

CHURCH LEGACY & CLOSURE RESOURCE



PREFACE

LIVING LEGACY

HOW YOUR CHURCH'S HERITAGE LIVES ON

My old church is gone. Well, the building is still there, but my old church is gone. My grandfather was baptized there, and so was his grandfather. My parents were married there and my brother and I were baptized there. Basically, my extended family was THAT family—the ones that were there many days a week. They brought their joys and sorrows to their church, and they also brought the cleaning buckets, the knowledge about how the boiler worked, how to change the chandelier light bulbs and what color paint was used on the shutters the last time. Each generation grew up and assumed their roles, along with a number of other dedicated families. One aunt was the soprano soloist and the cemetery manager. My grandmother had all the recipes for the fundraising dinners in her head. My mother organized all the stuff for the Rummage Sales. My father was the superintendent of the Sunday School. It was the first place I learned Scripture, the stories of Jesus who loved me. It's where I learned to sing and be quiet. It's where my friends were. It was the center of our world. You get the picture.

But my church is gone. It didn't happen overnight. It was lost by attrition. It turns out that being a family church wasn't enough to keep it going, enough to attract new folks in postmodern times. The cohesiveness of a village church accepted empty spaces in the pews that became too empty to be filled by visitors. Though my family had moved on and I was ordained elsewhere, I did have a chance to preach from that pulpit once when they were down to only using pulpit supply. My old Sunday School teacher who was still ambulatory showed up along with the remaining members of my family. There were about 12 of us in worship that morning. A year later the remaining members prayerfully gave the figurative and literal keys to the church to the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ.

That empty place echoes in my soul. It certainly carved out in me the place for compassion for churches that have reached a low point and wonder if it is their "valley of the shadow of death."

My guess is that you, the reader, have your own relationship to this story.

But the Psalmist reminds us that we "will live in the House of the Lord forever." It turns out that the first memory verses that I learned at this church are those that draw us out of despair into the warmth of God's promises, both as individuals and as congregations.

JANE HECKLES
*...on Good Friday,
Claremont, California*



INTRODUCTION

FROM 'CORNERSTONE' TO 'CAPSTONE'

**NEW OCCASIONS TEACH NEW DUTIES, TIME MAKES ANCIENT GOOD UNCOUTH,
THEY MUST UPWARD STILL AND ONWARD, WHO WOULD KEEP ABREAST OF TRUTH.**

—JAMES R. LOWELL, 1845

Lowell's ponderous poem written in protest of the Mexican American War of his day still serves to confront us with our iterative calling: though what came before us was indeed good, it will not serve our next contexts or the even near future. New truths about the changing contexts challenge us daily.

We who have bridged from the 20th to the 21st century have a particular vocation in the life trajectory of the United Church of Christ. Our predecessors were challenged to grow new churches to stay ahead of the population growth of this country. We are challenged to realign, partner, merge, gather and even close congregations. Many of today's mature leaders were trained in growth and maintenance for stable congregations only to find that fewer and fewer congregations resemble the context for which we were equipped. The waves of change in demography and democracy have crashed over the protective jetties that formerly offered us a protected, calm waterfront view.

Few leaders or Conferences of the United Church of Christ are spared from the challenge of coaching churches that are mighty in spirit yet small in numbers. Many of our churches will weather ups and downs and affirm their particular vocation as a family-sized church. And, a conservative estimate suggests that 500 congregations of the United Church of Christ may vote to merge or close over the coming decade. And even more will bide their time discussing their condition and perhaps awaiting a savior-pastor to turn the tide.

It has been four decades since Dr. Horace Sills wrote a resource "Help! My Church is Closing" for the United Church Board for Homeland Ministries. His courageous foresight and his compassionate, frank pastoral guidance have served well. Yet "new occasions" have overtaken us.

Therefore, Local Church Ministries UCC and United Church Funds offer this new resource for discernment and decision in what are termed "Legacy Congregations," that is, churches that conclude their ministry and seed new ministries. This mixture of narratives, guidelines, inventories and resources is designed for use by leaders from all church settings who work with congregations who are considering their 'capstone' ministry.

Who will use this Resource? You may be a.....

- Leader/member of a congregation who wonders if you need to 'get real' about your church's future
- Congregation seeking guidance in implementing your decision to close
- Pastor who seeks to guide your congregation in implementing a decision they have already made
- Conference staffperson or volunteer consultant to congregations
- Interim pastor who specializes in transitioning congregations
- Member of your Association Church & Ministry Committee and assisting churches

You will have your own points of reference and entry into these challenging issues and you will have wisdom to share from your experience. It is our hope that the related website Livinglegacychurch.org will be a link to

resources and shared experience that will equip you in your respective role.

What comes first.....the decision to close or the information about how to do so?

In some congregations the very idea of drawing church life to a close is so volatile that all the necessary decisions for implementation of such a decision need to be settled before the congregation can vote on closure. Yet in other congregations, folks would never entertain any discussion until the congregation had taken an empowering vote to study the question. Each congregation is unique in its character and culture. We are the UCC!

So whether your congregation goes for the chicken or the egg, this process is going to take time. It is good to move ahead into the process and not wait any longer. There are congregations that have waited too long and encountered a crisis that forced hasty decisions because of legal, fiduciary or financial crises. A congregation will have a far more faithful and uplifting experience if they have time to work through consideration of options.

Congregations are remarkably resilient. And they are even more so during their last chapter of life! A vast cohort of congregations in the United States from all denominations are extended families of choice—they worship fewer than 50 on Sunday morning. They have found a chaplain who cares for them on a part time basis and they will exist as long as that family needs it to be so. Spiritually and economically, they have found a way to maintain stasis and will faithfully do so until a crisis forces a change. And because they are not currently ‘broken’, they don’t need to be ‘fixed.’

Other congregations that observe decreasing participation have embraced some form of assessment, mission evaluation, or strategic planning. Sometimes this takes place during a stable pastorate, other times during times of pastoral transition. Some congregations have cycled through study, planning and evaluation several times—trying to find the magic combination to turn the tide.

In every region of the country, however, are churches that are unstable, unsettled and undecided. These churches are usually small and their leaders have often grown to the age when they need to hand off weekly responsibilities to those who can now shoulder the roles. The service of leadership weighs folks down at the very times in their lives when they most need to be served. These churches have often pared down their bylaws to require very little governance, yet they can’t meet the lowered bar to convene a legal, congregational meeting, pass a budget or elect officers.

This Legacy Church Program aims to serve the latter group.

IN THIS WORKBOOK:

PAGE

- 7** **A Guide on How to Use this Legacy Workbook** presents a step by step overview on how best to use the material in this resource.
- 9** **Chapter One—Mind the Gap** sets the context for the challenges our churches encounter in recasting their vision and call to mission for today and tomorrow. Such study and discussion should serve to ‘normalize’ the challenge that faces congregations in decline. It is far too easy to begin the discussion and quickly derail into anecdotal attributions of blame about the condition of the church. We will offer the six core gaps in congregational decline that are shared across many contexts.
- 19** **Chapter Two—Is it Time?** introduces tools for congregational assessment. Some are simple inventories to spark conversation and get the ball rolling in your congregation. Others refer to more robust tools available in the broader church world. This chapter discusses methods of decision-making; by David Schoen, Congregational Assessment, Support and Advancement, UCC Local Church Ministries
- 25** **Chapter Three—Legacy Inherited, Legacy Futured** clarifies the concept of Legacy. In following this program, a congregation can gather together documentation and understanding of its origins and history that can become important archival material to be deposited in historical libraries. By doing so, a congregation is helped toward a longer view of its gifts and mission. This work is foundational to imagining the future Legacy the church will bequeath at the time of its closing, be that in one year or one hundred.
- 35** **Chapter Four—Role of the Legacy Pastor** introduces the role of the pastor who ministers in a Legacy setting and pastoral care needs in these congregations. Pastors have different roles in these congregations than in stable, long term congregations. “Legacy Pastors” often wrestle with self-care and self-interest. As they minister amongst those who are spiritually challenged by loss and grief, they are called to be healthy and able. Because the minister’s livelihood is often tied to the resources of the Legacy congregation, significant ethical issues arise when the congregation faces closure.
- 43** **Chapter Five—Church Buildings as Living Legacies** describes the several options for a local congregation to consider for the stewarding and disposition of church-owned real estate (worship facilities, parsonages, school buildings, vacant land, etc.) so that the Word and work of Jesus Christ may continue; by Patrick Duggan, Executive Director, UCC Church Building and Loan Fund.
- 49** **Chapter Six—Financial Assets as Living Legacies** addresses the stewarding of assets and presents a variety of bequest vehicles that legacy churches may use to distribute their assets; by Cheri Lovell, Director, Marketing & Strategic Initiatives, United Church Funds.
- 53** **Chapter Seven—Legal Issues in Church Dissolution and Merger** covers the fiduciary responsibilities and legal process of church dissolution, merger, and asset purchase, addressing liabilities for dissolved churches; by Heather Kimmel. UCC Associate General Counsel.
- 57** **Bible Studies and Discussion Questions** are for use in your process of closure and legacy discernment. Kate Huey, Dean of the Amistad Chapel at the UCC Church House in Cleveland has prepared three studies to equip a team for the journey. Kate is the writer of Weekly Seeds, the lectionary based Bible study.
- 77** **Bibliography** points toward helpful books, websites and resources including worship liturgies.
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HOW TO USE THIS LEGACY WORKBOOK





CHAPTER ONE

MIND THE GAP!

JANE HECKLES

THE GAP BETWEEN OUR CHURCH AND OUR CONTEXT TODAY

Much has been written in the last five years that sets the context for the challenges our churches encounter in recasting their vision and call to mission for today and tomorrow. Every church that is pondering its future needs to study and discuss this context. In many of our churches, conditions seen in a congregation's rear view mirror appear a lot clearer than those seen through its windshield. But appearances deceive us.

More than 40 years ago, a public service message campaign began in the London Underground. "Mind the Gap" was created because sleek, modern subway cars created new, dangerous gaps between the edge of the older subway platform and the new cars. Over the decades, Mind the Gap has become a cultural meme. For example, a popular blog by the same name on BBC America's website is devoted to helping Brits navigate the 'gap' between British and American culture.

So looking to the future is like stepping onto such a train.

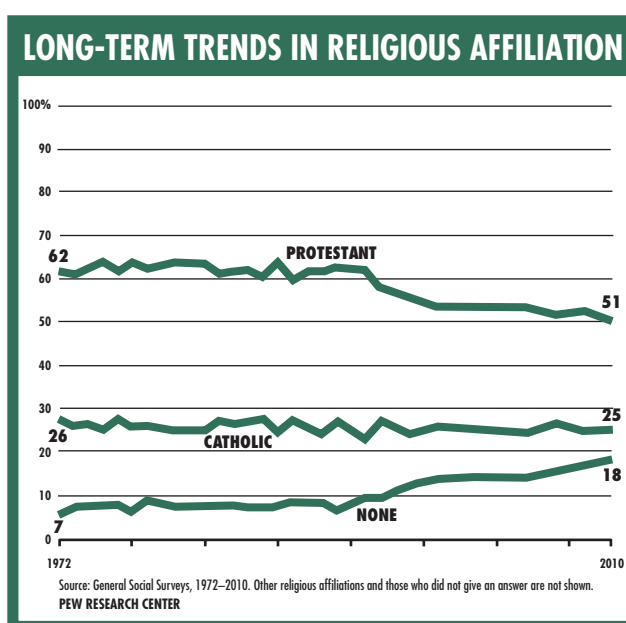
We observe **six gaps** between the contemporary context and congregations in decline.



I. WEAKENING RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Congregations in decline have acute experiences of the weakening religious affiliation in the United States which is manifest in at least these three ways: decreased membership rolls through disaffiliation, lack of new affiliations and decreased participation by ongoing members.

Virtually every survey of American religious affiliation and practice in the last 30 years observes that the churches formerly known as the "Mainline Churches" have been weakened through persistent membership loss since their membership apex in the 1960s. This matter of affiliation has deep impact on individual congregations in the numbers of children, youth and adults entering and leaving their pews and rolls. The well



UCC CONGREGATIONS BY SIZE OF WORSHIP ATTENDANCE (PERCENTAGE)

| Church Worship Attendance | 2013 | 2012 | 2002 |
|--|------|------|------|
| 1–50 | 44.1 | 42.4 | 29.3 |
| 51–100 | 34.0 | 34.5 | 33.5 |
| 101–150 | 12.5 | 13.1 | 17.8 |
| 151–200 | 4.7 | 4.9 | 9.1 |
| 201–400 | 4.0 | 4.3 | 8.8 |
| 401 and over | .7 | .8 | 1.5 |
| Statistics from 2003 were unavailable, so comparisons were made with 2002 figures. | | | |

During the last 10 years in the UCC from 2002 to 2013 the percentage of congregations with a worship attendance of 50 or less increased from 29.3% to 41.1% while the percentage of all congregations with 101 or more in worship decreased significantly.

choose a congregation based upon factors other than its denominational “brand.” And, people are much more likely to change churches from time to time based on ‘fit.’ Amy Sullivan, writing in Time Magazine, reported that “Leaving church, it turns out, doesn’t mean losing faith,” and that almost half of Americans have changed their affiliation at least once.² And the same study showed that the people who eventually disaffiliated didn’t make only one decision. “If they eventually left religion altogether, they were most likely of all formerly religious adherents to have tried several different traditions before giving up—38% of unaffiliated former Protestants had switched traditions twice, and 32% had switched three or more times. Their “theme song” appears to be the U2 song lyric “I still haven’t found what I’m looking for.”

CHILDHOOD RELIGION OF THE UNAFFILIATED

| | % |
|---|-------|
| Raised unaffiliated | 21 |
| Raised Protestant | 44 |
| Largely evang. family of denominations* | 22 |
| Largely mainline family denominations* | 17 |
| Protestant nonspecific | 5 |
| Raised Catholic | 27 |
| Raised in other faith | 8 |
| | 100 |
| N | 5,048 |

Source: 2007 “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey”

documented increase of the religiously “unaffiliated” is related to the decline in the number of Protestants in the US, as seen in this chart. In 1972, a far greater portion of any community sought church affiliation and rarely changed that affiliation unless caused by a residential relocation. Churches were equipped to receive ‘newcomers’ and to assimilate them into the parish. **With the decline in affiliations, most churches are smaller today than they were in 1972.**

During the last 10 years in the United Church of Christ from 2002 to 2013 the percentage of congregations with a worship attendance of 50 or less increased from 29.3% to 41.1% while the percentage of all congregations with 101 or more in worship decreased significantly.¹

Of today’s “unaffiliated” persons, 17% have come from the rolls of our mainline churches.

A second factor of affiliation relates to the weakening loyalty in the choices that persons make about church participation. Today, people are much more likely to

A third factor of weakening affiliation relates to participation. Only 39% of UCC members report that they attend worship on a weekly basis.³ Consistent weekly presence is no longer the baseline behavioral expression of affiliation. Likewise, mainline Protestants devote less in tithes and offerings to their churches on a per capita basis than they did 30 years ago.⁴ These two traditional marks of affiliation—attendance and contribution—have been on decline since 1962 and have contributed to looser affiliation.

There is a Gap between the marks of affiliation and the average UCC congregation.

II. DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS AND NEIGHBORHOOD CHANGES

If we were to contrast the 1960s population descriptions with today, in what were then UCC-rich geographic ar-

eas of the country, we would see there have been tremendous shifts. Because the population has shifted in every region of the country, we can observe several prominent areas of impact. **These four trends have a large impact on our decline in our churches:** our inability to grow in Latino ministry to match the growth in the national Hispanic community; the depopulation of farming communities due to big agriculture and climate change; shift of employment from manufacturing to knowledge base; and monoculture congregational identity present in multicultural neighborhoods.

All projections about US Demographics show that **Hispanics are the fastest growing segment** in this country. A striking article in the Wall Street Journal last year was titled “Latinos Fuel Growth in Decade.”⁵ The title references the most significant population trend between 2000 and 2010: the 43% increase in Hispanic population.

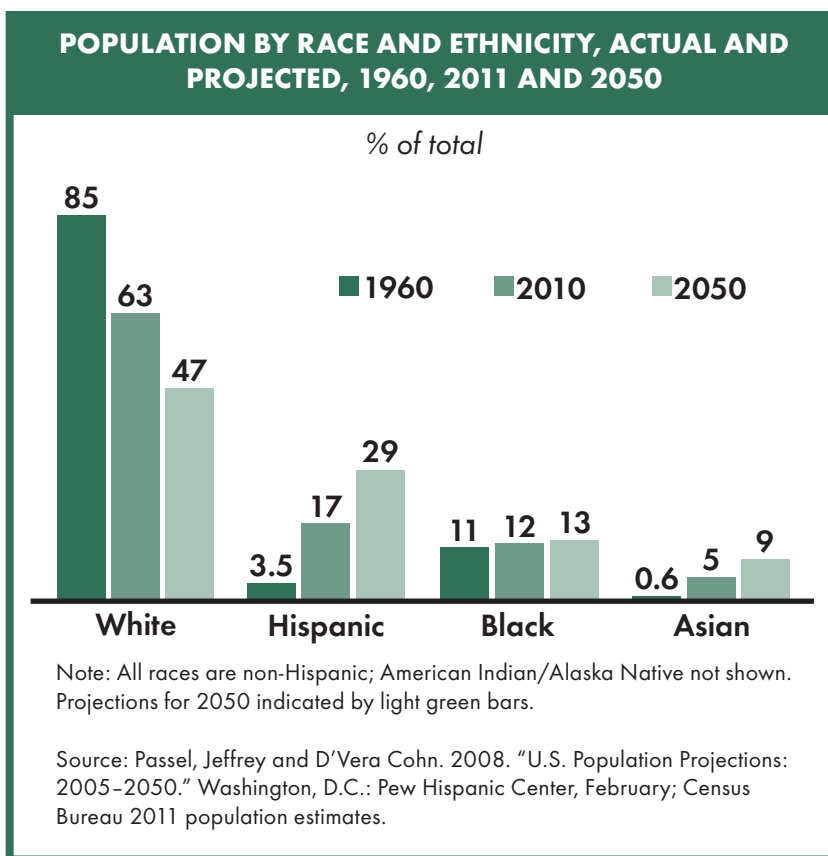
The last US government census indicates that the non-Hispanic white population is projected to peak in 2024⁶ and that by the time the White population in the United States drops below 50% of the total population, Hispanics will be the dominant non-White cultural group.

Since its inception, the United Church of Christ has not increased participation of non-White racial ethnic churches at a rate that keeps pace with the general demographic trend. As of 2013, only 0.6% of congregations in the UCC identified as Hispanic.⁷ There is a Gap between the growing Hispanic community and United Church of Christ.

The **second demographic gap** concerns the **depopulation of farming communities** due to the conversion to big agriculture and climate change. At the birth of the United Church of Christ about 1-in-6 Americans made a living on a small or family farm. Today about 1-in-80 Americans does so. Now just 8% of American farms produce two thirds of the agricultural output of the country.⁸

Climate change now impacts the fragile economic balance of these farming communities as well. “Climate change, I believe, may eventually pose an existential threat to my way of life. A family farm like ours may simply not be able to adjust quickly enough to such unendingly volatile weather”⁹ wrote Jack Hedin of Rushford, Minnesota.

Some of the earliest signs of decline in UCC congregations came from the segment of our churches in rural communities with agricultural-based economies. Small towns across the Midwest and upper Midwest states have shrunk as young people have moved to urban areas for employment. Churches in these bedrock communities have moved from vibrant faith and community centers to part time ministries or multiple point charges. The growth in licensed ministry training programs has provided a licensed pastor pool to serve these part time ministries. These churches can remain stable even in decline because they often require very few resources to remain open. Even when worship becomes sporadic, there is little impetus to formally close these congregations. Because they require little maintenance and because there is little residual financial value in the real estate itself, these churches exist as



physical anchors in the community as meetinghouse and chapel. They are lovingly cared for by aging members. These are Legacy Congregations whose last chapter of life can play out over decades rather than years or months.

Another shift in population in this country that has affected the base of church related population is the decline of the manufacturing base and the establishment of knowledge-based employment sector. “Urban landscapes especially in the U.S. have significantly altered in response to economic restructuring..... Older, compact, industrial U.S. cities have been rendered obsolete...Sunbelt cities such as Miami and Atlanta rise to become key business centers while Snowbelt cities such as Buffalo and Youngstown decline.”¹⁰

The predecessor bodies of the United Church of Christ developed hundreds of congregations in urban neighborhoods during the rise of the manufacturing class of the 20th century. Built in and for ethnic neighborhoods for newly arrived workers from Europe, these congregations can be seen from Worcester, Massachusetts across Pennsylvania and out to St. Louis. Likewise, new congregations were planted by the migration of African Americans north to the industrial growth of Michigan and Illinois.

