

United Church of Christ Local Church Ministries  
Report to K-O Conference Council by Sean Weston – May 14, 2011

The spring 2011 meeting of the Board of Directors of Local Church Ministries took place at the Church House in Cleveland, Ohio, from April 7<sup>th</sup> to April 8<sup>th</sup>. We began after breakfast on Thursday with opening worship with all of the Local Church Ministries staff present. Our chaplain was Rev. Holly MillerShank, minister and team leader for Parish Life and Leadership. Our Executive Director, Steve Sterner, opened with a stirring sermon.

One of the central decisions we made was the election of Rev. Dr. Ben Guess, currently the director of our Publishing, Identity, and Communications ministry. There is a UCC news article about his election here: <http://www.ucc.org/news/local-church-ministries-board-3.html>. Rather than summarizing all of the action we took at the meeting (if you want a copy of the minutes, let me know and I'll get them to you) I would like to pass along to you seven areas of change that Rev. Guess outlined for us:

1. We must stop thinking of denominational staff as experts in a particular area of church life. Instead, staff must be thought of as local church conduits or church wide organizers whose true expertise is in congregational engagement. The local church is not just the place of central authority in the UCC, it is where we look to find and express the vitality of our denomination.
2. We must shift our denominational understanding of mission, by respecting and encouraging mission done on a local level. In our interconnected world our local churches no longer NEED US to accomplish mission. Instead of shaming churches to "get with the national program" we need to claim and bless this work as being the whole church's lived mission.
3. We must move our multi-racial, multi-cultural, and 20/30 commitments from heavenly visions to earthy strategies. We need a strategic plan so that, 10-30 years from now, the UCC will reflect the racial and age demographics of this country.
4. We need new data to measure what success really means. We cannot rely only on membership totals and dollars given to national ministries to define the impact and effectiveness of the UCC. We must find ways to measure who we serve and what our impact is on the world so we can know ourselves better.
5. We need more transparency and accountability around the impact of our programmatic work. If we launch a big initiative and the hope everybody forgets about it if it doesn't work, we create suspicion.
6. All initials beyond UCC don't matter that much. We must drop LCM, JWM, WCM, OGM, etc. People don't know what they stand for but they can say why they love the UCC. We must be "united and uniting" and "one UCC staff."
7. We need more moments when we can wildly celebrate something we can accomplish together. We must cast out a vision that is acted out locally but celebrated nationally.

It is a deep joy to say that the UCC is truly moving in this direction. A great example is the Mission1 campaign, which is designed to bring the whole church together to feed the hungry and combat food injustice. More information can be found here: <http://www.ucc.org/mission1/> and I urge you to see how your congregation can be involved. During this time of transition in the life of the church, we must give thanks to God for the new life among us and a church seeking to become more faithful to God's ways.

The work of the United Church of Christ is the work of through its local churches, who covenant together believing that together we can do more, that in covenantal community we are open to a presence and power beyond ourselves. We are a holy (and, yes, sometimes frustrating) group working with God so all may realize God's kingdom. The work of Local Church Ministries is the work of supporting and equipping those local churches, by raising up and supporting vibrant leadership, by envisioning church vitality and discipleship, supporting education and faith development, empowering youth and young adults, supporting higher education and seminaries, and providing resources to local churches through UCC resources. We are here to serve you. As your representative, I welcome your contact for any reason, so that Local Church Ministries can empower your local church, and the whole church, for vital mission in this new century.

Respectfully submitted,

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