

MY2K Mission for the Year 2000

Southern California Nevada Conference United Church of Christ January 14, 2000

I. Introduction

This report is presented to the Board of Directors of the Southern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ. It represents the work of this past year that was authorized by the Board last March. This report includes an overview of the theological and organizational assumptions that have guided our planning process, a brief history of planning in the Conference over the past eight years, a new model for ministry that is being proposed, and several specific recommendations from the Mission for the Year 2000 (MY2K) Leadership Team for the Board of Directors to consider.

II. The Missional Challenge for our Conference

This planning process has been guided by several assumptions about the church, the mission of the Conference, and the nature of the change and process required to advance this mission in the new world that lies ahead. Some of these assumptions are:

- The church is a “called” community of faith with a special purpose or mission. It is more than just another human organization that does good works. It has been brought into being by God to participate in the mission of God, the *missio Dei*. to call an unbelieving, alienated, and divided world to repentance, reconciliation, and unity in Jesus Christ.
- The Conference is more than a mere network of local congregations; it is the corporate (bodily) presence of the United Church of Christ in Southern California and Nevada. The community of God’s people called the Conference can be understood as a “charismatic” (Spirit-filled) and “messianic” (Christ-centered) community, called and equipped to participate in God’s mission of bringing about the fulfillment of God’s rule. Therefore we can speak of the Conference as a *sign*, *foretaste*, and *instrument* of the coming reign of God.
- The central theological metaphor that informs our common life as a United Church of Christ is *covenant*. The biblical roots of covenant affirm that human community is created by God’s initiative and that our existence as a free and diverse people is dependent upon our living faithfully in relationship with God. Freedom and responsibility are bound together. Although we commonly refer to our polity as one of local autonomy, which is legally the case, we are theologically a connectional church in the sense that every unit (members, congregations, associations, etc.) exists in covenantal relationship with one another. Legally this connection is voluntary in nature, and not coercive. But we cannot be the United Church of Christ apart from

being meaningfully connected with one another—as members sharing life within a congregation, as well as congregations in living relationship with other congregations. Ultimately we are not autonomous, but, as our name implies, we belong to Christ. God’s covenant with us in Jesus Christ is the foundation for our unity as a church.

- Planning for mission in a world that is undergoing such radical change as is taking place today necessitates a new way of being church. Doing business-as-usual will no longer work. Incremental program changes, such as minor tuning and adapting, will be insufficient. What is needed is innovation that is re-orienting and re-creating. The Conference must move beyond a mode of institutional survival to a strategy of transformation. The Conference in every dimension of its life—in congregations, associations, and conference-wide structures—is called to become nothing less than the Body of Christ, that sacred place in the world where trust is institutionalized, where love is embodied, and where justice is enfolded.
- While drawing upon strategic planning processes that are shared with the secular world, the theological foundations of the United Church of Christ require us to go much deeper. Planning in the Conference must be a process leading to a new missionary encounter of the gospel with the modern world as experienced in Southern California and Nevada. This planning process is a call for radical conversion, not only a conversion of the will and of the feelings but a conversion of the mind. This constitutes a paradigm shift that leads to a new vision of reality. Discipleship is counter-cultural. Guided by the Spirit and grounded in the scriptures, our challenge is to help people throughout the Conference gradually develop new ways of perceiving, new ways of thinking, and new ways of behaving.
- There will be many obstacles to achieving our transformational goal of becoming a missional community. Because the Southern California Nevada Conference, like other mainstream church bodies, reflects the patterns of thought and organization inherited from Christendom, namely the synthesis between the Gospel and the culture of the West, the resistance to change will be great. This inherited model no longer works, however. Christendom patterns of thought are still deeply assumed by most clergy and lay people, including key leaders in decision-making positions in the Conference, and they continue to direct the self-understandings and activities of the Conference, the associations, and the congregations.
- Because we are God’s people—disciples of the living Christ who are empowered by the Spirit—this mission, in spite of the many obstacles we face, is not impossible. This is “Mission Possible.” While we have a sense of urgency about the challenge, there will be no quick fixes nor instant successes. As a Conference—the United Church of Christ in Southern California and Nevada—we are on a pilgrimage. This journey together is an experiment, a learning process. The test will be how much and how quickly the Conference is able to learn to become everything our tripartite name implies as the **UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST**.