Many of these churches have shrunk to shadows of their former selves. These congregations have wrestled to meet the challenge of changing neighborhood identities and needs once they have been buffeted by the economic decline around them. It has proved much more difficult to maintain these churches in the last chapters of their lives. In spite of their symbolic value to the community, they wrestle with decisions about the future while struggling with complex responsibility for urban property. In some settings these churches have great financial value for redevelopment projects even when they are not suited for ministry redevelopment. More often, however, the partnerships needed for successful redevelopment will not be found.

The areas of the country that have grown the fastest around the new economy are not in strongholds of the United Church of Christ. We do not have strong presence in those places for collaboration of church multiplication or planting. In fact, most of our success in gaining congregations in these areas has been through the affiliation of congregations who have sought out UCC church standing.

The fourth demographic trend is the prevalence of a monocultural identity in an increasingly multicultural world. To be sure this is not solely a challenge for the United Church of Christ.

Scheitle and Doherty, their article “Race, Diversity, and Membership Duration in Religious

Congregations”, offer research on the overpowering influence of homogeneity. “There is no reason to believe that congregations, just because of their religious nature, are unique to these dynamics. Indeed, research indicates that a wide range of voluntary organizations face these homogenizing forces. Organizations or institutions that overcome them often do so because of political, legal, or economic mandates and incentives. One potentially effective “mandate” for religious organizations might come from groups’ theology. That is, if individuals come to see diversity as theologically required or to define their social groups in more theological than racial terms, then they might be able to attenuate the challenges faced by a diverse organization.”¹¹

This persistent monocultural character sends a profound message to the generations of younger Americans who live, learn and work in multicultural environments six days a week. For them, the culturally segregated life on Sunday morning is not of the world they choose for themselves or their children.

There is a Gap between today’s demographic realities and the readiness of today’s UCC churches to ministry in these contexts. Our churches were prepared and designed for former neighborhoods and past cultures that are now changing rapidly.

● INSTITUTION-BUILDING VS. MISSIONAL EVANGELISM

Today there is a significant **Gap in concepts of vocation and purpose** in our tradition.

Somewhere in the 1960s, mainline Protestant churches had “arrived.” They portrayed normative church life like Norman Rockwell painted families. And having ‘arrived’, they were so busy assimilating those who came in the front door that they forgot how to go out to where the people were. Church life itself became the most important content of ministry. There were hordes of people to baptize, confirm, marry and bury—until there weren’t any longer.

Sometime in the 1980’s the “E” word began to rise again in generally acceptable vocabulary in the UCC. With the decline of the ‘institution’ has come a renewed interest in the first mission of the Christian church in Biblical and historical terms.

A stream of the church growth movement was growing and influenced at/by Fuller Seminary. The megachurch movement has fostered the art of attractional evangelism. Efforts to attract people into church through a menu-driven array of activities created fast growth by new churches in many communities.

Church development and evangelism in the mainline, however, has not produced such fast growth. Many leaders in the United Church of Christ became acquainted with evangelism through the research and continuing education offered by the Center for Parish Development of Chicago. In the 1991 Loren Mead, founder of the Alban Institute, published the first of his *Once and Future Church* series. Read widely in UCC congregations around the country, the notion that the mission field was now outside my church’s door sunk in.

Over the last ten years, we have seen some merging of these streams and new expressions of missional evangelism by progressive churches and younger leaders. They have found synergy in missional evangelism because they no longer feel that they live at the “mainline” of culture or church life. More likely they identify their congregation to be at the “sideline” or to be finally “oldline.” They are not impressed by the results from the church development efforts of the last 20 years and are as likely to be influenced by the emerging church experience and literature as they are by organizational development models. Increasingly, seminary faculties are creating new educational models and pedagogies for students who will become lifelong learners, pastoral theologians and leaders for a very post-modern church.

This Gap sometimes appears in the middle of a congregation as a disparate “agenda” dividing those who like things ‘as they are’ and those who yearn for ‘something new.’ And unless this conversation is engaged with respect and skill that holds a community together in moving forward, most often those who seek new expressions of Christian practice and life will “get on the train” while the rest of the congregation stays alongside the tracks. The new generation of pastoral leaders will not be drawn to these communities any more than younger laypersons. Occasionally some new persons will arrive on “the train for a visit.” But they will encounter a submerged level of conflict as persistent as a damp basement. They will get back on the train and look for a new stop in the future.

It does not take long to test the priorities of a congregation. If the content and purpose of ministry is to maintain the institution, only maintenance tasks and crises are on the agenda and in the litanies. But when one visits a church that uses an efficient institution to serve an identified mission, the difference in the content, pace and vitality of church life is radically different. Today, missional evangelism is the imperative core of most every church planting, church revitalization or church renewal process. And it is just such a complex of shared mission and vision that fuels the institution.

This 5th Gap can be so wide as to prevent a congregation from stepping over into the future. And it is in facing this gap that some churches will encounter their deepest questions about whether they are now called to wrap up their Legacy of ministry and mission.

● DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES AND CHANGING PATTERN OF VOLUNTEERISM



This chart easily demonstrates the difference in the work force over the last 50 years.

Mainline church life was geared to the lifestyle of 1960. The typical church involved women and men in a myriad of committees, their time made possible by the economy of a one-worker family. Today, churches have difficulty filling ‘vacancies’ on committees and the typical adult has 20 fewer discretionary hours per week at their disposal.

Children are often brought to church by grandparents while single or coupled parents try to fit in the chores of daily life into a tight workweek. The average adult works more hours per week than their parent did.

people who continue to participate are those who relate to that lifestyle.

This Gap can be called “No Room In the Inn for My Kind”. Rural churches in limited population areas have experienced an exodus of younger families who have moved to follow work. These congregations have not grappled with these issues as much. But this Gap has perplexed our suburban and urban churches for decades. When the children of mainline churches grow up and move on, they rarely find mainline churches that fit their lives. To find a church that fits their family they often tolerate an uncomfortable theological fit for the sake of their children or their schedules.

Many vital congregations in the UCC today make room for diverse schedules of diverse families. Sometimes this means practicing a new style of “extravagant welcome” that affirms participation in new patterns. Shorter-term commitments, less formal worship, mid week family night services, one-shot events, multigenerational programs all are examples of welcome that bridge this Gap.

In 1992 when Murphy Brown took on Dan Quayle in a cultural discussion about the changing norms of family life, so much had changed from the post WWII image of home life. One of the Gaps that churches must navigate is **the impact of family diversity on church life**—both in the children’s ministry and in the pool of available volunteer labor.

And, retirement age has reversed it’s downward trend and is creeping back up again.

The Open and Affirming Movement and changing levels of acceptance of LGBT families have brought new members and life to some congregations, substantial evidence of the blessing of diversity.

Yet, the rhythm and calendar of mainline church life has not changed much. With diversity of families and circumstances come diversity of needs, but many churches resist diversity of worship and program, either in style, schedule or frequency. The value of “not splitting up the church” into multiple worship opportunities is prized above all, even if it means that younger or newer persons or families cannot attend in the traditional timeslots. The dominant culture of the congregation, in this way, is often modeled after a lifestyle long gone. No surprise then that the peo-

● GENERATIONAL PREFERENCES

| Generation name | Birth years, Ages in 2010 | % of total adult population* | % of internet-using population* |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Millenials | Born 1977–1992 Ages 18–33 | 30 | 35 |
| Gen X | Born 1965–1976, Ages 34–45 | 19 | 21 |
| Younger Boomers | Born 1955–1964, Ages 56–64 | 20 | 20 |
| Older Boomers | Born 1946–1954, Ages 56–64 | 14 | 13 |
| Silent Generation | Born 1937–1945, Ages 65–73 | 7 | 5 |
| G.I. Generation | Born –1936, Ages 74+ | 9 | 3 |
| *Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, April 29–May 30, 2010 Tracking Survey. N=2,252 adults 18 and older. | | | |

In the 1960’s the term “generation gap” was coined to describe the profound difference in world view between the Boomer generation and their parents. Since then we have grown accustomed to the sociological descriptions of generations and terminology for these age categories. Today these generations are understood to have distinctive cultural anchors and worldviews.

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Today these generations are understood to have distinctive cultural anchors and worldviews.

These differences play out as well in the field of congregational studies. For example, the chart below comes from the Pew Forum on Religion’s study of the Millennial generation.¹² Gen Y and “Millennial” are sometimes used interchangeably.

Cohort description and analysis have been used [and misused] in congregational planning and evaluation. It has provided some sample data against which congregations may compare their own anecdotal dynamics and challenges. This chart shows a high degree of agreement over the impor-

tance of a good match between pastor and parish. It also shows that there is little generational difference in matters that are ranked as lower values in congregational life such as prayer ministry or social justice ministry. But when it comes to the highly visible, core offerings of the church in worship and teaching, the evaluations are dramatically different between generations!

The **Gap between generational cohorts** is very real and presents fertile ground for both growth and conflict in congregational life. The Barna Research Group has added a lot of data to this area of inquiry over the last twenty years. Most recently George Barna drew out key generational differences in their latest study.¹³

Robert Wuthnow, in his book *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* writes that while some congregations will survive by “shear inertia”, that doesn’t guarantee vitality. He suggests that congregations need to bridge these gaps and receive the gifts of generational diversity by engaging in changing formats around styles of worship, staffing, evangelism, and even membership.¹⁴

Gabe Lyons outlines five Christian practices that he believes have merit and promise for what he terms “the new Christians.” They give us a view of what church life might look like 25 years from now. He lists Christian practices that involve Scripture, Sabbath, Fasting, Prayer and Embodiment.¹⁵ Lyons is a graduate of Liberty University who, like Rob Bell, has pushed the envelope on the traditional, conservative Christian world view.

It is fascinating to then compare this list of projected practices to the list developed from the other side of the theological continuum. Dorothy Bass is a professor at Valparaiso University whose project on Formation of People of

| | Gen Y | Gen X | Boomers | Older |
|---|-------|-------|---------|-------|
| Satisfaction with what is offered for children and youth | | | | |
| Satisfied or very satisfied | 57% | 62% | 62% | 63% |
| Most valued aspects of the congregation (mark three): | | | | |
| Holy Communion/Eucharist | 34% | 38% | 47% | 58% |
| Sermons and preaching | 31% | 41% | 42% | 42% |
| Traditional style of worship and music | 21% | 24% | 27% | 41% |
| Contemporary style of worship or music | 21% | 20% | 20% | 12% |
| Ministry for children | 21% | 22% | 21% | 7% |
| Reaching the “unchurched” | 22% | 16% | 13% | 16% |
| Wider community care; social justice emphasis | 14% | 16% | 16% | 14% |
| Bible study, prayer groups, discussion groups | 16% | 16% | 14% | 13% |
| Proactical care for one another in times of need | 11% | 11% | 13% | 15% |
| Social activities; meeting new people | 20% | 15% | 11% | 12% |
| Openness to social diversity | 16% | 12% | 11% | 7% |
| Prayer ministry for one another | 8% | 7% | 9% | 10% |
| Congregation’s school or preschool | 7% | 11% | 11% | 5% |
| Adult church school | 6% | 7% | 7% | 6% |
| Good match between pastor/priest and congregation: | | | | |
| Agree or strongly agree | 78% | 84% | 84% | 87% |

Faith commends all of the same practices, and more!¹⁶

When this Gap exists in congregations wrestling with their future, we see honest differences in “what people are looking for” from their congregation. Younger generations seek support and opportunity to explore ancient Christian practices in new ways relevant to the world they seek to change and into which they will bring their children. Unless a congregation can support this deep engagement, this gap may be too wide to overcome.

● DECLINING CAPACITY IN THE FACE OF INCREASING CHALLENGE

The **final Gap** that is noticeable in congregations in decline is **in the arena of capacity**—the capacity to manage its life together, to meet legal and fiduciary responsibilities, to provide pastoral presence and leadership for individual and congregational needs, to fulfill its own purpose.

Even when congregations have shrunk to a very small size, there are still roles and responsibilities to be managed. One of the kinds of gaps that manifest in these churches is the gap between the jobs to do and the people to do them. Though people can remember past times when there were committees that handled things and people who rotated on, off and through to new committees, at this point people are often not succeeded by others in these responsibilities. The remaining members carry on to the best of their abilities.

Visitors to these congregations are sometimes startled to be invited to immediately jump in at a level of responsibility that makes them uncomfortable. There can be an air of desperation for new hands to help. This decline can

have to do both with the declining physical ability of the members or with the decline in consensus about what steps to take. There is an inertia that settles in like a layer of dust that is undisturbed by the winds of energy or change.

This gap can manifest itself in dangerous legal and fiduciary issues. Sometimes the capacity to manage drops so low that there is no longer a functioning treasury. More than one small group has simply held up the month's bills for oil, electric, insurance etc. and asked people to volunteer to take one and pay it that month.

The gap more often is present in the seeming inability to make decisions. The remaining group now operates as a committee of the whole, but must actually hold a legal meeting to take important actions on property and other assets. Such duly called Annual Meetings will often bring back long-gone people who consider themselves members on the rolls. Too often conflicts arise about the qualifications of voting, membership lists and control of the future.

The irony of this gap is a pastoral one. Those left in the remaining group often include elderly persons who have given of themselves on behalf of the church for decades. Now, when they are least physically able to continue and may be in need of significant pastor care and community, the church has little to offer. This gap between capacity and need is profound.

Perhaps you have recognized aspects of your own church's condition in one or more of these descriptions of gaps that exist in some congregations. All of these gaps happen in congregations for good reasons that have nothing to do with failure of character or faith. But this does not inoculate us from the virus of blame or disappointment that can be chronic.

In Chapter 2 "Is It Time?" on Assessment and Decision-Making, we offer tools to tackle the questions that stand before you in discerning your church's future.

¹ <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/2014-UCC-Statistical-Profile.pdf>

² Read more: <http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1894361,00.html#ixzz2Vjn8iVd0>

³ 2007 U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, collected by Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

⁴ Research from Empty Tomb seen at http://www.emptytomb.org/fig1_07.html

⁵ <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704604704576220603247344790.html>

⁶ <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb12-243.html>

⁷ <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/2014-UCC-Statistical-Profile.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.epa.gov/agriculture/ag101/demographics.html>

⁹ <http://www.startribune.com/opinion/111082894.html>

¹⁰ Logan, John R. and Swanstrom, Todd (1990), *Beyond City Limits: Urban Policy and Economic Restructuring in Comparative Perspective*, Temple University Press as cited in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_restructuring

¹¹ Christopher P. Scheitle, Kevin D. Dougherty. "Race, Diversity, and Membership Duration in Religious Congregations" in *Sociological Inquiry* Vol. 80, No. 3, August 2010, 405–423

¹² <http://www.pewforum.org/Age/Religion-Among-the-Millennials.aspx>

¹³ Barna, George. *State of the Church Series 2011 Part II Generational Change*. Ventura, CA

¹⁴ Robert Wuthnow, in his book *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings Are Shaping the Future of American Religion* Princeton University Press, 2007. Princeton, New Jersey.

¹⁵ Lyons, Gabe. *The Next Christians*. Doubleday, New York. 2010.

¹⁶ Dorothy C. Bass. Editor. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2nd edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publisher, Paperback-2010



CHAPTER TWO

IS IT TIME?

DAVID SCHOEN

How do congregations discern when it is time to decide to close, bring an end to their ministry, and seed new ministries as a Legacy Church? Perhaps, this question has been asked already in your congregation's life, or perhaps the question is silently behind every other discussion and question in your church. Given the reluctance of both congregations and denominations to deal with the closing of congregations, it is not surprising that churches, including the United Church of Christ are just now developing church closure and legacy resources.

However, our ecumenical partner, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) has been a leader, attentive to church closure and legacy for several years, preparing a fine publication about the issue "Sacred Stories; Continuing a Congregation's Legacy of Gifts"¹ through the Christian Church Foundation. Much of what follows comes from that piece with permission, as well as, from "Ending with Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations" Beth Ann Gaede, editor used with permission.²

KNOWING THE SIGNS

Congregations come into being for a variety of reasons and in a variety of ways. Most United Church of Christ congregations have been established by dedicated men and women through the years, frequently with the assistance of the region in which they are located as well as national ministries. Each is an outpost for the Proclamation of the Gospel, nurturing of its members, and sharing God's mission in and for the world. The congregation remains truly a church as long as it is able to provide ministry and mission within and beyond its own doors.

Here are some of the signs enumerated by Lyle Schaller, parish consultant, that indicate when the local church is in serious decline.

- **Total concentration on member-oriented activities**

When the congregation lapses into a survival mode, caring only for its own wellbeing and providing resources only for its own programming, then you have a telltale sign the church is in trouble. "The Christian Church exists primarily for those who are not in it." (Reuel Howe)

- **Excessive emphasis on the past**

While pride in past achievements is good, obsession with looking back says the present and the future are being neglected.

- **A neighborhood church without a community constituency**

By nature the church is an integral part of a community. If a large majority of members of a congregation have to travel long distances to attend church, this is often a sign of impending decline.

- **A rebellion against denominational calls for dollar support**

While congregations won't always be happy with the way their denomination works, neglect of support for the wider work, says Schaller, is a sign of local trouble.

- **A firm resistance to change**

Being "set in one's way" is a warning of creeping obsolescence for churches as well as people and machinery.

WHAT ARE OTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF AT-RISK CONGREGATIONS?

In addition to Lyle Schaller’s signs there are these characteristics of a church at risk from the Classification System Approach.³

This system uses the following criteria to define at-risk congregations:

- insufficient numbers of persons to maintain critical mass for volunteer ministry and financial support
- barely able or unable to sustain full-time pastoral ministry
- average worship attendance less than 50
- survival goals predominate
- lack of clear parish boundaries

TAKE A SURVEY

The following survey can be used to evaluate the indicators of a congregation’s viability.

Please indicate the degree to which you believe that the following descriptions reflect the situation in your congregation by indicating “very much,” “somewhat,” or “not at all.”

| | VERY MUCH | SOMEWHAT | NOT AT ALL |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Total concentration on member-oriented activities | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Excessive emphasis on the past | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. A neighborhood church without a neighborhood constituency | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. A rebellion against denominational requests for financial support | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. A firm resistance to change | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Lack of persons to maintain ministries | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. Unable to sustain pastoral ministry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. Average worship participation under 50 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Church mentality is ‘maintenance and survival’ | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

If you use this survey within a congregation, space may be added after each question or at the end of the survey for additional comments.

If you or your congregation respond by agreeing ‘very much’ with 5 or more of the questions, it is time to have a wider discussion in the congregation on closure and legacy.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP

Having conducted preliminary work and discussions, it should now be clearer if conditions warrant continuing your discernment about your congregation’s viability. The preceding signs and survey are meant to help discern areas of concern. If after your initial period of prayer, investigation, discussion, and reflection several areas of concern are raised, then the following more thorough process is recommended to continue your discernment and decision-making.

SEEK COUNSEL

The United Church of Christ national and Conference ministries have resources and staff who can assist churches as they consider viability and the possibility of closure. So a first step is to seek counsel with UCC staff and resources. Staff members may provide input on demographics, the status of other churches in the area, and creative possibilities for cooperative ministry as well as discuss legal issues on property, buildings and a myriad of other issues. The United Church Fund can provide counsel on financial matters. The UCC Church Building and Loan Fund has expertise in building and related issues. All of these people can help church leaders consider the disposition of the congregation's resources. Contacting denominational staff is the last thing some churches want to do. Some react this way reflexively because of issues having to do with control, past history, strained relationships, or assumptions that they have made. Such issues or history become part of church folklore and take on a life of their own and often generate unwarranted fear that renders a congregation unwilling to seek counsel at a time when it needs every bit of help it can find. Congregations should not let the process of discerning what God is calling them to do become captive to fear. When they feel fear and mistrust taking over, it is time to slow down, pray, reflect on what is behind that fear and mistrust, and consider what would be lost by giving them up in order to seek outside counsel.

Additionally, churches should seek advice from a local attorney regarding state law requirements on corporate dissolution and the disposition of property.

● FORM AN EVALUATION COMMITTEE

The second step is for the congregation to form an evaluation committee. This committee needs to be composed of the most trusted and gifted leaders. It is the single most important committee a church will ever form. Leaders must be willing to reflect dispassionately on the information and issues, and to make hard decisions that will ultimately face scrutiny by their fellow parishioners and denominational staff.

● MORE INTENSIVE RESEARCH AND REFLECTION

Third, the committee needs to set about the task of studying the church's viability in greater depth.

To do so the committee could engage the congregation in an assessment, preferably by an objective outside party, aimed at uncovering basic factual data upon which an objective evaluation can be made. New Beginnings Assessment Service offered through UCC Local Church Ministries works with congregations to help assess and discern a congregation's options for the future. (*see further in this chapter for more information.*)

The following are seven questions that could form the basis for such a more intensive study.

