

**Empowering Congregations  
Core Ministry Team  
2023 Conference Annual Gathering Report**

The Empowering Congregations Core Ministry Team energizes and equips clergy and lay members for vision and leadership. We do so by cultivating healthy relationships, providing resources, and creating opportunities for service, spiritual growth, and church vitality. Our work encompasses congregations, agencies, and leaders in: the Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ, unallied and partner churches interested in working with the UCC, emerging congregations and non-traditional communities.

**Team Members**

Monty Jackson, Lisa Martin (co-chairs) Karen Miller, Meredith Jackson, Max Bade, Michele Higgins, Sharon Speckhals, Beth Windmann.

**Team Priorities**

Clergy Care  
Committee on Ministry  
Church Vitality  
Lay Leader Training and Development

**Step 1 -- Initial brainstorming**

**Clergy Care**

- Clergy retreat
- Re-starting Communities of Practice (basically clergy support groups)
- Mentoring newer clergy
- Mentoring clergy transferring from other denominations

**Committee on Ministry**

This is a recognition that everything that the Conference does has to have a home under somebody's umbrella. Committee on Ministry lives here. We are here to help Committees on Ministry as needed and to encourage continued communication between the COMs of our Associations.

**Church Vitality**

- Tool Kit Day – a chance to learn about several resources
- Programs to help with church growth
- Programs to help churches with money, stewardship, other sources of income
- Revitalization program perhaps partnering with Convergence

**Lay Leader Training and Development**

- Polity resources – a “what is the UCC” class for congregations
- Boundary training for congregations

- How congregations and pastors can better work together.

### **Step 2 – Informal Interviews**

Members of our Team had conversations with people we knew, both clergy and lay, within our Conference to see which ideas resonated most strongly with them. This was not a survey of the entire Conference.

### **Step 3 – Decision on first steps**

After gathering this information we had another meeting in August to narrow down where will initially put our energy.

#### ***Clergy Retreat***

We will have a clergy retreat after Easter, April 7-9 (Sunday night through Tuesday afternoon) at Shannondale to coincide with the solar eclipse that will be happening there at that time. Details will follow, but our interviews revealed a mix of clergy who only want to attend gatherings with a clear learning component and those who want a retreat to be a time for renewal, so we know we need to include elements of both.

#### ***Congregational Revitalization***

September 14, the Empowering Congregations Team had an initial online meeting with Cameron Trimble the President and CEO of Convergence, a non-profit that helps mainline congregations figure out how to reimagine themselves for the future. We don't have a specific plan yet, but watch this space.

#### ***Communities of Practice***

This is a way to support pastors which we began several years ago, and which sort of fizzled out with the pandemic. The basic idea is that clergy meet monthly around a particular ministry interest or need to support and resource each other. In the past this was done with clergy resourcing each other, but the original practice involved having a paid facilitator. We are looking at both options. In particular we recognize the need to provide support for new clergy or clergy new to the denomination, and African American clergy serving historically white congregations.

### **Step 4 – You**

The fundamental idea of Core Ministry Teams is not that this group of people do all the work, but provide leadership to make sure that things get done. Our small group cannot do all (or any) of these tasks alone, they require people throughout the conference stepping up, saying "yes" to ideas and programs we have planned. If any of these things spark an interest in you, please contact someone on our Core Ministry Team.