II. A Brief History of the Strategic Planning Process

About eight years ago our Conference embarked upon a strategic planning process. Trained leaders met with clergy, lay leaders of congregations, and association and conference leaders to determine what the needs and hopes were for our United Church of Christ. On the basis of these many conversations, a STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MISSION was developed. Five broad areas of interest, called “priority elements,” were identified. The plan was approved by vote of the delegates at the 1994 Annual Meeting. **[Appendix A]**

Three years later the Board of Directors conducted a major review, or monitoring, of progress made to date on the Strategic Plan for Mission. **[Appendix B]**

Although many of the recommendations included in the original Strategic Plan for Mission had been implemented—in particular, restructuring of the organizational life of the Conference—there continued to be little priority focus. The Council of Ministries devoted the 1998 fall meeting to beginning a process of translating the five priority elements into specific program initiatives.

It became apparent that we needed to give additional attention to this task of providing focus for the life of the Conference and that we could benefit from specialized assistance. The Center for Parish Development, a professional church planning consultant firm, was brought in to lead a two-day planning workshop with the Council of Ministries in mid- January, 1999. At that gathering three prioritized focus areas were developed from the original plan: BUILDING UNITY IN DIVERSITY, CHURCH DEVELOPMENT & RE VISIONING, and YOUTH MINISTRIES. (Early in the process the Building Unity in Diversity Core Team changed its name to Community in Diversity.)

A PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPING ACTION PLANS was developed by the Strategic Planning Committee and was presented to the Council of Ministries at its spring meeting for its critical review and suggestions. The Board of Directors then contracted with the Center for Parish Development to assist us in a one-year planning process. **[Appendix C]**

Core and Advisory Teams were recruited in each of the three priority concerns. The same planning system was followed by each of the three sets of teams. The three Core Teams met numerous times during the summer and early fall, and each Advisory Team met at least once. Several joint Core Team meetings were held. After much struggle with deeply held differing points of view, each Core Team developed a set of proposals.

[Appendices D, E, F]

These proposals were reviewed and critique⁴ at the fall meeting of the Council of Ministries. The MY2K Leadership Team (all members of the Strategic Planning Committee, Core Team chairpersons, and staff) then harmonized these proposals and developed this unified report and set of recommendations.

IV. A New Model for Ministry

As the MY2K Leadership Team reviewed the various Core Team reports, it became apparent that a new model for ministry was emerging. Throughout the Core Team reports the model for ministry was

“team.” This was expressed in a variety of ways. However, the model of a more collaborative, relational team approach emerged as a significant paradigm shift.

Mainline denominational structures have for the most part been organized on the American corporate model, a top-down hierarchical structure. The instrumentalities of the United Church of Christ have followed this model as well as most Conferences of the denomination. Only recently did the “team” approach emerge in the new national structure of the UCC. There are no longer any “General Secretaries” but team leaders. These team leaders will coordinate and facilitate ministry teams. The shift is significant and will require a new way of thinking and acting. While the concept of “team” is intended to be more inclusive, egalitarian and less hierarchical, it requires considerable commitment, time and training.

At the heart of each of the three Core Team proposals is the concept of developing leadership teams. The purpose of these teams is to assist congregations in finding the right solutions for the important challenges they face. This is a reversal of the usual practice of promoting denominational projects and then persuading congregations to embrace them.

We therefore recommend that the Southern California Nevada Conference embrace the team concept as a new form of ministry.

What would this mean in relationship to the recommendations of the Core Teams?

Embracing team ministry in the Conference will mean the actual embodiment of the “priesthood of all believers.” It will mean a ministry of empowerment of persons within the Conference who are willing to commit and share their gifts on a voluntary basis to the above ministries. It will mean identifying and recruiting individuals who are willing to work in these areas; organizing the teams and providing significant training on what it means to work as a team; and building a Conference-wide consciousness and understanding that paid staff can no longer be seen as the only way in which Conference program, mission and ministry is fulfilled.

- In terms of the Church Development and Revisioning Core Team’s recommendations, it would mean expanding the idea of church renewal consultants to organized “Church Renewal Teams” (CRT) that would be available to assist local congregations in discerning their future direction in the context of their particular communities. The Church Renewal Teams would assist in evaluating theology and prayer, outreach and mission, demographics, worship, education, youth ministry and issues related to diversity. The CRT’s would not be experts in all these areas but knowledgeable about the various congregational and denominational resources available to local churches in these various areas of ministry. The CRT’s would be association-based which might suggest the initial creation of one in each Association. Each CRT might consist of 5-8 persons in all, with two or three available upon invitation to lead a congregation through a discernment process.
- The name change that took place—from Building UNITY in Diversity to COMMUNITY in Diversity—reflects a theological understanding of the centrality of covenantal relationship of which team ministry is an expression. The unity which we seek is not sameness, but oneness. The Community in Diversity Core Team has recommended the formation of a Community in Diversity team to work with congregations and groups of the Conference to embrace God’s gift of diversity to

strengthen our mission. The Conference-wide team might join with the CRT's, for example, in addressing issues related to ministry and mission within the context of diversity.