1. Has the congregation experienced a long-term and continuing decline in its membership and attendance at worship services? Congregations should compile statistics from at least the past 10 years. Denominational staff in the UCC Center for Analytics, Research and Data may be able to assist in providing the needed data from their records. Often, when a congregation experiences a significant decline, accurate record keeping becomes a casualty. In that case, members should compile the data to the best of their ability.
2. What is the predominant age group of the congregation? Develop two forms, one for total membership and one for actively participating members, dividing each group into male and female. Then determine how many people of each age group (70 and above, 60-69, 50-59, 40-49, 30-39, 20-29, and under 20) the congregation has. Once the data are determined, the question needs to be raised: How many of those who are members are prevented by age or infirmity from participating in the work and witness of the congregation?
3. Has the congregation maintained a good level of stewardship? Look for data that will indicate the ratio of money spent in strictly local purposes (building maintenance, salaries, and so forth) compared with the

amount invested in mission efforts locally and worldwide. Generally, a good investment in outreach is a healthy sign. Can the congregation afford to pay a pastor? What is the stewardship potential of the congregation as it now exists?

4. Has the community in which the congregation is located changed radically since the congregation reached its membership peak? This information may be available through your denominational staff, the U.S. Census Bureau, or through professional demographic services for a fee. A shifting population pattern from one racial-ethnic or economic group to another presents one set of issues. The change from a residential to business or industrial community presents another challenge.
5. Is the congregation willing or able to adapt its ministry and lifestyle in order to develop the ministries that will meet the needs of a changed community? If there is a change in the community ask the members about their willingness to embrace multi-ethnic or multilingual ministries. Is the congregation open to hosting a racially ethnic congregation? Can the congregation provide special ministries or services to workers or to businesses if a change to industry or business is the transition issue?
6. Is the present facility physically adaptable for use? Is it in need of repair? Is the building accessible for all people or can it be made accessible? Can parts of the building be shut off? Are the utilities affordable? Are major repairs needed? Are the resources available for the repairs? Are the facilities in violation of local codes or are they unsafe?
7. Are new efforts in evangelism and education feasible? Are there unchurched people in the local community, and does the congregation have the leadership, passion, and resources to reach out to them and provide for their education in the faith? List the resources of church members and evaluate whether there are sufficient funds and will to conduct an adequate program to reach out to those without a church connection.

● CONSIDERING THE OPTIONS

At least five options should be considered following the more intensive study of ministry viability:

1. Continue the present ministry in the present location.
The caution here is that the congregation must continuously monitor the situation, so that it does not continue its ministry while declining to the point that responsible decisions about the future cannot be made. Tough decision making about congregational viability means looking at key elements, such as the ability to provide for a pastor, to maintain facilities, and to accomplish the ministry of the gospel.
2. Arrange to share facilities with another congregation.
Although this option relieves one congregation of the burden of maintaining its own property and could provide much-needed capital, leaving one's own church building could carry significant emotional trauma. Sharing facilities requires patience, understanding clearly defined responsibilities and expectations, and a sense of service to the greater mission of the church in the world.
3. Relocate to a growing area of the community.
This option requires careful coordination with denominational staff and significant preliminary research. It is a difficult choice for a congregation without a clear vision of new ministry for the new area, adequate financial resources, and large amounts of congregational energy. A move alone will not typically turn around a congregation without a fresh vision, energetic leadership, and commitment to change and to risk.
4. Explore various models for continuing one's ministry in a new way.
Denominational staff are often the key to this option, which includes such opportunities as yoked ministry with another parish (a pastor and programming ministries are shared), merging two congregations into a new one, and "nesting" one congregation with another of a different racial-ethnic background (the unique ministry of each congregation is still affirmed and celebrated).
5. "Fold the tent" and bless the continuing ministry.
The church of Jesus Christ has never been dependent upon building, even though buildings may hold precious memories for us and may have been the site of many significant milestones. Memories are to be pre-

served and celebrate but never worshiped. The closure of a church is like a funeral, but even in a funeral we still celebrate life. It is not the end. Death, as we proclaim boldly, does not have the last word. That word is life, and it was spoken at the cross in Jesus Christ for us for all time.

NEW BEGINNINGS ASSESSMENT SERVICE

New Beginnings Assessment Service equips congregations to choose their future, instead of having their future chosen for them. New Beginnings helps a congregation discern and make a bold decision as to what God is calling this congregation to be and do at this time and place, including the five options reviewed above.

If your congregation can answer “yes” to three or more of the following, it may be time for a New Beginning:

- Less than 70 in worship, or more than 70 in worship but significant decline for a decade
- Wrestling with future vision for the church
- Significant building issues (too much space, inadequate parking, putting off repairs and maintenance)
- Aging membership
- Changing neighborhood
- Trouble paying bills and/or paying off a loan
- Currently in interim time of transition

With New Beginnings, your congregation will:

- Receive a comprehensive report of strengths and challenges, as well as a realistic picture of possible future directions.
- Be trained in a discernment process to follow God’s lead in choosing a new direction.
- Discover available ministry opportunities in the community.
- Learn how to discuss and implement change in a healthy, open manner.
- Leaders receive additional training on leading through change.
- Set a course for future strategic and visionary ministry planning.

New Beginnings is a program developed by our denominational partner, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Local Church Ministries, United Church of Christ has bought a license to use the New Beginnings program among our congregations and Conferences.

For more information on New Beginnings Assessment Service contact David Schoen in Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ toll free at #866.822.8224 ext. 3837 or schoend@ucc.org . Learn more at www.ucc.org/new-beginnings

● WHAT IS GOD CALLING US TO DO IN THIS PLACE?

Many congregations have difficulty praying this question in complete trust that God will provide a clear answer. This is why so many congregations seek to seize control of the decision-making process and force conclusions that seem comforting at the time. Others choose not to choose at all. And some congregations will find themselves praying this question for many months, even several years, until the doors to new ministry close, leadership positions go unfilled, the community becomes exhausted, offers are made for the property, or invitations are received to merge or yoke with another parish. How God will answer, no one can say, but prayerfully discerning an answer will yield reward in the end.

¹ “Sacred Stories; Continuing a Congregation’s Legacy of Gifts”, Christian Church Foundation, Indianapolis, IN, revised 2012. <http://www.christianchurchfoundation.org/UserFiles/Files/SacredStories2012.pdf>

² “Ending with Hope: A Resource for Closing Congregations,” Beth Ann Gaede, editor, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

³ From the work of the New Jersey Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Bishop E. Roy Riley.



CHAPTER THREE

LEGACY INHERITED, LEGACY FUTURED

LEG·A·CY noun \ˈle-gə-seɪ\

Definition of LEGACY

- 1: a gift by will especially of money or other personal property: bequest
- 2: something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past <the legacy of the ancient philosophers>

This term, Legacy Church, is chosen with great intention. Every church has a story—churches don’t “just grow on trees!” Most every church has a story of a gift early on in its life that enabled that congregation to take a big step forward. Whether a church is 25 years old or 250 years old, there are stories that tell of financial gifts to raise a steeple or gifts of property on which the church was built. Countless people have given over and over again for the physical needs of that congregation in every generation. As the definition above indicates, when we hear the word “legacy” we often think first of money.

But there is also that second meaning of “legacy” that is so important to a Legacy Church. This second legacy is what church has inherited—what has been passed down through generations of members. This legacy is found in the “artifacts” of Annual Reports, of worship bulletins, of photographs and videos. In the files, one may find mission statements of old, former versions of Bylaws and rosters of the Sunday School. All of these serve to tell a story of the history of that congregation.

A church’s legacy is also found in the less tangible yet weighty content of memory—collective and individual. Legacy is sometimes written down, but also found between the lines. Like the silence in the silent prayer, it is full and holy. The intangible legacy is as meaningful as the tangible.

We urge your congregation to take the time to locate and curate your church’s inheritance—the gifts of property and the gifts of purpose and mission that have driven the congregation over the years. We offer two activities to carry out this study together: the “Legacy Study-Guide” and “Legacy through Appreciative Inquiry.”

● THE LEGACY STUDY-GUIDE

The Legacy Workbook is designed to assist your church in collecting and “mining” its history to build a shared understanding of your congregational legacy. This step in your process will require pooling everyone’s knowledge about the location of records and files. Some of these records may be found in your church office. And, many of them will be found in those hidey-holes around the church that people used for storage when one generation to the next. Some churches may have safes on site or safe-deposit boxes at banks. If so, make an inventory of what is there. Some of the church’s historical records have found their way into boxes, files, attics and garages of members’

| LEGACY COVENANT—SECTION 1 | INVENTORY OF SOURCES |
|---|--|
| FILL IN THESE QUESTIONS | LOCATE THESE SOURCE “ARTIFACTS” |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What year was the church founded? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • legal Articles of Incorporation • written histories produced during anniversary years |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who were the earliest leaders? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • written histories produced during anniversary years |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What motivated them to start your church? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original correspondence amongst founders, denomination |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did they come from? I.e. Was there a core group spun off from another congregation? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First/charter membership records |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was your church’s original purpose or vision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look in original Bylaws or other writings |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who helped your church to start in the beginning? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquire with original partners asking for any correspondence or reports they might have about the beginning of your congregation. See Appendix for listing of UCC related Historical Archives. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did they give to help start the church, materially, in leadership and in purpose? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin an organized Inventory of Church Property with this first section on “founding gifts.” Some founding gifts that churches have received have been gifts of Bibles, hymnals, altarware, crosses. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What other denominational or ecumenical groups supported the planting of your church? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulletins from the first few services of worship • First Annual Report of the congregation • Contact your UCC Conference and/or Association for copies of documents they have about the start up of your congregation • Contact the United Church of Christ archives and Local Church Ministries for any records they might have about the start up of your congregation. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where did the church meet before it had a building? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rental agreements or correspondence |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When it came time to find land for the church, how was it acquired? What gifts were involved in the land and the first buildings? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Property deeds, conveyances, covenants or easements, often found in safe deposit boxes • Copies of mortgages on property or grants |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate written accounts of your congregation at the time of significant anniversaries: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit local news sources that were in operation at the time the church was founded and search for articles/coverage on the founding of the congregation. • Ask your UCC Conference for copies of articles from their publications about the founding |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did some kind of disaster ever effect your church property? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for evidence of insurance claims in the church records. |

| LEGACY COVENANT—SECTION 1 | INVENTORY OF SOURCES |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have separate Tax Exemption or are you exempted simply as a part of the UCC? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate any tax exempt certificates from the IRS, Form 990s or annual reports to the Secretary of State in your state or commonwealth. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What anniversary year/s were celebrated? Build a timeline that includes those years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalog any Church Anniversary celebrations using files or histories |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was commemorated during those celebrations? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulletins from anniversary services or programs from anniversary special events |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who were the special guests? Where were they from? Who spoke at the events? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bulletins from anniversary services or programs from anniversary special events |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can you find to suggest how the church's mission/purpose was stated in new ways over the years? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find subsequent editions of your church's ByLaws over the years. Compare the purpose/ mission statements if/as they changed. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are there gaps in the church history and why might that be? ie WWII | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catalog the Annual Reports for each year the of congregational life. Read the subsequent annual reports after missing years to look for info about why things might have been missing |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When did membership in the church peak? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using data from annual reports, make a simple graph of membership over time |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for history of hard times or high conflict: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review your church's file at the Conference or Association office to identify when the UCC might have been invited in to the congregation to help problem solve or coach during hard times. • Locate copies of Congregational Profiles used for each ministerial search. Read each profile to discover how the church described itself at each of these transition times |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was going on? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the theme of any of these hard times or conflicts and add them to your timeline |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who tried to help the church during that time of conflict? How did that conflict get resolved? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes of Meetings of special task forces • Information from Conference/Association files |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did that conflict seem to linger on in the life of the church? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there repeating themes on your time line? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a chronological list of Pastors who served the church and chronicle how the church identified and called these ministers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look in UCC Yearbooks, your own church histories, any files from previous search committees |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When did a Sunday School or other education program begin and/or end? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look in histories and UCC Yearbook data |

| LEGACY COVENANT—SECTION 1 | INVENTORY OF SOURCES |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where there building campaigns? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look through property records, loan/mortgage docs for new buildings, news of property fires or other disasters in town. • Architectural drawings, blueprints, maps |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who have been your Youth program's best partners and resources? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reports from UCC youth events, regional and national • Look for the destinations for youth mission trips and note those mission partners • Do you work with local youth agencies or programs today? |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have been your church's 3 largest benevolence or mission partners? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look back through Annual Reports and scan for the benevolences that keep coming up year after year. Often times it is "Our Church's Wider Mission". Before 1965 it was called "Our Christian World Mission" and before the formation of the UCC in 1957, it had other names in the predecessor bodies. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What prayers, creeds or other worship elements have been repeated in certain eras of church life? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look back through worship bulletins as far as you can find for these elements. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What got the church in the newspaper? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Search local news archives |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the apex of the church's life, what was it like? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect oral history from those still alive during the 'heyday' |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where are the current financial records and reports located? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find/create Inventory of Financial Records |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of restricted funds are on your books? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Financial Reports |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the Church have a Memorial Fund? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorial Fund records of those honored, gifts and donors • Memorial Fund written policy |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What Bequests did the Church receive from Members and Friends and for what purposes? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assemble files on all Bequests of property or funds. This could include correspondence with donors, attorneys, courts, estates |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has been a part of your congregation? What were our unique cultural roots? Who have you become today? What kinds of diversity have been present over the years? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect any pictorial or membership directories you can locate from church files and members' own files. |

homes where they were put for safe-keeping or nostalgic purposes! Consider communicating with current and former members when you begin the project and ask them to bring back any files, photos, videos, records, minutes they may have at home. Some of these things are stored away by families whose parents were active in the church but have passed on. Be creative about your Treasure Hunt!

● WHAT TO MAKE OF ALL THIS INFORMATION?

You have tackled a time-consuming search for legacy materials from your church's history and you may be wondering about the purpose of this difficult exercise! It has served two important purposes:

1. You have gathered together an accurate historical picture of the defining decisions, programs and beliefs that have formed and guided your congregation through its life. None of us carries in our own memories the whole story of our church, no matter how long we have been members. We need each other and a look at the records from the past to fill in an accurate picture. We can be surprised by what we learn as we look back about what was important to our church and how important developments came to pass. At the conclusion of the 2nd Exercise in this chapter on Appreciative Inquiry, a synthesizing set of questions will be posed to help you write a Legacy for your congregation using these materials.
2. Perhaps you also noticed that you have been curating quite a lot of archival material about your church as you completed this Workbook! Whether you close the congregation or not, you are now ready to review your Archival Plan for congregational records. If you chose to close, you are now prepared to communicate with potential archive libraries about your church's collection. You are also prepared to work with your attorney to learn what you will need to do to eventually wrap up the legal and corporate life of the church. If you chose to remain active, you can still open an Archive relationship with a library and safeguard your church records. Whether you close or remain active, see the suggestions that the Congregational Library and Archives www.congregationallibrary.org has for churches' record management and donation of archives.

So let's move on to the next congregational activity in building your church's legacy: narrative history—it is much more FUN for most people!

● LEGACY THROUGH APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

There is a lot riding on your congregation's telling of its story, and how it is constructed. That story is at the heart of your legacy. It is the story that you will tell your family, your friends and neighbors about your congregation. How you cast your story will create and color the legacy you leave, even after closing as a congregation. It will include a story of the downturns and disappointments at this point in your church's life. As you have wrestled with decisions about closure you have had to assess the realities of the current times and confront the question of viability for the future. At this point you are quite cognizant of the reasons why you need to close or merge.

But if you create your final story solely around that current reality, you may end deep in a well of failure and disappointment. Your last chapter together as a congregation may be so dispiriting as to create conflicts within the band of remaining members. It would be as if a eulogy only addressed the final illness and spoke nothing of the vibrant life that came before.

There is a truer story. Your church's legacy story is much more than its present condition. In the Legacy Study Guide you have explored the earlier chapters of church life. Now it is time to explore and capture the meaning and mission of your congregation in the current generation. You might think that you have had more than enough conversation about this—you have “talked about it until there is nothing new to say.”¹

Most likely your conversations have revolved around evaluating the church's weaknesses, lack of resources, shrinking participation and untenable future. This next conversation will be different because it will be based on very dif-

ferent questions. “The thesis of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is that an organization, such as a church, can be recreated by its conversations.....what to talk about, what questions to ask, what metaphors to use....shapes the present and the future.” In this case it will shape your own experience in closing as a congregation and the lasting legacy of the congregation. You can chose to end in hope rather than simply close in sadness.

In the 1980’s, David Cooperrider² (who happens to be a member of the United Church of Christ) developed a new approach to working with organizations—both large and small corporations as well as non-profit corporations, churches and church organizations. Using “Appreciative Inquiry” people are invited to explore with reverence the valuable characteristics of their organization—what David called the “life-giving core”. AI is a process that is organized around four “D’s”: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. Most typically, congregations engage in AI for mission planning or during times of pastoral transition. We have adapted it to the purpose of Legacy development.

Use of Appreciative Inquiry for Legacy planning will help you to:

| | |
|-----------------|--|
| DISCOVER | Discover the “life-giving core” that has been at the heart of your congregation throughout its lifetime |
| DREAM | Dream about what could be created in gifting the abundant assets of your congregation |
| DESIGN | Design a healthy process you will use to honor the entirety of the legacy your congregation has received in building the legacy your congregation will pass on |
| DESTINY | Effect the Destiny you create by building a Legacy Covenant ³ |

Mark Lau Branson wrote *Memories, Hopes and Conversations*⁴ about using AI in congregations. In his work he uses an adaptation of AI that uses four “I’s” instead of “A’s”: Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate. In Chapter Six, “Schedules and Scripts” Branson introduces an AI framework used in a Presbyterian church undertaking mission assessment (congregational self-study) during a time of pastoral transition.⁵

This framework is quite suited to adaptation for your Legacy development. It will help you to uncover and articulate “the life-giving core” that has your congregation received as an intangible legacy from all those who came before you in this church.

We have recommend an adapted process and interview questions around this topic focus on Appreciative Inquiry for Legacy. Branson’s script was used to engage as many members as possible in his congregation. We suggest that you use this process for successive meetings of your Legacy planning group meeting weekly for about six weeks. Combined with the Legacy Workbook, these two exercise will take about 3 months to complete. Your Legacy planning group may be a “committee of the whole”, that is, anyone who is still a member and interested in helping determine the church’s legacy. Even if you still have a fully functioning church Council or Consistory or an appointed transition team that might try to draft a recommended legacy document, it is wise open this conversation to every member interested.

Building consensus on these matters requires a group process of careful listening, conversation and prayerful discernment that happens over time. Some legacy congregations have made participation in this Legacy work a qualification for voting on the final distribution of congregational assets. This diminishes the likelihood of divisive

floor debates at the congregation's last corporate meeting among individuals who appear there after long absences with personal opinions about asset distribution.

Some churches have taken a two-step process to clarify the final membership roll, those who will vote on the final closure:

1. The first step has been to determine who is willing to take part in a minimum number of conversations in preparation for decisions and votes.
2. The bylaws are then amended to establish two membership categories: voting members (qualified by presence at the required meetings) and associate members. Careful attendance logs are kept during this period at the required meetings.

By reducing the voting membership rolls to the truly active, it makes it much easier to establish a legal quorum at the final meetings. In Chapter 7 the legal requirements and steps for closure are reviewed in detail.

● ADAPTIVE QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCOVERY/INQUIRY PHASE FOR LEGACY CONGREGATIONS

The Discovery or Inquiry step in the AI process sets aside discussion of congregational deficits and takes up questions that will reveal the positive aspects of the congregation. The questions that follow are designed to reveal the life-giving forces that fuel the congregation today and yesterday. They are adaptive because they step over the usual AI conversation boundary about only voicing your own experience. They also invite thoughtful intuition based upon the curated material you discovered in the Legacy workbook process. A typical AI process might pose four questions to be tackled in one day's retreat format. Instead we have proposed six questions to be discussed over four sessions. Each session will require about 90 minutes to discuss in groups of six persons. Use as many groups as you need but keep them small to ensure that everyone speaks and is heard. If you use more than one group, add on time at the end of the session to give summaries to the whole group. Choose a facilitator and a recorder for each group.

Here are some guidelines for your facilitators and recorders at these sessions:

1. Agree on a place and time when the group will both be comfortable and have at least 90 minutes for the session
2. Explain that the purpose is to discover by inquiring of everyone, what this church is and has been like at its best, what has given it life and purpose, in order to understand what should be honored in its legacy that will be carried forward in new ways
3. Thank the individuals for being willing to help. Tell them how important their contributions are to the process. Let people know who the recorder is and what they are doing.
4. Make notes using key words and phrases about what was said in response to the questions and uses names with each comment so that the meaning is clear.
5. Establish the "ground rules." Everyone will be heard. In order to do so, once you have had your chance to speak please take on a listening role and don't talk "over" other people or in side conversations. Honor each person by listening quietly. After everyone has had a chance to speak there may be time for general discussion of the question.
6. Begin with the first question. Have it written out on newsprint where everyone can see it and remember the focus.
7. Let each person tell his/her story, without influencing them, try to refrain from telling your story and discourage interruptions from others. Listen for the events, feelings and interpretations.
8. use follow-up questions as needed such as: "Tell me more about ..." "How did that happen?" "What do you mean when you say it was great?"
9. Model a positive and energetic affect as you lead the group.
10. Sometimes people will respond with negative stories or evaluations. Don't reject the stories but don't stretch them out. Instead turn their focus to why they persevered in spite of this situation and any good that came

of it.

● QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

| | |
|------------------|--|
| SESSION 1 | Concerning people you personally remember: Who were the key leaders who strengthened this congregation and tell stories about how did they do so. Who were the legendary heroes before your time? What was important to them about the church and what did they do? |
| SESSION 2 | What were the peak experiences of members of this congregation over the years? How do you know? Capture the stories. |
| SESSION 3 | What are the most important ways the church has contributed to your life? When did this happen? Who made a difference? How did it affect you? What are you proudest of about your own contributions to the life of this church? What have you given—your personality, your skills, your activities, your character? Give some examples and don't be humble! |
| SESSION 4 | What are the best “gifts” the church received over the years? Why are they the best? |

● DRAWING IT ALL TOGETHER

Once these sessions are complete, a small group can convene to review the notes from all the sessions and draw out the central theme which have appeared through the interview process. Then it is time to integrate this with the information learned in the Legacy Study Guide.

Use these questions for conversation:

What are the themes from our Legacy Study-Guide and Discovery Day?

What are the most important and valuable tangible and intangible inheritances that we still possess today.

What are the enduring values throughout our history, our priorities for ministry and mission?

With the answers to these questions in hand, you are prepared to consider the legacy you will pass on as your congregation closes.

● LEGACY FUTURE

It's time for a different conversation—not one about choosing an ending but about choosing a future. When a congregation has determined that it has reached the natural end of its lifecycle there will come an end to its life as a worshipping community of faith and a corporate body. But the congregation will have a future! The future will be made up of all that you bequeath in tangible and human resources to others who will live on. That future will be directed by the Legacy Covenant that you adopt at the time of the closing.

If you have not yet had a conversation with the legal advisor recommended by your Conference staff, this would be a good time to do so. Your Legacy Covenant is not, in itself, a legal document. But it will contain all the informa-

tion and decisions needed for your legal advisors to draft a legal document that will carry out your intent. (for an example of a clause regarding asset distribution that is acceptable to the IRS see Chapter 7 on legal issues)

Your Legacy Covenant will express your values through the choices you have made for the distribution of those tangible assets and through the resettlement of your current members. Your tangible assets, including money and property, will all need to be distributed to other non-profit organizations. The laws on distribution of assets from non-profits vary from state to state, but in no case may the distribution be to individuals.

Sometimes when churches have reached this last stage in their lifecycle, their mission horizon has shrunk. Earlier in their congregational life they may have enjoyed mission relationships around the world, around the country, throughout their region in addition to partners in their own community. But in the last chapter of life congregations can become “homebound” and only relate to a few other organizations in their immediate area. Because those are the only partners the remaining members can think of, there is a temptation to place all the church’s tangible assets only in those local hands. Two very important opportunities will be missed in doing so:

- The opportunity to honor and celebrate the deeper values that fueled the congregation over the span of its lifetime by also endowing partners beyond the local community who carry on their long-held values and mission.
- The opportunity to help start a new church for a new generation to carry on your Christian mission and identity

When an individual drafts a legal will, some start with an inventory of property to be distributed and then develop a list of heirs by assigning those tangible gifts to a list of persons. Instead, we recommend that you reverse that and begin with answers to these questions about who will be our heirs?

● LEGACY COVENANT—DISTRIBUTION OF ASSETS

Who carries on the values we have evidenced over the years?

Who have been our mission partners over the lifetime of our church?

What values do we want to perpetuate in our community and world and who exemplifies those values?

Who helped us over the years and how can we help them now?

What does the law require in our distributions?

The answers to these questions should be found in the work you have just completed on the legacy you inherited up to this point in time. Go back and study the Legacy Study Guide and the themes that resulted from your Legacy conversations and answer those questions in light of the length and depth of congregational history, tradition and experience.

Once you have completed answers to these questions, you can move ahead to work with the inventory of tangible assets that you identified. Using this list of heirs, where are the best matches for your congregation’s investment in the future in carrying out the historic vision and mission of your congregation through the hands of others?

Human assets are an integral part of your Legacy plan too. It is important that you make provision for their future. More will be written about this in Chapter 4.

¹Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes and Conversations*. The Alban Institute, p. xiii

²David Cooperrider is the Fairmount Minerals Professor of Organizational Behavior at Case Western Reserve University’s Weatherhead School of Management. <http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu/>

³A Legacy Covenant is the final written document, adopted by congregational vote, for the closure of your congregation and distribution of its assets, informed by the values and programs that you plant through legacy gifts to other organizations.

⁴See note 1

⁵Mark Lau Branson, *Memories, Hopes and Conversations*. The Alban Institute, p. 113–124, 141.



CHAPTER FOUR

ROLE OF THE LEGACY PASTOR

I've yet to meet a pastor who got up one morning and said "I'd like to specialize in closing churches." Most of us entered pastoral ministry to accompany and equip those growing in faith. Many in my generation of clergy, those ordained in the 1970's, grew up in church families during the strongest era of Protestantism in the US. In spite of the divisive effects of the Viet Nam war on church life, we could not yet see the trend lines turning down so rapidly. We were educated to lead growing congregations of lifelong Christians. Born in the Boomer generation, we rode the age wave into more crowded, newer schools, expectations of rising economies and hopefulness about the power of social change. But the tipping point on church growth happened right before our eyes and most of us today have never served a church that has consistently grown in numbers of members. In fact, the whole relevance of membership has given way to the much more important question of numbers of persons in worship.

We have an ambivalent relationship to the metrics of our churches, the research data published and updated in both popular print media and web based knowledge banks. Pastors report taking comfort, at times, in the accounts of decline in numbers because it relieves their sense of personal or professional responsibility for the decreases in their congregation. On the other hand, it highlights the mismatch between their original vocational discernment and the outlook for their ministry in the future. Paul Nixon may have declared "I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church"¹ but most of us will have tried and failed at church revitalization somewhere in the course of our ministry. Bill Easum frequently says that 80% of all revitalization efforts in churches fail to reach their goals.

● GOOD MORNING—YOU ARE NOW A LEGACY PASTOR

We use the term Legacy Pastor to describe a pastoral leader of a church that has made a decision to conclude its ministry. There are several ways to become a Legacy Pastor. Many become Legacy Pastors because they are the settled pastor² of a church that has gone through a discernment process and chosen some form of closure. Others are intentional interim ministers who guided a church through such a discernment process during a time of transition and the church has made a decision to close. And very occasionally, a pastor is called to a parish with the explicit job of leading the time of closure because the pastor has particular gifts or experience in this type of ministry. With the rise in the numbers of hospice chaplains across the country, some have transferred their experience in hospice ministry to the congregational setting to apply their learnings on facilitating palliative care in a community of faith.

Not every pastor is well suited to legacy ministry. Because a legacy congregation will encounter deep places of stress, a legacy pastor will need above average skills in leadership in times of stress, and be at a place in their lives where their own stress is well managed.

The effective Legacy pastor will have sufficient self-awareness, coaching, and/or spiritual direction so as to not misfile their underlying assessment about their own ministerial career into the process and decisions their church will undergo on the legacy journey. In fact, engaged understanding of what it means to be a pastoral leader in this generation in mainline Protestantism will help to generate the clear-headed compassion needed in this role.

Legacy pastors will benefit from experience and study of congregational assessment. Some form of congregational assessment has been used to arrive at your church's legacy decision already, whether it is formal or informal. Here are two ways congregational assessment can help throughout the legacy process:

1. by establishing a shared data platform on which the congregation makes decisions
2. by assuring that everyone in your church's family system has had the opportunity to participate.

Some churches will use a formal assessment process up front while they are determining their options about whether it is time to consider some form of revitalization, renewal, merging, closing etc. Other churches will arrive at a decision that their congregation is no longer sustainable, and will use an assessment process to weigh choices for the future. There are dozens of congregational assessment tools and resources available and the most effective often have a fee structure. This is a good time to work with your Conference staff to determine which assessment programs would be a good match for your church and circumstance and if the Conference or National UCC provides any cost-sharing or group rates for these methods.³

If you are choosing a congregational assessment method at any point along the process, you might consider questions such as these to evaluate your choice of methods:

- How will this method collect the current and future demographic conditions and trends?
- How will it measure our local demographics with the wider landscape?
- How will it yield a clear, easy to understand presentation for our members and friends?
- Does it come with any assistance from our Conference staffperson or other consultant?
- Can I talk with a pastor/s who has used this in legacy settings to benefit from their learning?

A Legacy pastor will be more effective if they are skilled in pastoral caregiving. It isn't enough to simply have a big "pastoral heart" and lots of compassion. Additional supervised experience, education and training in "crisis ministry" will be put to constant use in guiding the members and families through the grief process that is at the heart of legacy ministry. For this reason some persons refer to legacy ministry as "hospice ministry for churches." There are several good sources of information about spiritual caregiving in the Legacy context.⁴

All our Losses, All our Grievs by Kenneth R. Mitchell and Herbert Anderson. Westminster John Knox, 1983 remains an excellent classic text. More recently Melissa M. Kelley a very usable resource: *Grief: Contemporary Theology and the Practice of Ministry*. Fortress Press, 2010.

Legacy pastors will be more valuable if they understand best practices for congregational finance and can support the development and administration of a Legacy Covenant in partnership with Lay Leaders.

Over the course of this legacy journey you will have many discussions and amass much material. You will study your own congregation and community and you will need to have reports that become the shared understanding of the church's condition. The basic reports of congregational finance will be needed.⁵ At a minimum a Legacy pastor could help evaluate whether the church's current financial reporting kept up to date with current standards of church finance reporting and help the church consult to get that expertise as needed. There are times when decisions about church closure have been deferred for so long that church leaders are less able to carry out the administrative work needed. While a pastor should not cross the line into making decisions for the congregation, there is a lot of room to assist leaders in preparation of supporting materials for discussion at meetings and for communication.

Once the report's "facts" are clear, they will only be understood with clear communication. Communication often declines in the last chapter of a church's life. One might think it would improve since the congregation becomes smaller and there are fewer with whom to communicate. It is a mistake, however, to assume that the church has become "a committee of the whole." Communication under good conditions is challenging enough. Communication under stressful circumstances often degrades, so this is a time for the very clearest, accessible and transparent communication possible.

Concerning communication, the widespread use of email today in our communities is a blessing and a bane. The use of email has improved our communication by speeding it up, by helping us to communicate more often because it is less expensive than it used to be. But it has also been detrimental in church life when it is used to communicate material more complex than a short message with emoticons.

Access to denominational coaching during the Legacy period is essential, so improve and use your partnership with your Conference staff! If that is unavailable to you then reach out to the other denominational bodies mentioned in the Resource Appendix. These organizations exist to serve you as partners all along the lifecycle of your congregation.

It is important for the Legacy pastor to make the case for this denominational consultation to the congregation and its leaders. The wider church carefully manages two missions in this regard—to strengthen existing local church and to plant new ones or revitalize potential restarts, just as your congregation was planted many years ago. Because of this dual role, defensive suspicion can grow in local churches “that the only reason they want to see us is to steal our money/building.” A Legacy pastor has careful work to do with UCC advisors to build trust and respect as well as transparency. Ultimately, the UCC can be immensely helpful to a congregation in carrying out the hopeful future it feels called to accomplish with its final bequest/s.

The Massachusetts Conference of the UCC has established excellent best practices in this regard. They have identified their coaching and consulting services available to congregations who are evaluating their potential for new models or closing. Encourage your Conference Staff to consult with the Massachusetts Conference Office for more information about their Conference programs. Several Conferences are now offering the New Beginnings Assessment Service available through UCC National Ministries to congregations. Your Conference staff person or the UCC Congregational Assessment, Support and Advancement office www.ucc.org/newbeginnings can tell you how your church might take part in this process.

Of course there are dozens of skills and qualities desired for Legacy pastorates as with any ministry. This list is not exhaustive. We conclude this section with Practices that will sustain a Legacy pastor and ensure that they stay healthy throughout their term.

Excellent self-care⁶ helps keep the pastoral journey on the road and only in the appropriate “rest stops.” Every pastor has the opportunity to strive for a reasonably healthy life, physically and psychospiritually. And most pastors have gone through a period of time in their ministries when their priorities between caring for others and caring for self have gotten seriously out of balance. In that mix of realities rests the challenge of healthy pastoral work. Perhaps the best known study is The Duke Clergy Health Initiative, a \$12 million, seven-year program intended to improve the health and well-being of United Methodist clergy in North Carolina.⁷

No setting of ministry is immune from challenges in self-care, but we know that seemingly intractable personal and congregational crises are not naturally restorative to the storehouse of pastoral health. Each Legacy pastor needs to build their own program of self-care that is tailored to their context, their particular personality make-up, the available resources, and overall health.

● SENSE OF HUMOR AND OTHER SKILLS

The most obvious skills are those of pastoral caregiving. But a couple of leadership tools are mentioned here. According to the Hartford Seminary Institute for Religion Research, “if you ask a woman what she wants in a man, and a congregation what it wants in a pastor, and you’ll likely get the same answer: A sense of humor and an ability to laugh.”

In addition to an authentic religious life, a pastor who can adjust the rheostat of anxiety appropriate to the context is quite suited to Legacy ministry. The pastor’s ability to model buoyancy in facing large life challenges builds the capacity of a legacy congregation to weather the inevitable dustups that will come along in creating and implementing a Legacy Covenant. Whether using Biblical resources that lean on humor in problem resolution or in drawing on contemporary narratives that help us to laugh at ourselves in the right moments, humor is a gift in the toolbox of legacy ministry.

Q: Turn, Turn, Turn—how many decisions does it take to close a church?

A: At a minimum, one decision per person, often times, 3 decisions per person.

Like the “old saw” about changing light bulbs, there is more than one right answer to this teasing question. Every qualified member will have at least one decision to make when they vote yea or nay on the Legacy Covenant at the Annual Meeting. But the answer above acknowledges that congregations may revisit the fundamental questions about change vs close more than once. So a member might vote to stay open at one time and at a subsequent meeting vote to change the vote and close. So might a member vote to close, no....wait...I changed. my mind....vote to stay open....then no, I’m just not able to personally do what would be required of me to keep this church going—we were right the first time. So the answer is just not that simple.

Why do people change their minds about these decisions about their congregations? Well it is just plain hard work. Some congregations will have Antagonists and Protagonists on the proposal that will come to the floor of the meeting, whether it is worded affirmatively or negatively to stay open. If our church had a \$1,000 for every time someone at an Annual Meeting said “just to be the devil’s advocate I’m taking the other side of the debate” the endowment would be much larger.

Email threads and the parking-lot meetings provide unhealthy venues for lobbying for one’s point of view. And the issues at hand can become emotionally loaded like “well I LOVE THIS CHURCH so I’m voting against closure.” Or, this church meant so much to MY family that it would be like spitting on their grave to give up.” Or, “we are being hijacked by _____ who wants our assets....can’t you see that?” So how does the conversation sink to this level?

Just like there are antagonists and protagonists who use side conversations to campaign vigorously for their point of view, there are also Crusaders who use spiritual challenges to shame people into agreement. “Jesus never gave up, did he!” There are the Resuscitators who believe that if they can just call the right pastor next time they will restart the heart of the congregation and it’s a matter of spiritual fortitude to hang in there. There are the Mounted Police who ride in on the proverbial white horse to rescue the church from the “bad guys” who believe the church should/shouldn’t close and they mount organized campaigns to call out long inactive members to vote with them, according to the letter of the law of the Bylaws. I attended one Annual Meeting where an armed, private security guide checked everyone’s membership credentials at the door! And there are the Opportunists who have a particular favorite project to accomplish through the church’s final bequests of assets.

While the Legacy Pastor cannot mitigate these potential derailments all on her/his own, s/he can anticipate these behaviors of human nature and encourage the leadership of the church to pay careful attention to healthy process long before they call for a congregational meeting.

Ideally the congregation will make ONE well informed decision about their future based upon an inclusive, transparent process that exemplifies deeply held values of fairness and equality. Engaging all the members in a conversation about what would create a “level playing field” at the time of the vote is time well spent. See the previous chapter for one method wherein persons ‘earn’ their vote by reasonable participation in quality conversations.

The best leaders in the local church to cultivate during the legacy project are the people who are seen by the congregation as being fair and steady. Even if they have their own opinions that develop through the process of discernment, if they are seen as fair and kind, it will go a long way toward a good outcome.

● PASTORAL ETHICS IN LEGACY CONGREGATIONS

THE CODE OF ETHICS DURING A TIME OF CLOSURE

Unless a congregation is carrying a significant mortgage on their property and the sale of that property is just enough to pay off that note, chances are there will be financial assets for distribution. For some congregations, this bequest will be the largest sum of money their members have ever related to in their lives. Later on in this resource there will be suggestions about ways to approach the decision making on bequests in the Legacy Covenant to ensure that all is done ethically. But we would be remiss if we only looked at that as an ethical issue for the members.

We have come to understand that the church cannot distribute its assets to individuals but must bequeath them to appropriate non-profit corporations. But, in fact, there have been instances where some of those assets have been distributed to the current or former pastor based upon a so-called “deferred compensation” restitution or an extensive severance package.

The Ethics for Authorized Ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ is contained in the Manual on Ministry. In the section below there are specific guidelines that are pertinent to these delicate situations that can arrive in legacy congregations. It reads:

THE ETHICS OF MINISTRY

- I will regard all persons with equal respect and concern and undertake to minister impartially.
- I will honor all confidences shared with me.
- I will not use my position, power, or authority to exploit any person.
- I will not use my position for personal financial gain, nor will I misuse the finances of the institution that I serve.
- I will not perform pastoral services within a parish or for a member of a parish without the consent of the pastor of that parish.
- I will deal honorably with the record of my predecessor and successor.
- I will not, upon my termination and departure from a ministry position, interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor.
- And under a further section there is one more pertinent vow:
- I will be a responsible steward of my personal and family finances. I will honor and accept responsibility for all debts that I incur.

The potential to violate the Code of Ethics under these circumstances requires vigilance and audit. Perhaps the most frequent circumstance arises when a pastor agrees to see out the last days of the congregation in order to support their difficult and courageous decision to close. Congregations that are closing often have severe cash flow challenges. At some point the church and or the Legacy pastor may visit the question—“Rev. Jefferson, could you see your way clear to a reduction or elimination in regular salary in the last 6 months while we have the church property on the market? We don’t see any need to keep pledging when we are closing and we would be glad to say a handsome thank you to you once the building sells.” The unintended consequence of this decision is that the pastor has their hand in the Piggy Bank and has crossed the ethical boundary.

Another scenario has been to give deferred compensation to the Pastor who “stuck with them through thick and thin” and was always willing to take a salary below Conference guidelines. While we are busy paying off all our other obligations, wouldn’t it be good to give Rev. Washington a generous sum to help them out in retirement because we were lousy employers for all these years.”

A third type of situation is observed between churches and pastors that have been engaged in a delicately timed journey. The pastor won't retire too soon leaving the church too poor to be able to pay a new pastor at modern "rates". The church delays its closure by spending down endowment so that it doesn't leave a pastor shy of their retirement benefits and "too old" to be able to find a new call.

Each of these types of scenarios pose a great risk of violation of the Ministerial Codes of Ethics that pastors swear to uphold at our installations, either in spirit or letter. In good conscience, pastors cannot engage in any of these sorts of arrangements.

Neither members nor the pastor have a claim on the accumulated assets of a congregation. Courts have found transfers of church assets upon closure to pastors or members of the congregation to be unlawful, resulting in legal, financial, and tax consequences for those involved in such a transfer. Those assets were given through stewardship giving to the mission and ministry of the church. This can be a painful and emotional realization. It is wise to involve the Conference in any conversations about final compensation arrangement. Having a neutral third party involved can be of great mutual benefit in helping everyone complete the terms of the ministerial call agreement fairly and not based on guilt or backroom deals. Sometimes congregations have no idea that there are other sources of subsidy for those retirees who pension income is inadequate to their need. The last position you want to wrestle with at closing are any lingering questions about ethics and finance. Be sure to use all the expertise available.

● TENDING MEMBERSHIP IN THE FUTURE

Preserving the faith of members at a time when they are experiencing deep disappointment about the demise of the church family sometimes results in a permanent loss of faith and participation by members who give up on all churches as a result of their experience. The pastor and the church can exercise spiritual practices and ethics to ensure that their members don't become spiritual "orphans."

