

Proposed Process, Structure, Responsibilities, and Representation: A Unified Conference-Association Model

Introduction

In the United Church of Christ, we affirm that each generation is called to make its faith its own—to engage in faithful discernment, respond to the Spirit’s movement, and shape the church’s structures to best serve the ministries of today and tomorrow. From the beginning, our tradition has affirmed that the Church is always reforming, adapting to meet the needs of the moment while remaining rooted in covenant and connection.

Over the years, the role, function, and energy of Associations have shifted, reflecting broader changes in church life, ministerial needs, and the ways we engage in covenantal relationships. Many UCC Associations across the country, including two Associations within our Conference, have responded to these shifts by discerning that volunteers and those in their care would benefit from concluding the formal structures of their Association and transferring responsibilities to their Conference setting. These decisions are most often guided by the desire for energy to be invested in building relationships, strengthening collaboration, and deepening support among clergy and congregations.

What does ‘covenantal’ mean?

The UCC’s polity or structure is covenantal, meaning the denomination is structured by agreements and relationships rather than by hierarchy or authority. In the UCC, covenantal relationships are characterized by trust, mutual commitment, promises, and shared experiences rooted in commitment to God.

The Southern California Nevada Conference is committed to creating a model that is responsive, sustainable, and centered on equipping the Local Church for ministry. This proposal outlines a provisional **Unified Conference-Association Model** for those interested in thoughtfully transitioning the responsibility for essential Association functions to the Conference setting, while continuing to nurture regional accessibility, connection, and ministerial support.

Commitments

This proposal is guided by several key commitments:

1. **Equipping the Local Church** – The core purpose of our collective ministry and judicatory structures is to support and empower Local Churches in their ministry.
2. **Fostering Connection and Community** – There is an ongoing desire to maintain and even strengthen opportunities for clergy and congregations to gather for support, learning, and shared ministry.
3. **Ensuring Financial Transparency and Sustainability** – Healthy ministry will be supported through Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) giving, with transparent and responsible resource management that creates greater equity among our partner congregations.
4. **Amplifying Diverse Perspectives** – The Church benefits from leadership comprised of people from diverse perspectives, including experience and attitudes informed by diversity of race, ethnicity, language, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, geography, and disability.
5. **Supporting the Well-Being of Volunteers** – This model seeks to reduce burnout, respect time commitments, and foster a more sustainable approach to lay and clergy leadership.
6. **Collaborating Ongoing Evaluation** – This provisional model allows us to assess and adapt as needed, ensuring it remains effective and relevant.

Overview of Action Steps for Associations

1. Discernment and Decision Making:
 - a. The Association Executive Committee engages in structured conversations about benefits and implications of this transition.
 - b. Gathered bodies within the Association discuss and discern whether to move forward.
 - c. A formal vote is taken at a duly called Association meeting to provisionally authorize the Conference to act as an Association.
2. Transition Process:
 - a. The Association formally notifies the Conference Board of its intent to join the Unified Model.
 - b. The Association coordinates with the Conference Staff to transfer ministerial standing, financial resources, and historical records.
 - c. A transition team may be formed to address logistical concerns and support communication with Local Churches and clergy.
3. Implementation and Support:
 - a. Once transitioned, the Conference assumes ministerial oversight responsibilities, event planning coordination, and regional funding administration.
 - b. The first two regional events post-transition will include a time to onboard and acclimate clergy and churches to the new structure.
 - c. Regular check-ins will assess how the new model is working and allow for adjustments as needed.
4. Honoring Legacy and Finalizing the Transition:
 - a. Following the provisional period, the Association calls a final meeting to honor, celebrate, and appreciate its ministry, and to vote on dissolving the Association and fully authorizing the Conference to act on their behalf in perpetuity.
 - b. The end of the Association's ministry occurs in conjunction with the legal process of dissolution that occurs for incorporated entities registered with the State of California.

Who or what is “the Conference”?

The Conference is all of us!