- The Youth Ministries Core Team, in addition to calling for a full-time youth leader, has also recommended the development of our Conference Youth Staff Team concept with additional youth ministry teams. These teams would be dedicated to leading mission opportunities, inspiring youth advocacy about the real issues facing youth, helping youth experience God in their lives as a steady and hopeful presence, and advocating for ongoing financial support for the youth program of the SCNC. Leadership development among youth and adults, building the youth community of the Conference, and strengthening communications—all key components of the team concept—are central to the Youth Ministries Core Team proposal.

What are the benefits of this model of ministry?

- 1) The use of the skills and gifts of both clergy and laypersons in the SCNC will unleash a significant people-power of involvement within the Conference.
- 2) The team approach is relational in nature and will build intergenerational community across our very diverse cultural, racial and theological differences.
- 3) This new way of envisioning ministry will support current Conference-trained groups in the areas of education, conflict management and mediation, change and transition management, and stewardship.
- 4) Individuals who volunteer for these teams will benefit personally from the experience and training which will develop leadership gifts.

This new model for ministry does not in any way replace the many recommendations made by the Core Teams. It simply provides a mechanism through which these recommendations might be fully realized.

V. Recommendations to the Board of Directors

1. That the MY2K plan as presented be adopted in principle to guide planning and implementation.
2. That all current means of communication and forthcoming events be utilized to share this plan with the Council of Ministries, Associations, pastors, and congregations.
3. That the Strategic Planning Committee, utilizing the groundwork laid by the Core and Advisory Teams, be authorized to begin establishing any preliminary Conference-wide task groups/teams that may be needed for the initial stages of implementation between now and the Conference Annual Gathering. This would include but not be limited to the Conference-wide Church Renewal Task Force, the Community in Diversity Team, and the Youth Ministry Teams.

4. That the Personnel Committee begin exploring implications for staffing with consideration given to continuing needs, structures and programs.
5. That the Personnel Committee and the Strategic Planning Committee coordinate possible staffing changes with any new task groups/teams or structures that may be required with appropriate timelines.
6. That any budget implications be directed to the Finance and Property Committee with any significant adjustments to be presented to the Board of Directors at their March meeting.
7. That the Council of Ministries continues in its important work of initiating and responding to strategic planning issues facing the Conference.
8. That each of the above named Board Committees report back to the Board of Directors in March on their progress with any recommendations that may require formal action by the Conference at the June Annual Meeting.
9. That the Strategic Planning Committee, in considering next steps in an on-going planning process for the Conference, collaborates with the Pacific Southwest Region of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in developing long range goals.
10. That “The Missional Challenge for our Conference” and “A New Model of Ministry” (Sections II and IV of this report) be used by staff the Board of Directors, the Council of Ministries, Associations, Annual Meeting, clergy retreats, and congregations as a resource for reflecting upon the identity and mission of the church.
11. That the Conference Board of Directors acknowledge with deep appreciation the work of the Strategic Planning Committee, its Director, the Core and Advisory Teams, staff and others who have contributed to this significant work.

VI. MY2K Core Teams and Strategic Planning Committee Strategic Planning Committee

- **Strategic Planning Committee ***

Kendall Baker, Project Director
 Jim Beggs
 Lola Day, Chairperson
 Teresa Henderson
 Kristen Koizow
 Barbara Wilson
 Al Nweeia
 Dan Romero, Staff
 Sam Taesali

- **Church Development & Revisioning Core Team**

Ann Beggs
 Luz Diaz
 Armand Javines
 Clara Mills, Staff *
 Eric Naftzger
 Barbara Noyes, Chairperson
 Fred Plumer
 Elsa Seifert *
 Bernard Taesali
 George Taesali
 Iese Tuuao
 John Will
 Barbara Wilson, SPC Liaison

- **Community in Diversity Core Team**

Anthony Butler Bates
Art Cribbs

Lola Day, SPC Liaison

Levi Oracion
Jane Heckles, Staff *
Sonya Chung Hirano
Jake Pomeroy
Misi Tagaloa, Chairperson *
Paul Tellstrom
Kit Wilke

Youth Ministries Core Team

Jim Beggs, SPC Liaison

Cathy De Los Rios
Sharon Graff
Debbie Hallmark
Nancy Joynt, Chairperson*
Donna Richards
Mike Schuenemeyer, Staff*
Mickey Stone

Consultant

Ray Schulte, CENTER FOR PARISH DEVELOPMENT

[Asterisk * signifies member of MY2K Leadership Team]

Southern California Nevada Conference
United **Church of Christ**