This orphan status can evolve for different reasons. Not every member is able to sustain conversation about an issue that touches and upsets them deeply. They will opt out of participating in the final chapter and disappear. It is important for the pastor to acknowledge this and help those persons to remain a part of the congregation at the margins, for surely this is still their spiritual home. These folks will require pastoral care just as those who remain in the process. Preaching about the challenge of grief and giving permission to withdraw a bit during painful times is good pastoral care. There is a consequence to this—often not being present for the legal votes, but the best outcome would be that every person who was a member of a church that closed would have joined a new faith community that welcomed them with a positive voice and not with a pall of failure. The legacy pastor can be a great ambassador with neighboring faith communities to help this goal be realized.

● MANAGING CAREER ANXIETIES

Legacy Ministry is not for everyone any more than Hospice Ministry is a good fit for any authorized minister. If you have served as a Legacy Pastor and you feel that it has stigmatized your ministry in a negative way, it may be a sign that Legacy ministry may not be your best call this time. Pay attention to your own career anxiety and discuss it with your trusted colleagues and coaches. Beth Gaede's book is an excellent resource for discernment on this matter. When Legacy Ministry has been a good fit, an authorized minister can look forward to the next opportunity to lead a congregation through a healthy process to a celebratory, though bittersweet, conclusion.

In addition to managing one's own career anxiety, the Legacy Pastor has a responsibility as "head of staff" to advocate for the ethical conclusion of employment for any other church staff. This usually would include development of a rubric of separation benefits that is fair, equitable and transparent. As a part of the final Legacy Covenant, this rubric could take into account years of service, terms of call, and other shared factors.

Finally, each Legacy pastorate will be unique and will draw upon every gift and skill the minister possesses in loving God's church and loving God's people.

¹ Paul Nixon. *I Refuse to Lead a Dying Church* Pilgrim Press, 2007

² In the UCC a settled pastor is a duly called and installed pastor, in comparison to an interim or transition pastor who will serve for a designated term.

³ See Chapter 2 discussion of New Beginnings Assessment Service <http://www.ucc.org/new-beginnings/>

⁴ Beth Ann Gaede, *Ending with Hope*. Alban Institute 2002.

Jaco Hamman, *When Steeples Cry*. Pilgrim Press 2005

⁵ The basic reports are a Statement of Financial Activities (P&L or budget report)
and Statement of Financial Position (Balance Sheet)

⁶ Jones, Kirk Byron, *Rest in the Storm: Self-Care Strategies for Clergy and Other Caregivers* Judson Press 2001.

Rochelle Melander and Harold Eppley, *The Spiritual Leader's Guide to Self-Care* Alban Institute 2002

⁷ <http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/clergy-health-initiative>

⁸ http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/quick_question35.html



CHAPTER FIVE

CHURCH BUILDINGS AS LIVING LEGACIES

PATRICK DUGGAN

● TRANSITIONING TO NEW LIFE: “IT IS FINISHED!” (BUT IT’S NOT OVER.)

In some church traditions Good Friday is observed through a community worship called “The Seven Last Sayings of Jesus”. Typically, this is a gathering of church folk from several congregations in a given community. The liturgy includes a series of seven brief homilies from different speakers on each of Jesus’ last words from the cross. Seven Last Sayings gatherings are powerful remembrances of what Jesus said before his violent death, what these words meant to the witnesses at the cross, and what these words mean to us today.

“It is finished” from John 19:30 is the sixth of the seven last words of Jesus. This was Jesus’ pronouncement that he had completed the assignment for which God had fashioned his earthly body to do. The prophecies were fulfilled. The Word had become flesh. The world had seen His glory. The Gospel had been implanted in the 12 disciples and the extended band of Jesus’ followers. Now, with goals accomplished and objectives achieved, Jesus was ready to die. Jesus’ death would lead to the sending of the Holy Spirit and a greater fulfilment of God’s intended mission carried forth through the yet unborn church.

Did you notice that “It is finished!” is the sixth of seven sayings? The irony of John 19:30 is that if it were absolutely true, the bible would end right there. The story would be over. There would be nothing left to talk about. But as we know, the bible does not end in John 19. Neither does the life and work of Jesus. The Book continues through the Revelation of John. And the life of Jesus continues today and forever more.

Resurrection is the reason that Jesus’ story does not end. Christians believe in the powerful idea that Jesus died and lived again. From the biblical accounts we know that when Jesus rose from the dead, his followers recognized him, but he was not the same. He died in one form and rose again in another.

● THE LOCAL CHURCH & RESURRECTION

The end of the life of a congregation is very painful. However, the end of ministry and mission in a particular community can be viewed as a part of the continuing witness of Christ. The first local church started, with the disciples’ prayers from the upper room and tongues of fire from the Holy Spirit, does not exist today. Yet every local church can trace its spiritual origins to that New Testament tradition. And like every local congregation that once existed and is no more, unless the Lord returns first, every local church in existence today will one day pass on its legacy to believers yet unborn.

● PLANNING THE LEGACY OF A LOCAL CHURCH’S REAL ESTATE

The idea of resurrection may be comforting for congregations in the throes of a life-ending transition. But in the midst of the pain of loss, how may a community of believers plan and act proactively to bring about resurrection? How should a small group of laypersons approach the decisions that must be made regarding the future of worship space, community center or other facilities owned by the transitioning local church?

There are several ways that a local congregation may transition church-owned real estate (worship facilities, parsonages, school buildings, vacant land, etc.) so that the Word and work of Jesus Christ may continue. The following ideas are shared as conversation starters for local congregations to use as they consider several options on the disposition of these assets.¹ Location specific factors (property conditions, demographics, neighborhood needs) that are critical to the decision-making process are beyond the scope of this guide. Boards and officers of local congregations should consult with Conference ministers, United Church of Christ Local Church Ministries staff, and other professionals as early as possible in the decision-making process.

THREE WAYS TO THINK ABOUT TRANSITIONING TO NEW LIFE

There are three possibilities that a church in transition to closure may consider for the disposition of its real estate. The church may:

1. **Donate:** transfer ownership of real estate without a sale.
2. **Re-Purpose:** redevelop its real estate in a manner that advances mission and/or ministry in a new way.
3. **Sell:** transfer real estate ownership through a sale and designate proceeds from the sale in a way that advances mission and/or ministry in a new way.

The “how to” for each of these options along with benefits and disadvantages are explained in greater detail below.

DONATING CHURCH REAL ESTATE

The donation of church real estate is an option that congregations consider when the desire is for the property to remain as a locus of ministry and mission. The thinking may be that perhaps a new ministry may come and advance the Gospel with greater results and membership growth than the transitioning church has been able to achieve. The transitioning church may see donation of its real estate as a way to support a fledgling new ministry.

Once the church makes a decision to donate its real estate, the local church must identify a recipient of the donation. The church may decide to donate its real estate to the Conference, another UCC church, a congregation from another Christian denomination (or other religious faith), or any other organization, in accordance with applicable State and local laws. Once the recipient is identified, the church must transfer to the recipient the title deed for each property to be donated. Typically, a qualified real estate professional or an attorney is retained to assist in this process.

BENEFITS OF DONATING CHURCH REAL ESTATE

- **Simplicity**—If a church decides to donate its property in an “as is” condition, the transaction costs are minimal.
- **Continued Witness**—If the property is donated to the Conference, another church, or an organization that advances the Gospel or another social purpose, the mission of the transitioning church may continue in a new way.
- **Community**—If the local church designates that the property not be sold by the recipient, the value of the real estate remains in the community.

The donor church may ask the recipient to agree to restrict future uses of the property to purposes that align with or (at a minimum) do not disrespect the mission and values of the transitioning church. An agreement may be prepared that specifies restricted uses of the property in as much detail as may be desired. Once the agreement is signed by donor and recipient and registered with the appropriate legal authorities, the recipient would be legally bound to the restricted uses.

POSSIBLE CONCERNS WHEN DONATING CHURCH REAL ESTATE

- **Prevailing Conditions**—In parts of the country with declining population trends, high operating costs, and challenging economic conditions there are higher incidences of church closures. These regions have many underutilized and/or abandoned church properties that make the reasons for donating unrealistic.
- **Unrestricted Use**—The transitioning church may find it difficult to negotiate restrictions given prevailing conditions. If donated without restrictions, the property may be sold by the recipient at any time, or used for any purpose, including those contrary to the donor's mission.
- **Uncertain Legacy**—If the donor church is unable to negotiate restricted future use, the possibility of a future sale of the property by the recipient is higher. In this case, the donor church would have no possibility of advancing its mission beyond the church closure. In addition, there would be no certainty that the accumulated value of formerly owned real estate would be used for a purpose that aligns with the mission of the donor church.

RE-PURPOSING CHURCH REAL ESTATE FOR NEW WAYS OF JUSTICE & WITNESS

Sometimes the ending of a local church ministry may be due in part to declining economic conditions, rapidly changing demographics, or other transformational developments in the community served by the church. An influx of recent immigrants, an outflow of affluent residents, an increase in the number of low income families, or a growing lack of affordable housing are some examples of these changes. As the church plans for its transition, church leaders may consider using the existing property in a new way that glorifies God through the promotion of justice, peace, and community economic development.

This may be an option to consider if leaders of the transitioning church understand that to use their church property exclusively for religious purposes may not be the highest and best use of their real estate. Perhaps a new use may serve to bless and transform the community in ways that advance Jesus' goals as expressed in Matthew 25 (food justice, advancing health, housing, services to formerly incarcerated, etc.). Or perhaps a different use may bring about some other positive social impact (disaster relief, reducing poverty, creating jobs with living wages for low and moderate income residents, enhancing or improving the environment or the local quality of life, or otherwise transforming the community to the glory of God).

The decision to re-purpose church real estate is not one that should be determined solely by the leaders and members of a congregation. To determine the feasibility of this course of action, a number of questions must be addressed, namely:

- What new use(s) would the existing church property best serve?
- How would this use benefit the community over the short, intermediate and long term?
- How would the new use advance the former mission of the transitioning church and advance the Gospel?
- Would this new use meet a currently unmet need? If not, why should we do something that others are already doing?
- Who will take on the redevelopment of the existing church property?
- What will be the role, if any, of our church, the Conference or some other setting of the United Church of Christ in the re-purposing of the church real estate?
- How do we ensure that the church legacy is advanced and honored through the re-purposed real estate?

Given the complexity of this way forward, it is strongly advised that transitioning churches considering this option should consult with their Conference Minister and seek the assistance of community and economic development professionals. The United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund is available to help churches in transition with the exploratory and decision-making process.

Once the decision is made to re-purpose church real estate for new ways of justice and witness, the church must identify and/or assemble a planning team to move the process forward. Working with the planning team, the transitioning church must articulate in great detail the proposed re-use of the property. The planning team must then determine the feasibility of the project. Once the project is deemed to be feasible, the planning team will work with legal and professional real estate professionals to proceed, on behalf of the church, with the selection of the new owner/operator of the church real estate. The new owner/operator should be identified through a structured selection process, such as a request for proposals. This will ensure that the new owner/operator meets all of the requirements to repurpose the property for the justice and witness purpose(s) identified by the transitioning church.

In the sale of a church property for a new justice and witness purpose, the church must consider the proposed new use in determining the appropriate sales price. For example, let's say that the church identifies that the community they serve has a large population of low income people living with HIV/AIDS, and that services to this population are inadequate. A decision is made by the transitioning church that the best and highest new use of the property, therefore, would be to build an affordable housing development for low and moderate income people living with HIV/AIDS. The development would include a wellness center and community space for spiritual, life and career counselling, coaching and training. Here's how the sales price of the real estate factors into this redevelopment.

For the new property owners, the carrying costs (mortgage, taxes, insurance, utilities, etc.) of the property are usually among the largest costs for the organization. To keep rents affordable in the housing for low income people living with HIV/AIDS, for example, the carrying costs of the property must be lower than typical market rate housing. The cost of the church real estate (the selling price set by the church) is a significant factor in determining the new owners' carrying costs. The transitioning church has the leverage to adjust the sales price of the real estate so that the new owners may offer to the end users (low income people living with HIV/AIDS) a high quality facility at an affordable price.

BENEFITS TO RE-PURPOSING CHURCH REAL ESTATE FOR NEW WAYS OF JUSTICE & WITNESS

- Continued Witness—If chosen with care, a re-use of church property can be a creative new way to use a building or a property to witness to the love of God in Christ Jesus.
- Community—One re-purposed church property can be the catalyst to transforming an entire community. In both spiritual and material ways, thousands of people may be blessed.
- Legacy—The love, community care and value that the church provided to the community in former days would be revitalized and continued for decades to come. In addition, the church may find itself able to not only re-purpose the property but direct possible surplus funds from the sale of the property to other worthy causes.

POSSIBLE CONCERNS WHEN RE-PURPOSING CHURCH REAL ESTATE FOR NEW WAYS OF JUSTICE & WITNESS

- Complexity—The transitioning church must weigh many factors in making the decision to re-purpose church real estate, engage experts and professionals who are not a part of the transitioning faith community, and make decisions on price, future use, and community impact.
- A Use Other than Worship—The transitioning church may not want to consider any other future use but worship for their sacred space.
- Outcome Dependent on Others—Ultimately, the outcome of the re-purposed church property may not rest with the transitioning church.

SELLING CHURCH REAL ESTATE & DESIGNATING SALE PROCEEDS

The sale of church real estate is more challenging than donating it but not nearly as complicated as re-purposing. In addition, the sale of church real estate creates an opportunity for the church to make a twofold positive impact through its transition. First, the transitioning church may provide a new church or other organization with property that can be used for a mission-based purpose. Secondly, the transitioning church may use the proceeds of the sale to support the continuing ministry of their Conference, the broader United Church of Christ (through Our Church's Wider Mission), and/or to support new and renewing ministry in their community or anywhere in the United Church of Christ. (Conference Ministers are equipped to assist transitioning churches in determining how best to direct real estate sale proceeds.) The church may even consider using sale proceeds to make a major gift to the United Church of Christ Church Building and Loan Fund.

Since the first church loan funds were raised by the American Congregational Union in 1853, the United Church of Christ and its predecessor denominations have helped thousands of new and renewing churches launch new ministries and build places of worship, community centers, schools, parsonages/rectories, libraries and other church buildings. Today, the UCC Church Building & Loan Fund is in partnership with more than 80 congregations in the financing and construction of new church buildings. When a major gift is made to the UCC Church Building & Loan Fund, 100% of the gift is used to assist new or renewing churches in the planning or financing of worship facilities, fellowship halls, schools, parsonages and other church-owned buildings.

One of the most exciting and challenging times in the life of a new church is the first 5 years of financing and constructing a new church building. More than 95% of churches are able to make it through this early phase and continue to thrive in ministry. But a few churches struggle for years with a perpetual shortage of funds, late loan payments, and an inability to pay staff salaries on time. With the infusion of resources for a down payment, to complete construction, or to offset 6, 9 or 12 months of loan payments, most of these churches can make it through the early years and move to a sustainable operating model.

The donation of proceeds from the sale of a transitioning church to support a new or renewing church would be a creative and powerful way to advance the Gospel mission. Sale proceeds may be used to support a new church near the transitioning church, or a new or renewing church anywhere in the United Church of Christ. The Church Building & Loan Fund can facilitate this process by identifying the recipient church(es), work with the transitioning church's attorney to coordinate all of the legal documents, and ensure that the donated funds are used for the designated purpose. No costs (other than legal and other fees related to the transaction) would be incurred by the transitioning church, ensuring that nearly all of the proceeds designated would go toward advancing ministry. Possible uses of funds designated for new and renewing churches include:

- Down payment assistance or mortgage relief for a growing church worship facility, community facility or other church building
- Special mortgages for new construction, land or building purchase
- Purchase of a new church building
- Flexible financing for faith-based community development (Matthew 25 purpose)

BENEFITS TO SELLING CHURCH REAL ESTATE & DESIGNATING SALE PROCEEDS

- Impact—The sale of church real estate, after expenses are paid, could yield a significant sum of money for the transitioning church to direct to other mission and ministry purposes.
- Flexibility—The church may designate proceeds of a sale of its real estate to their Conference, Our Church's Wider Mission, the UCC Church Building and Loan Fund, to a new church start, and/or to any religious or charitable organization(s).
- Legacy—Through the designation of sale proceeds from church real estate, the transitioning church may express its heartfelt desires, hopes and dreams for the future. Through supporting new ministry, advancing

ing the mission of the broader church, or providing resources to important social causes, the transitioning church can help ensure the future impact of Christianity.

POSSIBLE CONCERNS WHEN SELLING CHURCH REAL ESTATE & DESIGNATING SALE PROCEEDS

- **Timing**—Depending on the peculiarities of each local market, the sale of church real estate can be a lengthy process that a transitioning church is unwilling to endure. If this is the case, the church should consult with the Conference Minister on ways that a sale may be executed on the church's behalf.
- **Too Many Choices**—With so many worthy causes and ways to advance mission and ministry using proceeds from a sale, the church may find it difficult to narrow the choices.
- **Abstract**—There is a major difference between advancing ministry and mission through a sustained witness in a local community as compared to doing so through the donation of money. For this reason, the church may not be convinced of the viability of this choice.

USE PROFESSIONAL HELP WISELY

These options are just a few ways a United Church of Christ congregation that is likely to close may choose to proceed with the disposition of church-owned property and buildings. These ideas are presented to help clergy and lay leaders begin the development of a final plan. Conference Ministers are equipped to be the primary resource to UCC congregations for assistance in the delicate process of a church closing. Local church leaders may consider the use of legal, accounting and/or other professional assistance at the appropriate time in the planning process before final decisions are made. Church leaders should be mindful of the costs of such professional help, only dealing with professionals that are ethical, honest, and transparent, highly recommended and versed in the polity and tradition of United Church of Christ congregations. Any such professional should be generous with their time prior to entering into a fee-paid relationship with the local church.

CHURCH REAL ESTATE EXPERTISE IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

With roots in all four predecessor churches that formed the United Church of Christ, the United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund (CB&LF) has assisted thousands of congregations with real estate transactions since 1853. As a part of Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ, CB&LF offers and promotes financing for the purchase, construction or renovation of church buildings, meeting houses, parsonages/rectories, and other facilities used by churches of the United Church of Christ (or by any Christian church without limitation to sect, denomination or name.) Because of the high demand for church-owned real estate expertise, CB&LF now offers no-cost real estate advisory assistance to churches that enter into the Legacy Program. For additional information, please contact your Conference Minister, call CB&LF at 216-736-3833, or visit the CB&LF website at cblfund.org.

¹ The term “church real estate” or “church-owned real estate” in this chapter refers specifically to facilities used for worship and typical church-oriented uses (worship space, fellowship space, parsonages, etc.). The advice here may not apply to church-owned schools, housing developments, office buildings, and other properties. Transitioning churches with extensive real estate holdings should consult with attorneys, licensed real estate professionals, Conference Ministers and/or the Church Building & Loan Fund to assist in the decision-making process.



CHAPTER SIX

FINANCIAL ASSETS AS LIVING LEGACIES

CHERI LOVELL

Imagine a church where only a handful of members still attend regularly. What was once a thriving community of faith can no longer afford to call a regular pastor or even maintain their building. Another organization— or perhaps a developer—has expressed interest in their property. Our small church doesn't want to close, but they know they must.

Or imagine another church that can still afford to pay their pastor—but they're drawing on their endowment for most of the church's day-to-day operations. The church members know their situation cannot be sustained for many more years, and they know their future doesn't look bright. Appropriately, the church has begun to question if using their endowment in this manner truly reflects good stewardship of the assets that were entrusted to them by generations of past members. Has the time come to remove the church from the life support offered by their endowment?

The good news: the voices of these struggling churches can continue to be heard. Their presence can continue to be felt for generations beyond their own, even after their doors have closed.

As a Living Legacy Church in partnership with United Church Funds, ministry can live on even after the church's corporate life ends.

As the membership of our church prepares to move on, the decisions the community makes about the distribution of their assets can impact the wider church for years to come. While many churches choose simply to turn over their assets to their Conference, others want to see their legacy continue in ways that reflect the life of the church that was. Without the formal structure of an operating church, however, members must identify a trusted resource who will manage their funds, enable those funds to grow into the future, and distributed the funds in a manner appropriate to the church's desires.

With the pool of funds remaining after the sale of property and payment of final expenses, a Living Legacy Church could:

- Pay a chaplain/pastor to serve the remaining members of the church
- Help fund a new church start in the community
- Provide ongoing support for ministry at a sister church
- Make an annual gift to a local hunger program or domestic violence shelter
- Offer a scholarship at a local college, a seminary or camperships at a UCC camp
- Reduce seminarian debt burdens for active pastors in small churches
- Support an Association or Conference program
- Sustain denominational programs for local or wider church ministries
- and more!

