

**AWAKENING:
A SEASON OF DISCERNMENT FOR A FUTURE OF SHARED
MINISTRY**

A Resolution Adopted Unanimously by each of the RI, MA & CT UCC Boards

That they may all be one... -- John 17:21

*Even though it has many members, all the members of the body,
though many, are one body. -- I Corinthians 12:12*

*Believers know that while our values are embodied in tradition,
our hopes are always located in change.*

-- William Sloane Coffin, Jr.

BACKGROUND

On August 25, 2015 Kent Siladi, Barbara Libby, Jim Antal, Angie Menke Ballou, George Peters and Jocelyn Spencer (representing CTUCC Board) met to discern what next step God might be calling our Conferences to undertake as we continue to explore the opportunities for strengthening the mission of the UCC in Southern New England by embracing our interdependence.

In a spirit of prayer, we reviewed the recent history of cooperation among our Conferences, along with the larger contexts of our denomination, examples of transdenominational mission, and God's ongoing, compelling call to share the Good News with a world in desperate need of the Gospel.

Led by the Holy Spirit and the momentum of this and previous conversations, the following proposal won our enthusiastic support. We now bring it to our three Conference Boards in the hope that you will join us by endorsing this resolution and leading our three Conferences in a season of discernment.

RECENT HISTORY OF RI, MA & CT UCC CONFERENCE COOPERATION

- Since 2010 there has been ongoing cooperation among search and call staff, help with fitness reviews, and Environmental Ministries programing and initiatives through NEREM (New England Regional Environmental Ministries)
- April 2013: RI & CT CMs join MA CM and other New England and national denominational leaders in the Climate Revival
- Dec. 2013: Kent attended MACUCC Board meeting
- February 2014 Jim attended CTUCC Board meeting

- March 2014: CT joins MA in hosting Super Saturday
- May 2014: RI, MA & CT CMs + Board Chairs had lunch together
- Oct. 2014: RI joins MA in hosting Super Saturday
- Nov. 2014: RI, MA & CT Boards met together w/facilitator
- Jan 2015: RI, MA & CT Staff met together w/facilitator
- March 2015: CT joins MA in hosting Super Saturday
- June 2015: RI and CT CMs attended MACUCC Annual meeting; 3 CMs celebrated communion at the end
- July 2015: RI, MA & CT Synod delegations met together for breakfast
- July 2015: Select RI & MA leaders attend CT Racial Justice training
- Aug 2015: RI, MA & CT CMs and Board Chairs met and developed this proposal

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS the historic origins of what would become the United Church of Christ are found in Southern New England, and that story of origin includes Roger Williams, who declared that in the Gospel, there is no justification for the uniformity of churches – but only for their unityⁱ (“that they may all be one”); and

WHEREAS that story of origin also includes Pastor John Robinson, who reminds us that there is still more light and truth to break forth from God’s Holy wordⁱⁱ (“Never put a period where God has put a comma!”); and

WHEREAS that story of origin also includes Pastor John Winthrop, who calls us to be a city on a hillⁱⁱⁱ (As we declare that “God is still speaking!”); and

WHEREAS in the birthplace of independence we are being led to proclaim interdependence, recognizing that while independence has brought us safe thus far, God is calling us to live out a more interdependent Gospel; and

WHEREAS we have been learning that the effectiveness of our local churches and the impact they are called by God to have in their communities can best be amplified when those local churches have ready access to resources and opportunities for learning that no one Conference can offer; and

WHEREAS we recognize the economic benefits that would result from sharing staff, sharing technology and implementing best practices across the region; and

WHEREAS by creating and pursuing a robust partnership, we may increase the likelihood that 15 years from now, a vital expression of the progressive church movement will be alive and well in America; and

WHEREAS our enhanced partnership would benefit the whole UCC by modeling adaptive change that actively seeks a more vital future by leading from strength; and

WHEREAS many in our Conferences have been asking the question, “What would we do if we were brave and faithful?”;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Directors of the RI / MA / CT Conference UCC commits to joining with the other two UCC Conferences in Southern New England to issue a common invitation to the pastors, leaders and congregations of our three Conferences to use the 2015-2016 program year as a season of discernment as we listen to how God may be calling our three conferences over 2016-2017 calendar years to either federate or merge. We do this seeking to advance the mission of the UCC in Southern New England and beyond, and as a sign of faithfulness to God’s call.

ⁱ Quote from *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience 1644*

ⁱⁱ http://www.newtestamentpattern.net/christian-articles/sundry-thoughts/the-words-of-john-robinson_mayflower/

I charge you before God...that you follow me no further than you have seen me follow the Lord Jesus Christ. If God reveals anything to you by any other instrument of His, be as ready to receive it as you were to receive any truth by my ministry, for I am verily persuaded the Lord hath more truth yet to break forth out of His Holy Word. For my part, I cannot sufficiently bewail the condition of those reformed churches which...will go, at present, no further than the instruments of their reformation. The Lutherans cannot be drawn to go beyond what Luther saw; whatever part of His will our God had revealed to Calvin, they will rather die than embrace it; and the Calvinists, you see, stick fast where they were left by that great man of God, who yet saw not all things. This is a misery much to be lamented..."

ⁱⁱⁱ From John Winthrop's "City on a Hill" sermon 1630:

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding plantations, "may the Lord make it like that of New England."

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God, and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us till we be consumed out of the good land whither we are going.