

**A Vision for the Mass. Conference UCC Staff and Board Leadership – draft 4b
Dec. 7, 2012**

Depth, Courage, Bridge-building

Recognizing that we are living through times of deep change for so many of our churches, denominational institutions, and settings; recognizing that we are experiencing the changes in religious affiliation, loyalty, and even decline that are part and parcel of broader fundamental shifts in religious life in America; we affirm our faith in a God who is still speaking, whose work of creation is ongoing, and who calls us to the creative work of the Gospel in this new day with renewed vision, mission and purpose.

*“... See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland.”
(Isa 43:19)*

Following Jesus and rooted in the Grace of God, our mission is to nurture local church vitality and the covenant among our churches, ...

*“...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ .”
(Eph.4:12-13)*

... to make God’s love and justice real.

*“...Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”
(Matthew 6:10)*

What is the nature of our discipleship? The UCC churches and pastors of Massachusetts come together as a Conference – a covenantal web of relationships that grow out of Jesus’ call to discipleship. As Board and staff leaders, we seek to strengthen the web, and to help each congregation and pastor discern and respond to the call.

“... Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

(Romans 12:2)

The Staff and Board leaders of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ envision a Conference of churches characterized by ever-greater **depth, courage, and bridge-building**.

Purpose: By God’s grace, we will provoke a groundswell of eager discernment and pursuit of the unique vision to which God calls each of our congregations! We will challenge and equip each congregation to help its people to encounter Jesus more deeply, to act more courageously, and to create broad and vibrant partnerships to help build God’s realm of Shalom.

*“... God has told you, O Mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”
(Micah 6:8)*

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Depth

We seek to be a community of churches where the words of Matthew 7:7 are made manifest; where every seeker in every locale may encounter the living God and be transformed.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.” (Matt.7:7)

Conference leaders catalyze deeper spiritual connection in and among our congregations, by:

- Evoking joyous, passionate worship,
- Modeling and resourcing authentic discipleship for people of all ages,
- Inspiring, modeling and teaching the integration of spiritual practices into daily living,
- Encouraging and demonstrating the sharing of personal faith stories,
- Enabling, strengthening and embodying communities of caring,

Courage

We seek to be a community of churches in which the words of Jesus to His disciples are relied upon, where faith transforms fear and discouragement, and where Scriptural calls to justice are cherished and pursued. Jesus led with courage. As leaders of the United Church of Christ in Massachusetts, we make our courage visible through bold prophetic witness, and by engaged and compassionate listening.

“Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these...” (John 14:12)

Conference leaders inspire and facilitate bold advocacy for Jesus' vision of peace and justice, by:

- Encouraging congregations to address the controversies of our time, even as scripture addresses controversy.
- Equipping leaders for compassionate conversations about controversial concerns.
- Modeling and equipping congregations for public Christian witness.
- Challenging one another to think deeply about how our faith speaks to societal issues.
- Modeling bold and faithful decision-making by the board and conference staff.

Bridge-Building

We seek to be a community of churches persistently reaching beyond age-old boundaries; embracing and aiding the work of the Holy Spirit in all communities, physical or virtual; and allowing no barrier of doctrine or belief to keep us from recognizing and engaging allies in the pursuit of God's realm on earth.

“...He came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we all have access to our heavenly Parent by one Spirit. Consequently you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and the whole family of God ...”

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(Eph 2:17-19 adapted)

Conference leaders facilitate connection within and beyond our walls, by:

- Equipping congregations to be a vital presence in the digital world.
- Establishing enduring trans-denominational and interfaith communities.
- Provoking congregations to deeper engagement in their local communities.

What do we believe are our most effective means toward these ends?

Conference leaders recognize that the work needed toward these ends will evolve over time. However, our clear and present understanding is that these qualities of discipleship can only be developed and sustained through effective leadership in our local faith communities. Therefore we will work to strengthen leadership by:

- Creating intentional communities of practice,
- Equipping the laity for ministry,
- Preparing, authorizing and supporting excellent pastors, well-matched with their congregations,
- Empowering our lay and clergy leaders to ensure that each of our congregations regularly engages in an effective, community-wide process to discern God's vivid, specific and compelling vision for that faith community, and
- Demonstrating leadership and commitment to a ministry of depth, courage, and bridge building within the work of the board and the conference staff.

Notes:

- 1. This vision statement is intended to inspire those who work as leaders in the Conference setting, and to serve as a tool for increased alignment of all staff and Board efforts toward our common mission.*
- 2. Because God is always speaking, and our discernment of God's voice is always partial at best, we understand this statement to be a draft which will evolve over time. "Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us" (Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw).*