THE LIVING LEGACY PROGRAM AT UNITED CHURCH FUNDS

For over 100 years, United Church Funds (UCF) has served the ministries of the United Church of Christ by providing just that trusted resource. While primarily known as a manager of endowment and other long-term assets,

UCF also serves as trustee for funds created by both individuals and organizations. Perhaps the best known fund: The Richard & Helen Brown Endowment for Pastoral Scholarships—created by a couple who wanted to further pastoral education, who identified UCF as trustee for their assets, and whose legacy has supported education for hundreds of pastors and seminarians.

For churches looking for a trustee who will faithfully manage their remaining assets upon closure, UCF offers options specifically designed for Living Legacy churches—

① THE LIVING LEGACY ENDOWMENT

A lot of small funds are nice—but a large pooled fund can make a big difference. The Living Legacy Endowment allows closing churches to pool their resources under one umbrella with other churches in similar situations. Together, these Living Legacy churches achieve wider and deeper impact across the denomination.

Each Living Legacy Church in this pooled fund will be recognized in the fund's ongoing Honor Roll, in The Living Legacy Endowment's annual report, and at each meeting of the UCC's General Synod. Upon contributing their assets to this fund, each Living Legacy Church will enjoy the option of contributing to the general Living Legacy Endowment that will distribute funds where they are most needed, or designating their preference among three funds within the Endowment—

INNOVATIONS IN MINISTRY

As generations come and go, the needs of the church change. With deep and close ties to the United Church of Christ's missions and ministries, United Church Funds remains informed of the range of needs and priorities across the denomination—an ideal position from which to support carefully selected special initiatives, ministry innovations, and a range of ministry opportunities that might not otherwise be possible without the support of Living Legacy churches. Not intended to provide basic operational support to the denomination or Conferences, this fund will choose recipients from both applicants and direct nominations, with a strong emphasis on local churches and their related ministries.

PASTORAL SUPPORT

In contributing to this fund within The Living Legacy Endowment, a Living Legacy Church helps support several priorities for pastoral ministry. The primary emphasis for this fund will be providing chaplains and/or pastors to closing churches, followed by support for Conference-nominated pastors who need assistance with seminarian debt. Depending on funding availability, the Pastoral Support fund may also offer scholarships for General Synod attendance to pastors who would not otherwise be able to participate.

NEW CHURCH NURTURE

While new life may not be possible for a closing church in its present form, a Living Legacy Church can water the seed of new life for a new church start. In partnership with Conference staff and the UCC's Local Church Ministries, this fund might help support the first few years of a pastor's salary, assist with rent on a gathering space, or help fund other start-up expenses. Recipients will be chosen from both applicants and direct nominations, with a preference given to communities with Living Legacy benefactors.

② TRUST ACCOUNT

For Living Legacy churches that desire to leave a fund for a specific purpose, an individual Trust Account offers an alternative to turning funds over to another entity outside the UCC. The Living Legacy Church would provide initial guidance on the ministry or program they would like their fund to support; then as trustee, United Church Funds would assume ongoing investment and management responsibilities in perpetuity.

Let's say that years ago, a closing church had founded a food bank that over time became a larger, professionally managed, community program. To honor the legacy of its longstanding relationship with the food bank, the church might choose a trust to direct proceeds to the food bank in the Living Legacy Church's name. Should the food bank cease to operate, the funds in the trust would continue to be distributed in an appropriate manner that reflected the Living Legacy Church's larger goals — perhaps supporting programs that seek to eliminate food insecurity or alleviate poverty.

③ NAMED ENDOWMENT

For gifts of \$1 million or more, a Living Legacy church can create a named endowment for a particular purpose with more specific spending guidelines. As trustee, United Church Funds would manage all aspects of investment, management and distribution in perpetuity, in accordance with the Named Endowment's policy. United Church Funds would collaborate with the Living Legacy church to ensure the ministry support designation(s) are defined broadly enough that the church would continue its positive impact for generations into the future.

The Richard & Helen Brown Endowment for Pastoral Scholarships offers a good illustration of how a Named Endowment would work. Established with an initial gift of \$5 million, The Brown Endowment appointed United Church Funds as trustee to invest, manage and distribute funds as appropriate, under the guidance of a special committee of UCF's Board of Directors. Years after its founding, The Brown Endowment has grown to over \$7 million, and has helped hundreds of pastors attend seminary and a range of continuing pastoral education events.

BECOMING A LIVING LEGACY CHURCH

Once a church has made the difficult decision to close and become a Living Legacy Church, church leadership must begin the distribution of church assets. As perhaps at no other time in the church's history, financial decisions may be subject to increased scrutiny. Be sure to seek out legal counsel and read the next chapter on Legal Issues in Church Dissolution and Merger. While a range of resources can give churches ideas about distributing church furnishings and equipment, the UCC's financial ministries stand ready to answer questions and offer guidance about preparing to close accounts and transfer financial assets. The following suggestions offer an overview of the tasks for which church leaders need to prepare. These suggestions should be considered along with the state law requirements governing the dissolution of a corporation in the church's state. Remember that a church must satisfy all of its liabilities prior to transferring remaining assets.

1. DETERMINE WHO WILL BE RESPONSIBLE FOR ESSENTIAL ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

As church members begin to move on, the tasks they once completed may go undone. Be sure to document the tasks that remain, and receive commitments from members to accomplish those tasks. While the treasurer's role may be obvious, other roles may be less visible. Did someone mow the church lawn or shovel the sidewalk in the winter? Who checked the building after services to ensure lights were turned off and doors were locked? Was a

member responsible for opening the church for groups that use your facilities? Have renters or other building users been informed of your plans to close? Involve all of your members in crafting a complete list of tasks that must be attended until your last day.

2. DISCUSS PLANS FOR THE CHURCH'S CLOSE WITH YOUR INSURANCE AGENT

Until the final documents are signed and sealed, your church will remain liable for activities held on the premises and the condition of its property. Your insurance agent will be able to assist you in determining the appropriate coverage to maintain through your final closing.

3. PREPARE A COMPLETE AND DETAILED RECORD OF CHURCH ASSETS

Depending on the size and variety of church assets—from building and grounds to bank and investment accounts—a complete assessment will identify where assets are held, ensure all relevant legal documents are in order, and prepare a complete inventory of all assets. As part of this inventory, make sure the church has decided how each account will be distributed upon dissolution. Remember: no church member may profit from the dissolution of their church, and funds may not be distributed among members in any way.

4. ESTABLISH THE APPROPRIATE ACCOUNT WITH UNITED CHURCH FUNDS

If your church has decided to participate in UCF's Living Legacy Program, UCF will be pleased to assist you in completing the documentation required to transfer your assets.

The Living Legacy Endowment—A church wishing to contribute its assets to this fund will find the process quite simple. Church leaders will complete a brief application that will identify the church name(s) to be recognized in the years to come, as well as the sub-fund selection and percentages (if applicable). For instance, a church may wish to designate 50% of its assets to be held in the Pastoral Support fund, while the remainder may be undesignated and held in the general Living Legacy Endowment.

Trust or Named Endowment—A church that desires to create a trust account or named fund will need to seek advice in creating the legal documentation to establish the account. UCF's counsel may assist in this process, which upon completion will permit UCF to open a trust relationship account into which the church's financial assets will be received.

5. SELL PROPERTY OR OTHER PHYSICAL ASSETS AS APPROPRIATE

Real estate professionals and the UCC's own Church Building & Loan Fund can help churches determine the salability of their building and understand the process of sale. Once the sale has closed and final expenses have been paid, the financial assets will be transferred as the church has determined.

6. TRANSFER ENDOWMENT OR OTHER FINANCIAL ASSETS

For funds being contributed to a UCF Living Legacy program, UCF will assist church leaders with the paperwork and documentation required to transfer financial assets into the selected UCF program—even if a church's endowment is managed by another investment manager.

In becoming a Living Legacy Church, a community of faith takes a bold and courageous step to enable a new future. Remember that you are never alone—your partners in ministry and faith stand ready to assist you in any way they can.



CHAPTER SEVEN

LEGAL ISSUES IN CHURCH DISSOLUTION & MERGER

HEATHER KIMMEL

The purpose of this chapter is to provide incorporated local churches¹ with a basic overview of steps that may be required should a church decide to dissolve, merge with another church, or sell its assets. Laws governing these various transactions involve federal laws applying to nonprofit organizations as well as state laws. Failure to adhere to these laws can affect a church's tax-exempt status and may result in post-transaction liability for officers and directors of the church. The applicable laws will vary from state to state, and this memorandum should not be considered legal advice or a comprehensive guide to the legal requirements for engaging in such transactions. Churches contemplating dissolution, merger, or sale are advised to seek experienced local counsel in their own jurisdictions well in advance of the transaction. This is especially important when amendments to a church's constitution or by-laws may be necessary, or the church is subject to deed restrictions that may make transfer of property complicated.

I. CORPORATE DISSOLUTION

Churches that are incorporated under state law must follow their state's requirements for dissolution. These requirements will vary by state, but will likely involve the following steps.

A. DISSOLUTION STEPS

1. Voting members must adopt a resolution of dissolution.

The resolution of dissolution is generally proposed and adopted by the governing body of the church before the church members vote on it. The voting members of the church must be notified in writing of a meeting to vote on dissolution. The number of votes required to adopt the resolution of dissolution may vary by state law and also by the church's bylaws. For example, some states may specify that at least half of voting members present at the meeting must vote in favor of adopting the resolution. But a church's bylaws may require a supermajority vote, such as a two-thirds vote of all members, in favor of the resolution on dissolution. So long as the state law permits a church to specify a different number of voters for approval, the church bylaws must be followed.

2. Creditors of the church must be notified of the dissolution and all corporate debts must be paid.

The church must notify all creditors that the church will be dissolving. The church must pay all of its debts prior to dissolution. The church should keep detailed records of the creditors notified and the debts paid.

3. Notify the state department of taxation and other applicable entities that the church will be dissolving.

States have laws requiring all dissolving business entities to notify the state department of taxation and other departments, like the department of jobs and family services, to ensure that businesses do not owe taxes or unemployment insurance contributions. While churches may not be subject to certain taxes or to unemployment insurance requirements, they must still follow the procedures outlined under state law to notify these departments that the church is closing and avoid being subject to any future assessments or penalties. Some states require that a business that is closing receive a certificate from the department of taxation that confirms the business has no outstanding tax liabilities before the state will accept a business's articles of dissolution.

4. Remaining assets must be distributed to a tax-exempt organization as set forth in the church's governing documents.

If there are assets left over after paying creditors, the assets must be disposed of as indicated in the church's governing documents. A church's governing documents should specify that any remaining assets will be distributed to a named tax-exempt organization, such as the Conference in which the church is located. In this way, the church's members can ensure that the assets of the church will continue to support a purpose substantially similar to the mission of the dissolving church.

Although churches are not required apply to the IRS for tax-exempt status, churches are required to meet many of the same obligations as other organizations that are tax-exempt under I.R.C. § 501(c)(3). This includes ensuring that tax-exempt assets remain permanently tax-exempt. Accordingly, under no circumstances may assets of a dissolving church be transferred or paid to any individual or to a non-exempt organization. The IRS requires that all tax-exempt organizations have a provision in their governing documents that upon dissolution, their assets will be distributed to another tax-exempt organization. In some states, the operation of state laws will accomplish this purpose, but in others, a church needs an adequate dissolution provision in its organizing document to satisfy its obligations under I.R.C. § 501(c)(3). The following is an example of a clause that will satisfy the IRS:

Upon the dissolution of (church name), or disaffiliation of (church name) with the United Church of Christ, assets shall be distributed to the _____ Conference of the United Church of Christ, or to Local Church Ministries, A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ or its successor organization, which are organizations with an exempt purpose under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Changes to this bylaw require a vote in favor by two-thirds of the members of the congregation.

Some churches may have real property that is subject to mortgages, restrictive covenants, or deed restrictions that govern to whom the property may be transferred or the use of the property. Additionally, some churches may have provisions in their governing documents that create a trust on the real property in favor of another setting of the national church or another organization. Ideally, the effect of these restrictions should be determined well in advance of a church's decision to dissolve so that appropriate measures can be taken to avoid or mitigate undesirable outcomes. These situations are heavily dependent on the exact language of the restriction and on state law, and a church should consult with a local experienced attorney for advice on these matters.

5. Prepare the articles of dissolution.

The articles of dissolution (sometimes called the certificate of dissolution) must contain certain information required by state law. This generally includes the name of the church corporation, a statement that a resolution of dissolution was adopted and the manner in which such resolution was adopted, the names and addresses of the officers and directors, the identity of the statutory agent, and the date of dissolution. The articles of dissolution may also need to include a representation that all debts have been paid and that all assets have been transferred to an appropriate organization specified by the church's organizing documents. The articles may have to be signed by an officer or director of the corporation. The secretary of state may have a form for this purpose.

6. File the articles of dissolution.

The articles of dissolution are filed with the secretary of state's office in the state where the church is incorporated. The secretary of state may issue some acknowledgment of the dissolution, or may indicate that the church is dissolved in its business records. The church may be required to publish a notification of its dissolution in a local publication.

Generally, the board of directors continues to act as the board of directors until the business affairs of the corporation are completely wound up. The board should ensure that this happens as speedily as possible.

B. CONTINUED LIABILITY OF THE CHURCH AFTER DISSOLUTION

1. Liability of Officers and Directors

In general, officers, directors, and members of an incorporated church are not liable for the obligations of the church corporation, either before or after dissolution. An exception exists, however, where an officer or director has personally guaranteed any liability of the church corporation. Such a debt, if not paid, remains the personal obligation of the officer or director guaranteeing it.

A number of circumstances, too numerous to list here, exist under which officers and directors may face personal liability for their conduct both while the church is operating as a going concern and after dissolution. For example, officers and directors may be liable for obligations of the church if they voted or agreed to a distribution of church assets upon dissolution without ensuring that all debts of the church were paid. Officers and directors may also be liable for voting or agreeing to a distribution of assets that is contrary to law or to the church's bylaws (either upon dissolution or otherwise). State laws on the liability of officers and directors for particular conduct, such as gross negligence or reckless misconduct, may vary. Some states may place limitations on this liability.

2. Liability of the Church

After properly dissolving, a church may face claims for injuries that occurred prior to its dissolution but of which the church was not informed until after dissolution. If the assets of the church have been properly distributed, the person bringing the claim may have no recourse unless the church had an insurance policy in effect at the time that covered the claim. Insurance policies vary widely in whether they are "claims made" policies, which cover claims while the policy is in effect regardless of when the injury occurred, or "occurrence" policies, which cover injuries that occurred while the policy was in effect. Dissolving churches should ensure that copies of the church's insurance policies are permanently maintained in a safe location.

II. CHURCH MERGER

A church may choose to merge with another church. This process also requires a board resolution and a congregational vote. When churches merge, usually one church, the "surviving entity," absorbs another church, the "merging entity." The resulting combined church is a single entity that is responsible for all of the liabilities of both churches that were not satisfied prior to the merger. Because the resulting entity remains responsible for all liabilities of both churches, churches contemplating merger should engage in a discernment process that includes not only considering whether the church congregations could successfully join in worship and mission, but also a legal and financial due diligence process designed to fully inform both churches about the true state of each church's business affairs. Church merger may be an option for a church that has liabilities that prevent the church from dissolving under state law, such as an unresolved lawsuit or a mortgage on real property. Each church contemplating merger should retain a separate attorney to assist with the due diligence process and advise the church on the merger agreement and the articles of merger that the state will require.

III. CHURCH ASSET PURCHASE

A church may choose to purchase the assets of another church, or to sell some or all of its assets to another church. The church purchasing assets may or may not absorb the congregation of the selling church, depending on the goals and vitality of both churches. A church selling all of its assets dissolves after the sale through the formal dissolution process described above.

Assets include both real estate and personal property of the church, such as computers, vehicles, and furniture. Often, liabilities are attached to assets that either travel with the asset or must be satisfied prior to the sale. For

example, a church may have an outstanding mortgage loan on its building. The selling church must either pay the loan prior to the sale of the building, or the purchasing church must assume the loan. For this reason, creditors holding security interests in assets must be notified of the sale and may have the right to approve or reject the terms of the asset purchase agreement.

An asset sale may be a useful option for a church that wishes to dissolve but does not have cash available to pay its debts prior to dissolution. The asset sale will free up cash, allowing the church to satisfy its outstanding debts so that it may dissolve under state law. Churches contemplating an asset sale for this purpose should consult an attorney and an accountant to ensure that the appropriate legal and financial requirements are met.

¹ Unincorporated churches may dissolve according to their bylaws. Unincorporated churches should ensure that assets are distributed to a non-profit organization to maintain a tax-exempt status.



A LASTING LEGACY BIBLE STUDY IN THREE PARTS

KATE HUEY

PART I:

FAITH: SETTING OUT ON THE JOURNEY, LIVING BY TRUST

GENESIS 15:1-6

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” He brought him outside and said, “Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

HEBREWS 11:1-3, 8-13A

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren—because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.” All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them.

MATTHEW 13:31-32

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

LUKE 17:6

The Lord replied, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and planted in the sea,’ and it would obey you.”

EPHESIANS 3:18-21

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.

REFLECTION:

A visit to the national offices of the United Church of Christ here in Cleveland usually includes a tour of the Church House. A very special part of the tour connects visitors with the wider church of our past as well, our ancestors in faith who struggled to end the terrible sin of slavery in this country. Every tour lingers for a while in the Amistad Chapel, named for the ship that carried African captives on their way to slavery in America, captives who took over that ship and sailed along the Eastern coast of the United States until they were captured off Long Island. It was Congregationalists in New England who provided spiritual, legal and other support to these captives, helping to lead to their freedom. Their stand was not necessarily popular in their own day, but they had the kind of trust in God that enabled them to see beyond the laws and practices of their time, past the risks that they faced, to a better time of justice and freedom for all, whether they themselves lived to see it or not. In fact, the generosity and the foresight, the vision, of those Congregationalists were so great that the funds they provided not only started schools for freed slaves long ago but also continue to support many justice and evangelism ministries of the United Church of Christ in our own day.

LOOKING UP AT THE STARS

The Amistad Chapel is indeed beautiful: all glass and wood and stone, and a canopy over the table with brilliant little lights against a dark ceiling, like the stars in the sky at night, like the stars that Abram saw, when God told him to look up at the sky and to count those stars if he could.

Of course, Abram and Sarai (later called Abraham and Sarah) are also our ancestors in faith, although, at this point, they can't imagine that they're going to be anybody's ancestors at all. This elderly couple is what they used to call "barren," and in those days, that meant more than just childless, because children represented much more than someone to love and care for, someone to delight in. Children were a sign that you were, in a sense, "good with God." By this fifteenth chapter of Genesis, God is telling Abram for the fourth (and not last) time that he, Abram, is going to have lots of descendants, and a land for them to live in. Back in chapter 12, God had called Abram and Sarai to leave the comfort and familiarity of living with their family and set out for that new land. They have listened carefully to God and obeyed, even when they didn't know what would come next in their lives. When God promises Abram that he is going to have a future, Abram is willing to take the longer view of things and to step out in faith toward a new home and a new life.

Still, Abram is a lot like the rest of us. Even on the fourth time of hearing about these descendants, he just doesn't see how all this is going to work. It certainly looks like everything he has will go not to a family member but to his servant Eliezer. Abram is wealthy, but he's also worried. He needs anti-anxiety medication, or maybe just a trip outside to look at the stars. God figures that words alone just won't do it, so God takes Abram by the hand, tenderly, we imagine, and says, "Abram, trust me. Don't look down – look up, up at the stars. Remember how I've been telling you that you will have land, a home, and children and grandchildren and a future far beyond anything you can imagine? Don't be afraid. I've got you covered. You can't begin to count these stars, can you, and you can't begin to count the blessings—and to be honest, the trials—that the future will bring. But *there will be a future for you*, even though it may look very different from the way things look now, and I will be with you every step of the

way.” So Abram “believes” God and God reckons it to him as righteousness, which is another way of saying that Abraham is “good with God.”

Then God makes a promise to Abram, a covenant, and today we still see ourselves as part of that covenant, which says that God has got us covered, too. In this life that is a trust walk, God is in charge, and we are told not to fear but always to take the long view of things, to look up at the sky and see the countless stars instead of looking down at what appears to be “not enough.” While many count faith as belief in certain intellectual propositions, a movement of the mind, this kind of faith moves heart and mind, our whole being, toward a position of utter trust in God.

IF WE CAN'T DEFINE FAITH, PERHAPS WE CAN DESCRIBE IT

Many centuries later, another ancestor in faith, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, uses Abraham as one in a series of examples of faithful people in a letter that is really a sermon exhorting an early Christian community to stand fast in the midst of difficulties and challenges to their faith. Perhaps faith is so hard to define that it is easier or better to use examples than to write a lot of theoretical things about it. It's the experience of real people in a real relationship with God that can help us to grasp the meaning of faith, not a precise or scholarly theological definition.