It's the regional body of the UCC made up of all Local Churches and all Ministers with UCC Standing in a specific area. Its ministry is carried out by representatives from Local Churches who serve on teams such as the Board of Directors, the Covenanting Committee on Ministry, and other working groups.

The Conference's ministry is also supported by administrative and ministerial staff, such as the Conference Minister, but it is key to remember that no individual or committee is 'the Conference'. We together are the Conference.

Structure, Responsibilities, and Representation

Regional Events

Regional Events: Basis of Structure for Ongoing Collaboration and Events

- The Conference, through the Board of Directors and regional representatives known as **event liaisons**, will work with Conference staff to curate and host two series of in-person regional events annually, with at least one host site located in each of the four geographic regions, and an additional format in an online setting.

Event liaisons are the elected representatives from local churches in each region who are currently serving on the Board of Directors and Covenanting Committee on Ministry.

- For regional event planning purposes, the geographic boundaries that defined the four most recent Associations will be used to describe the regions within the Conference: Central, Eastern, Northern, and Southern.
- These regional events will focus on fellowship, collaboration and learning, and ministry support (e.g., training for Local Church leaders, clergy gatherings, networking).
- Clergy and church leaders may attend the events in their region or in another region, as fits their schedule.
- We recognize that the future adjustments to the boundaries or number of regions may be needed as ministerial and congregational needs evolve.

Planning Regional Events

- In place of the former model of elected Association officers, members of the Conference Board of Directors (BOD) and the Covenanting Committee on Ministry (CCOM) will serve as the **event liaisons** for their respective regions.
- Event liaisons in each region work with the Conference staff to determine:
 - The annual calendar for regional events
 - The host church site for regional events
 - How to use designated regional funding for hospitality and/or event logistics
- Event liaisons from a region may also propose an alternative or additional regional event to address local ministerial needs, interests, or concerns, and may use the designated regional funding towards its programming.
- Additional volunteer leaders from any region may be asked to participate in their local planning meeting, particularly as representatives from local host churches or in other similar roles.

Funding Regional Events

- The Conference budget will include a separate allocated amount for each region to be used to host the region's annual events, allowing event liaisons to shape gatherings in their region to meet needs or interests of clergy and congregations.
- Funds for these regional events will come from OCWM giving from local churches and be stewarded by the Conference.

Regional Event Participation for Clergy and Local Church Leaders

- All authorized clergy are expected to participate in at least one regional event per year to foster connection, continuing education, and mutual support.
- Each local church delegate to the Annual Gathering is expected to attend at least one regional event to strengthen their engagement with the Wider Church.
- Members of the Conference Board of Directors (BOD) and Covenanting Committee on Ministry (CCOM) are expected to attend at least one regional event annually to support collaboration and represent the Conference in their respective regions.

Ecclesiastical Councils and Other Special Meetings

In the United Church of Christ, the Association or a Conference-acting-as-an-Association holds responsibility for certain ecclesiastical and ministerial decisions. This structure is delineated in the Constitution and By-Laws of the National Setting, which is why when an Association finishes its ministry, we must continue to adopt the language of a

“Conference-Acting-as-an-Association” to refer to certain official ecclesiastical procedures. When the need for such procedures arises, the Conference will convene Special Meetings, following the current provisional policy already adopted by the Conference Board of Directors regarding Ecclesiastical Councils. This policy was originally adopted to guide Ecclesiastical Councils for candidates from the former Eastern Association following the end of its ministry.

Ecclesiastical Councils

An Ecclesiastical Council is a special meeting of the Conference, where the Conference is said to be a Conference-acting-as-an-Association for the purpose of considering a ministerial candidate’s readiness for ordination and authorization for ministry. Since these meetings are not meetings of the entire Conference but rather function in the capacity of an Association, quorum requirements reflect this distinction.

Quorum for an Ecclesiastical Council consists of:

- At least twenty-five members of the Conference,
- Representing at least twelve of the active churches within the Conference.

This ensures broad participation from across the Conference while maintaining the historical integrity and covenantal discernment process traditionally carried out by Associations.

