Led by the Holy Spirit, in September 2015 each of the Boards of the RI, MA and CT UCC Conferences voted unanimously to adopt a resolution committing to join the other two UCC Conferences in Southern New England in using 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. The fundamental question is: Is this collaborative ministry among the three Conferences of Southern New England something God wants us to do? How might it be a sign of faithfulness to God’s call?

TWO APPROACHES TO DISCERNMENT
We invite you to engage in discernment both as part of a group and as an individual:
- In 2016 we expect to provide the opportunity for individuals who are part of the UCC in So. New England to offer feedback over the internet. http://www.macucc.org/rimact
- In 2015-2016 various UCC gatherings (small groups at Conference gatherings or Association meetings; Communities of Practice; Church Councils or Committees; Super Saturday; Committees on Ministry; etc.) will use this resource to engage in conversations.

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNAL DISCERNMENT
- Discernment begins by welcoming the presence of the Holy Spirit as your guide, and others as your companions on the journey
- Discernment seeks to align our life’s direction and decisions with our sense and experience of God’s call
- Discernment is intentional – it doesn’t just happen; and it requires that we be radically open to where the Holy Spirit might lead us
- Discernment is more about generous listening than about expressing our views
- Discernment appreciates the many ways we can hear God together
- Discernment is grounded in prayer and scripture

ENGAGING A STRUCTURED CONVERSATION
Here are the questions we invite you to consider in your conversation today:
1) What are the resources, programs, and services that your Conference currently provides for your local church?

2) How has your church been enlivened through interdependence and collaboration with other congregations (in your own town or city and within your particular Conference)?

3) How might your church’s witness be strengthened through a new partnership with the other two Southern New England Conferences?

4) How would you imagine your church in five or ten years from now? How might your local church be different if RI, MA, and CT were to become partners?

5) What are your concerns and wonders about the possibility of an emerging partnership?

PLEASE be sure that each person around the room has an opportunity to contribute before anyone speaks again.