The author of Hebrews does give something of a definition, though, an eloquent, often quoted one: “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” But right away, there is one example after another of people of faith who have trusted in God's goodness and the unfolding of God's plan, including Abel, Enoch, Noah and Abraham. In fact, the very first example is “we”—the community of faith—who “understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.” Faith, then, is the gift of seeing the invisible in the visible.

It seems that what we're really talking about here is faith as trust. Many writers today describe faith that way, in fact, Eugene Peterson renders the first verse of Chapter 11 in the Letter to the Hebrews this way: “The fundamental fact of existence is that this trust in God, this faith, is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living. It's our handle on what we can't see” (*The Message*). At least, what we can't see with our physical eyes; in *Secrets in the Dark: A Life in Sermons*, Frederick Buechner writes, “Faith is the eye of the heart, and by faith we see deep down beneath the face of things...that the world is God's creation even so. It is [God] who made us and not we ourselves, made us out of [God's] peace to live in peace, out of [God's] light to dwell in light, out of [God's] love to be above all things loved and loving. That is the last truth about the world.” Buechner reassures us that “the madness and lostness we see all around us and within us are not the last truth about the world but only the next to the last truth.”

SETTING OUT IN TRUST ON THE JOURNEY OF FAITH

Trusting in God means setting out on a journey, like Abraham and Sarah and so many other people in the Bible, a journey of faith toward “the heavenly city,” a future where God's design for creation will be fulfilled. Trusting in God means seeing God's goodness even in the worst of times, and believing that God's blessings will far outnumber the stars in the sky, even if we could count them. Trusting in God means seeing not only beauty and grace but also power and possibility in what may seem like the smallest of wonders.

We hear Jesus himself say this in more than one place in the Gospels: when he's talking about the reign of God, he doesn't use theoretical examples or recite catechism questions and answers: instead, he tells us to look again, more closely, at the tiny little mustard seed that grows into “the greatest of shrubs,” a tree that provides shelter for

the birds of the air who nest there (Matthew 13:32). Jesus also observes that if our faith were even as great as the tiny little mustard seed, we could command a mulberry tree to “be uprooted and planted in the sea,” and not be surprised to see that it does just that (Luke 17:6). We listen to the writer of the Letter to the Ephesians, trying to describe just how great, how deep, is the love of Christ (“that surpasses knowledge”) and praying that we “may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:18–19). Not with the excess of a materialistic world, but the abundance of God’s good gifts, an abundance through which God “is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (3:20), if only we would trust in God’s goodness and will for our lives.

WHAT WE SEE WITHOUT EYES IS NOT ALL THAT THERE IS

No matter what circumstance we are in, faith enables us to reach out and feel the grasp of God on our lives, to trust in the promises of God that were made not only to our ancestors but to us as well. Perhaps we, too, like our ancestors, will see and greet these promises “from a distance,” as Hebrews says. But in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we believe, we trust, that God has conquered sin and death. We may not see exactly how everything is going to work out, but we are called to set out in faith, in trust, nevertheless, because we believe, we trust, in our hearts that what we see with our eyes is not all that there is, that there is the invisible within the visible. We believe, we trust, that we will come to our journey’s end and finally understand what all those statements of faith, catechism questions and theological definitions really meant. It is faith, then, that gives substance to our hope.

This faith, this trust, is not just a generic, warm fuzzy feeling about the future, a kind of free-floating optimism or positive attitude that will make good things happen. No. This is the story of who we are, and we’re finding our place in this story, we’re remembering who we are and where we came from. This story roots us now in the promises of a God who is our primary resource for strength, wisdom, courage, and love – a love that can face anything and triumph in the end. Our God did these things long ago, is doing them now, and will continue to do them faithfully in the future that we cannot even begin to imagine. And in every age, God calls people to be a blessing to all the nations. One of the most marvelous things about the beautiful Letter to the Hebrews is the way it somehow looks backward and forward at the same time, grateful for what God has done and trusting in God’s Spirit at work in our lives today.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

“The opposite of faith is not doubt, it’s indifference.”

—ELIE WIESEL, 21ST CENTURY

“Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.”

—CORRIE TEN BOOM, 20TH CENTURY

“I know God will not give me anything I can’t handle. I just wish He didn’t trust me so much.”

—MOTHER TERESA, 20TH CENTURY

“Faith is taking the first step even when you don’t see the whole staircase.”

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., 20TH CENTURY

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Each one of us can think of people we have known as people of faith. We could help out the author of Hebrews with some more examples of people we have known who trusted in God. Perhaps it was a parent, a grandparent, a family member, a teacher, a pastor, a friend, a spouse. Who has been a person, an example, of faith in your life? Who are these exemplars in the story of your church, and why are they remembered that way?
2. When did you “step out in faith,” as Abraham did, and yearn into a new reality, even if that dream seemed far beyond reason or expectation? What new reality is your church facing today?
3. When was the last time that your church did something bold, simply out of faith? What is an example of a time when your church saw things that were, at that point, unseen? What would you consider a “bold” move for your church in this day?
4. How much are your hearts and minds still on “what [you] have left behind” instead of the “better country” to which God leads you? How do you imagine that “better country”?
5. What promises of God motivate and animate your congregation and the life of the people in it? How do these promises challenge as well as console you? How do they call you toward others, beyond the walls of your church? What might God be calling you to, today?

PART II:

HOPE: STEWARDING THE STORY, REKINDLING THE GIFT

KATE HUEY

LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, [God's] mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in [God]."

2 TIMOTHY 1:1-7, 14

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus, to Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did-- when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.... Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

1 TIMOTHY 6:17-20A

As for those who in the present age are rich, command them not to be haughty, or to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but rather on God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you.

EPHESIANS 3:18-21:

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

If the First Letter to Timothy reads like the by-laws of a church, Second Timothy almost makes us feel as if we're reading someone else's mail or intruding on a private conversation. Of course, all the Epistles could be called "someone else's mail," but they function well on two levels, the personal and the communal. This deeply felt letter from a teacher to his student is no exception. The message is from and to "real" people, individuals in the early church: the author writes in the name of the great Apostle Paul (an ancient custom), although there may

be authentic fragments from Paul within the text, and Timothy was a figure who appears elsewhere in the New Testament. The message, of course, is for all of us.

By the time this letter was written, at least one generation of early Christians has passed from the scene, and the church is already struggling with issues of right teaching and perhaps a bit of discouragement. The author exhorts Timothy to remember where he has come from, or better, from whom: his mother and grandmother helped to make him who he is, a follower of Jesus. At first, the warm “family” feel of this passage might suggest a serene, untroubled faith, “the faith of our mothers and grandmothers,” unless we go on to verse 8, where Paul invites Timothy to join him in his suffering for the gospel, and unless we recall the challenges faced by the first-century Christians. How do we know what Lois and Eunice may have experienced and endured?

REAL PEOPLE, REAL CHALLENGES, REAL FAITH

We can imagine the Apostle Paul, then, writing to his young protégé, Timothy, in that difficult situation of the early church, facing persecution, division, hardship, and suffering. The beauty of this letter, its deeply caring and personal tone, helps us to understand that Paul and the other leaders and teachers of the early church – our ancestors in faith – were real, live people with hearts – hearts that knew how to love and fear, to miss and encourage and have high expectations of one another. His words are the stuff of remembrance and joy, tears and longing, gratitude and hope. Paul’s words are both the words of an heir who is remembering the faith of his ancestors and the words of an ancestor speaking in hope to his own heir.

People say that we live in “uncertain times,” an odd phrase: have you ever known a time that was certain? There has always been fear, hesitation, and anxiety. However, Paul reminds us that it is not a spirit of fear that lives and breathes in us, but “a spirit of power and of love and of a sound mind.” Instead of living in a state of orange, or yellow, or red to indicate our terror level, we should live in a state of green – the color of hope, for even in “uncertain times,” we know that God’s love and care are the greatest certainties of all. The future that God has in mind for us calls us to exercise the gift of our imagination, to expect the unexpected, trusting that God can work in ways far greater “than all we can ask or imagine” (Ephesians 3:20). That’s how we live as people of hope: we know who holds the future. We can’t picture what God has in store for us any more than Abraham and Sarah, Paul and Timothy, Eunice and Lois could, but those exemplars of faith lived their lives as people of hope as well, trusting in God’s mercies that are new each morning (Lamentations 3:23).

A later verse in this letter (1:12a) explains how Paul lives in a state of fearlessness in every situation: “But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him.” Faith, that is, trust, and hope are really deep-in-the-heart things, and Paul’s whole letter here seems to be a heart thing, too. He’s portrayed as writing at the end of his life, so his ministry will end soon in his execution. And yet Paul’s letter is written in bright hope for what is yet to be, no matter how things appear right now. Paul demonstrates a lively and life-giving imagination, the gift of seeing beyond his own immediate circumstances to the larger picture of God at work in the world.

A LONG LINE STRETCHING BACK AND FORWARD AS WELL

We are in a line, a long, long line that stretches back thousands of years to the ancient people of Israel, to Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, David and Solomon, as they looked up at the stars and sang of God’s majestic name and danced with joy at the awesome beauty of God’s creation. That long line links us back to the earliest Christians like Paul and Timothy and their congregations whose shared life in community deepened their sense of connection with one another and with those who came before them, as well as those who would follow them some day.

That same long line links us back to Congregationalists who landed on our Eastern shore and established settlements, opposed slavery, and ordained women and people of color; to German pastors who traveled from the East Coast across the middle part of this country long ago to serve the needs of congregations of settlers; to faithful Christians in the Philippines and their descendants here in the United States who have founded and enlivened congregations of the United Church of Christ, to countless congregations that have served the needs of the sick and the suffering, the hungry and the thirsty, the lonely and the oppressed, who have marched for civil rights and relentlessly worked for peace in the world. That long line links us back, more than fifty years now, to those faithful ancestors who had the vision and the hope to create the United Church of Christ.

And this long line links us forward, too, to the generations that will follow us, our heirs, the people who will come to the United Church of Christ next Sunday morning or one hundred years from now, in search of a spiritual home and amazed that a church like this one even exists. What more beautiful way of acknowledging this long line of ancestors and heirs than these beautiful words from the rite of baptism in the United Church of Christ Book of Worship, spoken before each new member of the church as they take their place in that line: “Inasmuch as the promise of the gospel is not only to us but also to our children...”

LEARNING FROM OUR HEIRS

Speaking of children: there is a story about a kindergarten teacher who was observing her students hard at work on their art projects. As she walked around the classroom, she stopped by one little girl’s desk and asked her what she was drawing. The girl replied, “I’m drawing a picture of God.” The teacher paused and said, “But, Susie, no one knows what God looks like.” Without missing a beat, or looking up from her drawing, the girl replied, “They will in a minute.”

Susie, whether she knows it or not, may understand better than we do what we’re supposed to be about in the church: drawing a picture of God. Making God’s love something people can see—and not just see, but feel in the life of the world. After all, we’re embodied creatures. We have eyes that see and ears that hear and skin that feels – or maybe it even sees for us. There’s a line from Shakespeare’s *King Lear* in which Lear asks Gloucester: “How do you see the world?” And Gloucester, who is blind, answers: “I see it feelingly.” Our senses are excellent gifts from God that make it possible for us to experience and enjoy God’s beautiful creation. In fact, we in the church are called to help the world sense God’s presence, God’s love. That’s not as hard as it sounds, if we agree with Thomas Merton: “Life is this simple. We are living in a world that is absolutely transparent, and God is shining through it all the time.” Ironically, Susie, the little child, one of our heirs, may find it easier to picture God than we the ancestors do, by the time the world, and the struggles in life, have worked on us long enough to exhaust our memories of God’s work in the past and deplete our hope in what God will do in the future.

ANCESTORS AND HEIRS

Ancestors and heirs: since we’ve received so much from our ancestors, we find it easy enough to focus on ourselves as heirs of those who were here before us. In the church, and not just in our 350-year-old New England congregations, we often look back at our ancestors and feel gratitude for what they passed on to their heirs (including us): not only buildings and endowments, but our theological heritage, our stories, our sense of call to ministry in a specific place. We look back to the remarkable, historic witness of our churches, their evangelical courage, their early truth-telling, their extravagant hospitality, as we seek inspiration for our own ministry and witness today.

As important as the books are that hold our “theological heritage,” the stories we tell and the “pictures” of God that we draw with those stories are just as much the theology of the United Church of Christ, the gift that we

have received and guarded and rekindled; a gift that we pass on to our heirs. Perhaps the most important reason that we tell the story over and over again, in every generation, is that we humans find it so easy to forget, and to become discouraged. Telling one another the story reminds us of God's marvelous work in the past, and inspires us to a daring, imaginative hope for the future. Several years ago, during dinner with a friend who had left a UCC congregation because of a church controversy, I found myself talking about the Amistad. Dolores sat quietly and listened to the story of our ancestors' great courage and witness for justice, when they worked tirelessly to make sure the Amistad captives won their freedom, setting a precedent for our church's bold and consistent witness on behalf of justice for those who are marginalized. (We believe that we are following in the footsteps of Jesus when we do this, in every age.) As she listened, her eyes widened, and when I finished, she quietly said, "No one has ever told me that story. Maybe if someone told us that story, we'd still be in church."

We do well, then, to listen to the stories that we all bring, not only as individuals each on our own journey of faith, but as congregations of the United Church of Christ, stepping out together on the next stage of the journey of faith. We bring, and treasure, not only our own stories but the stories and memories of our ancestors, of who we have been and where we have been, the things and experiences that have brought us "this far by faith" (see Hebrews 11), the stories of the Bible as well, and the example of countless church folks through the ages, all of them, in a very real sense, the ancestors in faith of us all.

PREPARING FOR WHAT IS YET TO COME

We hold those stories of the ones who came before us, but we also hold in our hearts the heirs who will come after us. Every decision we make in our own day, then, is as much for them as it is in honor of, and gratitude for, what has gone before, perhaps even more for them than for ourselves. Think of the immigrants who made the perilous trip across the sea to work in grueling conditions, or pioneers who trekked across the prairies and mountains, so many of them dreaming of their children and grandchildren and hoping to provide a better life for them and even for those descendants who would never know them personally but would remember with gratitude, and be inspired by, their courage and generosity, their great hearts and their spirits filled with hope.

Painting a picture. Telling, that is, stewarding the story, rekindling the gift that we receive from our ancestors, and passing it on, along with our own experiences, wisdom and deep hope, to our heirs. Our great hope as a church is to provide a spiritual home where those heirs can grow closer to God and, in their own day, work to transform the world God loves into a place of more beauty, more compassion, more justice, more grace.

What is yet to come is a mystery, and yet our gifts will be passed on to those we will never meet on this side of the river – not until we stand on that bright, shining other shore. But here are words of assurance from the great Archbishop Oscar Romero: "This is what we are about: we plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects beyond our capabilities. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders, ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

GOD AT WORK IN THE WORLD

In every age, the Stillspeaking God leads us on new paths of faith, hope, and love, new experiences of generosity and joy, new visions of God at work in the world, transforming the lives of God's children, one by one. God show-

ers us with new blessings when we open ourselves through extravagant hospitality to the “strangers and sojourners” who become friends, who become sisters and brothers today, as well as those who will come long after us. We may never see their faces, or know their names, but they are our heirs nevertheless, because we have stewarded well the story we received, made it our own in this day of grace and goodness, and then rekindled the gift and passed it on to be lived in a new day, in ways that we can’t picture today but trust will unfold in God’s own amazing and wonderful ways. In these days, our prayer is for God’s Spirit to come upon us and shower us with grace, that God’s Spirit will fill us and pronounce us those who trust God and walk in God’s ways, God’s own beloved and faithful servants, radiant with hope and joy.

The heirs, of course, have already arrived, and they continue to come through our doors. Today, in many UCC congregations, if you have a show of hands, the majority of folks will have come from another denomination. (It’s true that most of them were already Christian, but perhaps in a very different way.) Many of us don’t go to the same church our parents attended, and some of us come from very different traditions but have come to a United Church of Christ and found a home, a welcome, and a place to grow here. The passage from one tradition, one community of faith, to another can be a difficult and even uncertain journey, one that requires a close walk with God. But it is a journey full of hope nonetheless. And that hope draws on the hospitality, the vision, and the deep faith of those who have followed in the footsteps of the ancestors in faith whose stories we all share. In turn, we prepare a place for those who are yet to come.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

“The only thing worse than being blind is having sight and no vision.”

—HELEN KELLER, 20TH CENTURY

“The person who sees the difficulties so clearly that he does not discern the possibilities cannot inspire a vision in others.”

—J. OSWALD SANDERS, SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP, 20TH CENTURY

“Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift of God, which is why we call it the present.”

—BIL KEANE, 20TH CENTURY

“One lives in the hope of becoming a memory.”

—Antonio Porchia, 20th century

“We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.”

—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., 20th century

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe the picture of God that your congregation has painted throughout the years of its history, and what does that picture look like today? What has your generation added to the picture?
2. What is the “good treasure” entrusted to you, and who entrusted it to you? How does one “guard” a spiritual treasure?
3. What former things have passed away in your life, or need to pass away, and what new words of hope need to be spoken by you and by your church?
4. As we turn the diamond of faith around and around, we see many different facets of the faith that has been handed down from generation to generation: not only a “good treasure” of beliefs and practices, but a living thing, a fire that must be re-kindled in each one of us. What are the particular facets of faith that have shone brightly in the story of your church? How do you think it might shine in new and different ways in the years ahead, and what would that require?
5. Using your imagination, consider the possible ways you might touch and bless the lives of people you may never meet, people who will then, in a very real way, become your heirs?
6. What will your heirs say that you taught them about God’s love? How will they describe the gift that you passed on to them? How will their love for God be deepened by your love for God?

PART III

LOVE: GENEROSITY INSPIRES GENEROSITY

KATE HUEY

RUTH 2:8-12 (READ RUTH 1:1–18 FOR BACKGROUND)

Then Boaz said to Ruth, “Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.” Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?” But Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!”

RUTH 4:13-17

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

LUKE 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.” So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, “He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.” Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, “Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.” Then Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.”

MATTHEW 13:31-32

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

REFLECTION:

Jesus' parable of the mustard seed in the Gospel of Matthew seems straightforward enough and quite lovely, suggesting the sweet image of a tiny seed ("the smallest of all the seeds") that grows into a mighty tree, with birds nesting in its branches. We seem to understand that the kingdom of God (so easily identified with the church, of course) begins small, with Jesus and a tiny band of disciples, and grows into something vast and worldwide. Even if it's not identified strictly with the church, the kingdom is powerful and mysterious in its growth. The mustard seed: an ordinary, homey image, taken from nature and used by Jesus to convey how he experiences God, how he wants us to experience God. We find it a hopeful image; even if we've never laid eyes on an actual mustard seed, we can tell Jesus that, like his disciples, we, too, "get" what he's talking about.

However beautiful we find the image of the mustard seed, we're missing meanings between the lines that only make the parable more intriguing. That mustard tree (or shrub) is actually a weed, and no one in their right mind would plant a wild, profusely growing weed in their garden. In *Provoking the Gospel of Matthew*, Richard Swanson writes that the mustard seed presented religious problems for a faithful Jew who believed in "the stable and orderly love of God in all things. Planting a weed that was a symbol of wild disorder was judged to be an unnecessary compromise of the basic principles of a Jewish life." Just when we thought we understood the "obvious" meaning of Jesus' parable, we are taken by surprise at the mysterious workings of God in our ordinary, everyday world.

ZACCHAEUS AND A LIFE TRANSFORMED

Sometimes Jesus taught with parables, and sometimes he taught with his actions. In the Gospel of Luke, we read about Zacchaeus, who actually has a lot in common with that little mustard seed. He's so small that he can't see Jesus over the crowd and, as a tax collector, he is also quite unacceptable to the people gathered around Jesus. They have good reason, too, because he's part of the oppressive Roman Empire's system. And yet, this "little" man ends up being a model of hospitality and generosity for the very people who find it scandalous that Jesus would sit down and eat with a "sinner" like him. Zacchaeus is happy to welcome Jesus into his home. It's a new day for this outsider whose life is transformed by God's mercy and love reaching him through the love and acceptance of Jesus.

Joyful Zacchaeus stands in stark contrast to the rich ruler who walked away sadly from Jesus, because he couldn't let go of his possessions even to know joy and peace. It requires the grace of God for the rich to enter the kingdom of God, we recall, a miracle like Zacchaeus' willingness to give away money extravagantly, far more than the Law requires for restitution. The power of love has helped him cut loose from the wealth that had cut him off from his people. His generosity to the poor is his way of participating in the work of the community to bind the wounds of a hurting world and its broken relationships.

LEARNING FROM THE LITTLE ONES ON THE MARGINS

Both Zacchaeus and the mustard seed also share much in common with Ruth, another one of our ancestors in faith, whose story is a familiar one, or at least her words are, if we've attended many weddings. Here is her back story: a long time ago, a woman of Bethlehem, Naomi, and her husband left their home during a famine to live in the land of Moab. Their sons married Moabite – pagan – women, but tragedy struck the family when the father and both sons died, leaving their three widows bereft without husbands to look after them. Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. At first, the daughters-in-law went with her, but on the road, Naomi urged them to go back home to Moab and find new husbands there. Orpah wept, but turned back. Ruth, however, is remembered for her exquisite response to Naomi: "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go, where you lodge, I will lodge, your people shall be my people, and your God my God..." (1:16).