Other Special Meetings of the Conference-Acting-as-an-Association

In addition to Ecclesiastical Councils, the Conference will convene Special Meetings for the following purposes:

1. Votes on New Church Membership – To formally receive a congregation into covenantal relationship with the UCC.
2. Votes to Eliminate the Standing of a Local Church – In cases where a congregation has closed or has discerned that it is no longer in covenant with the UCC.

These Special Meetings ensure that essential Association-setting functions—including ministerial authorization and local church standing—are conducted with integrity, accountability, and broad representation across the Conference.

This approach maintains the ecclesiastical responsibilities historically entrusted to Associations while adapting to the realities of a **Unified Conference-Association Model**.

Regional Representation

As mentioned above, in place of the former model of elected Association officers, members from each of the respective regions currently serving on the Conference Board of Directors (BOD) and the Covenanting Committee on Ministry (CCOM) will serve as the event liaisons for their regions. Individuals are elected to those roles through the Conference Nominating Committee.

Each year, the Nominating Committee works in consultation with Conference staff, past and current CCOM members and BOD members, and open invitations to clergy and lay leaders to seek nominations. The Nominating Committee engages in conversation and discernment and ultimately nominates one person to fill each vacancy on the CCOM and

BOD. These nominees are then presented to and elected by the delegates from all local churches at the Annual Meeting of the Conference.

The Nominating Committee considers the expertise and spiritual maturity needed for this work, and seeks skilled, faithful people from diverse perspectives, including perspectives informed by diversity of race, ethnicity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, geography, and disability. The Nominating Committee also seeks a balance of clergy and lay people serving on the CCOM and Conference BOD, as well as balanced representation from participating regions. The Nomination Committee uses the following information to help guide balanced geographical representation.

| | Central Association | Northern Association | Southern Association | SCNC (formerly Eastern Association) |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|----------------------|--|
| Local Churches | 45 | 13 | 31 | 33 |
| Clergy with Active Standing | 67 | 20 | 47 | 60 |
| Church Members (as recorded in 2023 via UCC DataHub) | 6324 | 1320 | 3220 | 3021 |
| Representation: % of Members from Regions to a Board or Committee (Weighted) | 40% | 10% | 25% | 25% |

SCNC Conference Data, February 20, 2025.

Appendix: Example 2026 Regional Events Schedule

This appendix is a visual tool included to help people envision how Regional Events and planning could take shape.

Annual Schedule Overview

Each region will host at least **two** in-person regional events annually, and an **additional online** event. The timing, location, and host site for these events is organized to maximize participation and cross-regional engagement.

Programming Options for 2026 Regional Events

Each region's event liaisons **select two** of the following programmatic themes to tailor their regional gatherings to their specific needs or suggest another:

- **Accessible to All (A2A): Inventory Kickoff** – A focus on making church spaces and programming more inclusive.
- **Affordable Housing & Church Engagement** – Exploring ways churches can support housing justice initiatives.
- **Church Administration & Finance** – Strengthening financial stewardship and administrative best practices.
- **Insurance Board Event: Hospitality as Safety** – Fostering risk management and safe ministry environments.

Example 2026 Event Calendar

| Quarter | Central Region | Eastern Region | Northern Region | Southern Region | Virtual Event |
|-------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Q1 (Jan-March) | A2A: Inventory Kickoff @ Long Beach, CA <i>and</i> @ Claremont, CA | | A2A: Inventory Kickoff @ Bakersfield, CA | | Affordable Housing and Church Engagement |
| Q2 (Apr-Jun) | | A2A: Inventory Kickoff @ Las Vegas, NV | | Affordable Housing and Church Engagement @ Laguna Beach, CA | |
| Q3 (July-Sept) | Hospitality as Safety w/ UCCIB @ Hollywood, CA | Hospitality as Safety w/ UCCIB @ Riverside, CA | Hospitality as Safety w/ UCCIB @ Lompoc, CA | Hospitality as Safety w/ UCCIB @ San Diego, CA & @ Santa Ana, CA | |
| Q4 (Oct-Dec) | | | | | Hospitality as Safety w/ UCCIB |