessary to call a special church meeting. You may simply 1) inform the Conference by December 15, 2017 of your intention to make a decision early in the new year, 2) make no OCWM contributions and pay no Dues that may be billed to you by the Association until after the vote (otherwise, this will mess up our accounting), 3) let the Conference know of the final decision once it's made in early 2018, and 4) work with Conference staff to establish your church's initial giving percentage and calculate its UCM contribution soon thereafter.

What if we need more information?

If you have questions about or wish to make the transition to United Church Mission, please contact Jonathan New, Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship and Financial Development. Jonathan may be reached at newj@macucc.org or (508) 875-5233 ext. 231.