Naomi lets Ruth return with her, but she is so bitter and full of despair that she tells the women back home to call her “Mara,” which means bitter. But Ruth loves Naomi anyway, and looks after her needs. Naomi has an in-law, Boaz, a cousin of her dead husband, and a rich landowner. Ruth goes out with the women into the fields that Boaz owns, for gleaning: the women follow the harvesters to gather the bits of grain they leave behind. Boaz notices Ruth working hard, and makes special arrangements for these women, his distant relatives, to have extra grain.

Two widows are living on the edge of survival, two “small” women facing poverty and depending on God and the community. They are humble and do not aspire to luxury or riches but simply struggle to get through one more day. As such, they are excellent examples of the “anawim,” the poor and vulnerable people in ancient Israel, “the poor” whom Jesus would later call “blessed” (Luke 6:20b). As a foreigner, a pagan, and a woman, Ruth already has three strikes against her, and poverty makes her seem even smaller in the eyes of the world.

Ruth goes out every day and works hard in the fields to provide for Naomi, and under the warmth of that kind of consistent, persistent love, Naomi’s heart slowly begins to open up. She starts to think about someone else’s welfare, about Ruth, and Ruth’s future, and the heirs who will follow after them. In those days, society provided for widows by requiring a man to marry the widow of his dead relative, and Boaz is that next-of-kin candidate. When we hear that Ruth and Boaz marry and have a child, that alone would be a happy ending, but there’s still more, a twist that’s too wonderful for us to have imagined: the baby, the son of a pagan foreigner, will be the grandfather of David, the greatest king in all of Israel, and, we Christians say, the ancestor of Jesus himself! Little Obed, the grandson of Naomi the-no-longer-bitter, represents hope, then, for the future, not just for this old woman and her daughter-in-law, but for all Israel itself, and for us, today.

GENEROSITY INSPIRES GENEROSITY

While many of us know about the deep love and courage and generosity shown by Ruth on that road back home from Moab, we may miss an equally important moment in the story, when Ruth first meets Boaz and asks him what she has done to deserve his generosity. He tells her that he has heard the story of what she did for her mother-in-law, leaving homeland and family (and her own religion, we might note) in order to care for this elderly, destitute widow. Boaz not only says the right words, the ancient equivalent of our “God bless you,” but he takes the right actions, too: inspired by Ruth’s generosity and love, he shares what he has with these two widows. Ruth’s generous love, then, inspires both Naomi and Boaz to generosity as well, and eventually leads to even greater wonders for the generations that follow them. Even the women of the village are inspired by all this generosity to rejoice at Naomi’s blessing of a daughter-in-law who is more to her than seven sons. The depth of concern and care that Ruth and Naomi and Boaz (and the village around them) have for one another is the kind of concern and care that builds churches, communities, and a better world in every generation. Through generosity, every generation can become a blessing to those who follow them.

Our God is an awesome God of abundance and generosity, not a God of scarcity and fear. Scarcity happens when we don’t trust in God’s abundance and generosity, when we think that we –not our community, and certainly not God – are the source of our own security. Scarcity happens when we lose hope and turn inward toward ourselves and forget about the future, when we turn back, and give up, instead of facing the future with steadfast faith in God’s ability to “do a new thing.” Scarcity happens when we fail to notice and appreciate the abundance right before our eyes, in the love and care and promise of the church, like Ruth standing before Naomi, offering persistent, generous, undeterred love. Like the mustard seed, the miracles in the stories of Zacchaeus and Ruth are “ordinary” ones – the miracles that happen when everyday, ordinary people decide to open their hearts and lives to others, when we firmly resolve to let nothing and nobody deter us from the dream of a better world. Stubborn, faithful, undeterred love is a miracle that happens every single day in the life of the church, God’s community, gathered in faith, hope and love.

RAISING THE HORIZON OF OUR MISSION

Perhaps the greatest miracle in these stories touches on our ability to see what is not always immediately apparent, even when it is right before our eyes. Like Abraham, we may be gazing down at the ground, at what is closest to us, when God is calling us to raise our eyes to heaven and try to count the stars, to trust in God's will for our lives and the world beyond our own lives, our own communities. A world so expansive and so full of God's goodness invites us to ministry in ways we have not yet imagined. Like Paul and Timothy (and Lois and Eunice), we are called by God to see that long line of ancestors whose faith and generosity have left us a rich heritage, a gift for us to rekindle and pass on to our heirs, the generations who will follow us. And like Zacchaeus, Naomi and Ruth, God calls us to love, to express that love through justice and generosity, even for people we have never met, our sisters and brothers who live on the margins of our communities, and beyond. Perhaps they are the poor who live right around us and our churches, perhaps they are the "others" whose lives have not yet touched our own, perhaps they are the strangers whose love and kindness enlarge our vision and our hope as they open our hearts a little bit more.

Just as Zacchaeus gave back a generous portion to God, today we can give back to God through the ministry of the church, our local church and the wider church as well, where powerful good is done in the world because of the strength of a community together. Together we can do much more, by the power of God's grace, to bind the wounds of a broken world, to offer good news to those on the margins, to seek out the lost and celebrate God's love as a community because we ourselves know what it feels like to be lost and what it feels like to be found. Like Zacchaeus, we can let go of some of the stuff, the money, the wealth that we've been blessed with, not sparingly but generously, just as we have received so generously from God.

THE MIRACLE OF GENEROSITY

All of this doesn't happen in any magical way, without any effort or commitment on our part. No, it happens by a miracle, the miracle of letting go of the money that gives us status and security in the world, and finding our status, or height, if you will, as "little" children, precious children of God, gathered around a table of welcome, breaking open and sharing the Bread of Life in Word and Sacrament. It happens by the miracle of putting our security in the sure promises of God, the mercies of God that are new each morning.

In her book, *When I Was a Child I Read Books*, the wonderful writer (and member of the United Church of Christ), Marilynne Robinson, describes community as "imaginative love for people we do not know or whom we know very slightly." I think that works well for the church and our deep ties to people around the world, in the past, the present and the future. In a very real sense, we experience an "interdependency" with them that calls us, Robinson says, to "regard one another as the basis of our own well-being." Of course, this interdependence flies in the face of the self-reliant, independent way of life that our culture preaches, a lifestyle that has brought much suffering to the most vulnerable in our midst and much damage to the creation that God has blessed us with.

There are many places and wonderful causes to give our money to these days. That's a good thing. But the church is distinctive. It's where we begin our giving and claim who we are before we return to the world and find more ways to give of ourselves. Today, the United Church of Christ is not the greatest in size or numbers, but like that mustard seed, we can grow in the days ahead—higher in our hope, wider in our embrace, deeper in our faith, bringing delight to the heart of God.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION:

“The things you do for yourself are gone when you are gone,
but the things you do for others remain as your legacy.”

—KALU NDUKWE KALU, 20TH CENTURY

“Say that we are a puff of warm breath in a very cold universe. By this kind of reckoning we are either immeasurably insignificant or we are incalculably precious and interesting. I tend toward the second view.”

—MARILYNNE ROBINSON, 21ST CENTURY, *WHEN I WAS A CHILD I READ BOOKS*

“If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

—MOTHER TERESA OF CALCUTTA, 20TH CENTURY

“All the flowers of tomorrow are in the seeds of today.”

—CHINESE PROVERB

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think motivated Boaz to help Ruth and Naomi? What motivates us today to help those who are struggling? Think of a time that you were inspired by the generosity of another person. How did you respond?
2. Where is God in the story of Ruth? Where is God in stories that do not have happy endings? What sort of faith do you think Ruth had? What do you think was her image of God?
3. When we reflect on the sadness of the rich ruler who held on to his money, and the joy of Zacchaeus, who gave it away, do we hunger for that kind of joy and that depth of trust? Did the rich ruler take the more “reasonable” course?
4. Jesus is really the main character in this story about Zacchaeus. He is the one pursuing Zacchaeus. How do you think Jesus is calling you today?



RESOURCES, WEBSITES & BOOKS ON CLOSURE AND LEGACY

LEGACY CHURCH AND CHURCH CLOSURE RESOURCES AND CONTACTS

● UCC LEGACY CHURCH AND CLOSURE RESOURCES

- Local Church Ministries
- David Schoen

LIVINGLEGACYCHURCH.ORG

legacychurch@ucc.org

Toll-free: 866-822-8224 X3827

216-736-3827

● LEGACY CHURCH FINANCIAL RESOURCES

- United Church Funds

LEGACY@UCFUNDS.ORG

ucfunds.org

Toll-free: 877-806-4989

212-729-2600

● LEGACY BUILDING RESOURCES

- UCC Church Building and Loan Fund
- Patrick G. Duggan

Cblfund.org

dugganp@ucc.org

Toll-free: 866-822-8224 X3834

216-736-3834

● UCC NEW BEGINNINGS ASSESSMENT SERVICE

- Local Church Ministries
- David Schoen

www.ucc.org/new-beginnings/

schoend@ucc.org

Toll-free: 866-822-8224 X3827

216-736-3827

● STRUGGLING CONGREGATIONS OPTIONS, MA CONF.

www.macucc.org/strugglingcongregations

- **CHRISTIAN CHURCH FOUNDATION LEGACY CHURCH RESOURCES**

<http://www.christianchurchfoundation.org/pages/Legacy-Congregations/>

BOOKS ON CHURCH LEGACY AND CLOSURE

- **TOWARD THE BETTER COUNTRY: CHURCH CLOSURE AND RESURRECTION,**

L. Gail Irwin, author

<http://freelancepastor.wordpress.com/about-the-book/>

- **FINISHING WITH GRACE – A GUIDE TO SELLING, MERGING OR CLOSING YOUR CHURCH,**

Linda Hilliard and Gretchen Switzer, authors

<http://www.finishingwithgrace.com/about/>

- **ENDING WITH HOPE: A RESOURCE FOR CLOSING CONGREGATIONS,**

Beth Ann Gaede, author

<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781566992633>

- **LEGACY CHURCHES,**

Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond, authors

<http://www.stephengray.org/store/detail.asp?id=11>

- **EMPTY HOUSES: A PASTORAL APPROACH TO CONGREGATIONAL CLOSURES,**

Michael K. Jones, author

<http://www.booksurge.com/Empty-Houses-A-Pastoral-Approach-to/A/1554300223.htm>

CHURCH LEGACY AND CLOSURE WORSHIP RESOURCES

- **LITURGY FOR THE CLOSING OF A CHURCH – UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA**

http://www.united-church.ca/files/planning/theme/worship_closure.pdf

- **FINISHING WITH GRACE – A GUIDE TO SELLING, MERGING OR CLOSING YOUR CHURCH,**

Appendix P. 97-130

<http://www.finishingwithgrace.com/about/>

- **SACRED STORIES: CONTINUING A CONGREGATION'S LEGACY OF MINISTRY,**

P. 10-12 <http://www.christianchurchfoundation.org/UserFiles/Files/SacredStories2012.pdf>

- **A SERMON FOR CLOSING OF CHURCH,**

Rev. Emily C. Heath

<http://emilycheath.com/2012/02/05/sermon-for-the-closing-of-wilmington-congregational-church/>

CHURCH RECORDS AND MATERIALS

- **CONGREGATIONAL LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES – CHURCH CLOSING/RECORD DONATION**

<http://www.congregationallibrary.org/for-churches/closing-donation>

- **UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST HISTORICAL COUNCIL**

<http://www.ucc.org/about-us/archives/historical-council/>

CHURCH LEGACY AND CLOSURE BLOGS

- **THE PARISH PAPER: SHOULD WE CONSIDER CLOSING OUR CHURCH?**

<http://tinyurl.com/church-closing>

- **NO ONE SHOULD HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE - REV. DR. GAIL CAFFERATA**

<http://carducc.wordpress.com/2014/09/11/no-one-should-have-to-do-this-alone/>

- **FROM DEATH TO LIFE: CHURCHES FACING RESURRECTION – REV. GAIL IRWIN**

<http://freelancepastor.wordpress.com/>

- **SEASONS OF GRACE: REFLECTIONS ON CHURCH LIFE BY THE AUTHORS OF FINISHING WITH GRACE**

<http://www.finishingwithgrace.com/>



ENCOURAGEMENT AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our appreciation begins with you, church pastors and lay leaders, who have chosen to utilize this Living Legacy workbook as you attend to, and care for, your congregation during a time of impending closure.

Understandably, the decision to close a congregation's active ministry can be a difficult and emotional chapter in your life together, but, as you will discover, it also can be a time that inspires great communal clarity and gratitude, emotional courage, and grace-filled acceptance of the realities and opportunities before you. Your faithful leadership is critically needed and spiritually indispensable right now. This is no easy task you have accepted. Yet, gratefully, you have wisely sought the help you will need to attend to the many conversations, tasks and decisions now facing your congregation, as you discern together what will be the capstone that will be your church's legacy.

We pray that Living Legacy will be a source of help, support and comfort as your congregation's ministry comes to a close with dignity, grace, hope and faith, knowing that the God of Resurrection is always at work, both in life and in death. May you know the presence and power of the Stillspeaking God, even as you prepare to end your ministry, celebrating the many ways you can pass on your congregation's spirit through a living legacy that will serve God's mission for years to come. Thank you.

Special thanks go to the Rev. Jane Heckles, who proposed and started this legacy project, working in collaboration with Local Church Ministries and United Church Funds. Jane drafted the outline for the resource and wrote its initial chapters.

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The Publishing, Identity and Communication Ministry of the United Church of Christ designed this workbook. We are grateful for their close partnership.

The Living Legacy workbook is a collaborative project of many in the United Church of Christ who are committed to serving local congregations at every stage of life, including the time of ending, closure and legacy.

Thanks be to God, whose steadfast love and faithfulness endures forever!

THE REV. J. BENNETT GUESS
Executive Minister
Local Church Ministries
United Church of Christ

MR. DONALD G. HART
President and Chief Investment Officer
United Church Funds



LEGACY COVENANT WORKSHEET

1) What year was the church founded?

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- LEGAL ARTICLES OF INCORPORATION
 - WRITTEN HISTORIES PRODUCED DURING ANNIVERSARY YEARS

2) Who were the earliest leaders?

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- WRITTEN HISTORIES PRODUCED DURING ANNIVERSARY YEARS

3) What motivated them to start your church?

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- ORIGINAL CORRESPONDENCE AMONGST FOUNDERS, DENOMINATION

4) Where did they come from? I.e. Was there a core group spun off from another congregation?

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- FIRST/CHARTER MEMBERSHIP RECORDS

5) What was your church's original purpose or vision?

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- LOOK IN ORIGINAL BYLAWS OR OTHER WRITINGS

6) Who helped your church to start in the beginning?

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- INQUIRE WITH ORIGINAL PARTNERS ASKING FOR ANY CORRESPONDENCE OR REPORTS THEY MIGHT HAVE ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF YOUR CONGREGATION. SEE APPENDIX FOR LISTING OF UCC RELATED HISTORICAL ARCHIVES.

7) What did they give to help start the church, materially, in leadership and in purpose?

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- BEGIN AN ORGANIZED INVENTORY OF CHURCH PROPERTY WITH THIS FIRST SECTION ON "FOUNDING GIFTS." SOME FOUNDING GIFTS THAT CHURCHES HAVE RECEIVED HAVE BEEN GIFTS OF BIBLES, HYMNALS, ALTARWARE, CROSSES.

8) What other denominational or ecumenical groups supported the planting of your church?

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- BULLETINS FROM THE FIRST FEW SERVICES OF WORSHIP
 - FIRST ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CONGREGATION
 - CONTACT YOUR UCC CONFERENCE AND/OR ASSOCIATION FOR COPIES OF DOCUMENTS THEY HAVE ABOUT THE START UP OF YOUR CONGREGATION
 - CONTACT THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST ARCHIVES AND LOCAL CHURCH MINISTRIES FOR ANY RECORDS THEY MIGHT HAVE ABOUT THE START UP OF YOUR CONGREGATION.

9) Where did the church meet before it had a building?

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- RENTAL AGREEMENTS OR CORRESPONDENCE

10) When it came time to find land for the church, how was it acquired? What gifts were involved in the land and the first buildings?

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- PROPERTY DEEDS, CONVEYANCES, COVENANTS OR EASEMENTS, OFTEN FOUND IN SAFE DEPOSIT BOXES
 - COPIES OF MORTGAGES ON PROPERTY OR GRANTS
 - LOCATE WRITTEN ACCOUNTS OF YOUR CONGREGATION AT THE TIME OF SIGNIFICANT ANNIVERSARIES:
 - VISIT LOCAL NEWS SOURCES THAT WERE IN OPERATION AT THE TIME THE CHURCH WAS FOUNDED AND SEARCH FOR ARTICLES/COVERAGE ON THE FOUNDING OF THE CONGREGATION.
 - ASK YOUR UCC CONFERENCE FOR COPIES OF ARTICLES FROM THEIR PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE FOUNDING

11) Did some kind of disaster ever effect your church property?

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- LOOK FOR EVIDENCE OF INSURANCE CLAIMS IN THE CHURCH RECORDS.

12) Do you have separate Tax Exemption or are you exempted simply as a part of the UCC?

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- LOCATE ANY TAX EXEMPT CERTIFICATES FROM THE IRS, FORM 990S OR ANNUAL REPORTS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE IN YOUR STATE OR COMMONWEALTH.

13) What anniversary year/s were celebrated? Build a timeline that includes those years

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- CATALOG ANY CHURCH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS USING FILES OR HISTORIES

14) What was commemorated during those celebrations?

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- BULLETINS FROM ANNIVERSARY SERVICES OR PROGRAMS FROM ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EVENTS

15) Who were the special guests? Where were they from? Who spoke at the events?

- BULLETINS FROM ANNIVERSARY SERVICES OR PROGRAMS FROM ANNIVERSARY SPECIAL EVENTS

16) What can you find to suggest how the church's mission/purpose was stated in new ways over the years?

- FIND SUBSEQUENT EDITIONS OF YOUR CHURCH'S BYLAWS OVER THE YEARS. COMPARE THE PURPOSE/ MISSION STATEMENTS IF/AS THEY CHANGED.

17) Where are there gaps in the church history and why might that be? ie WWII

- CATALOG THE ANNUAL REPORTS FOR EACH YEAR THE OF CONGREGATIONAL LIFE. READ THE SUBSEQUENT ANNUAL REPORTS AFTER MISSING YEARS TO LOOK FOR INFO ABOUT WHY THINGS MIGHT HAVE BEEN MISSING

18) When did membership in the church peak?

- USING DATA FROM ANNUAL REPORTS, MAKE A SIMPLE GRAPH OF MEMBERSHIP OVER TIME
- LOOK FOR HISTORY OF HARD TIMES OR HIGH CONFLICT:
- REVIEW YOUR CHURCH'S FILE AT THE CONFERENCE OR ASSOCIATION OFFICE TO IDENTIFY WHEN THE UCC MIGHT HAVE BEEN INVITED IN TO THE CONGREGATION TO HELP PROBLEM SOLVE OR COACH DURING HARD TIMES.
- LOCATE COPIES OF CONGREGATIONAL PROFILES USED FOR EACH MINISTERIAL SEARCH. READ EACH PROFILE TO DISCOVER HOW THE CHURCH DESCRIBED ITSELF AT EACH OF THESE TRANSITION TIMES

19) What was going on?

- IDENTIFY THE THEME OF ANY OF THESE HARD TIMES OR CONFLICTS AND ADD THEM TO YOUR TIMELINE

20) Who tried to help the church during that time of conflict? How did that conflict get resolved?

- MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF SPECIAL TASK FORCES
- INFORMATION FROM CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION FILES

21) Did that conflict seem to linger on in the life of the church?

22) Are there repeating themes on your time line?

- MAKE A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF PASTORS WHO SERVED THE CHURCH AND CHRONICLE HOW THE CHURCH IDENTIFIED AND CALLED THESE MINISTERS
- LOOK IN UCC YEARBOOKS, YOUR OWN CHURCH HISTORIES, ANY FILES FROM PREVIOUS SEARCH COMMITTEES

23) When did a Sunday School or other education program begin and/or end?

- LOOK IN HISTORIES AND UCC YEARBOOK DATA

24) Were there building campaigns?

- LOOK THROUGH PROPERTY RECORDS, LOAN/MORTGAGE DOCS FOR NEW BUILDINGS, NEWS OF PROPERTY FIRES OR OTHER DISASTERS IN TOWN.
- ARCHITECTURAL DRAWINGS, BLUEPRINTS, MAPS

25) Who have been your Youth program's best partners and resources?

- REPORTS FROM UCC YOUTH EVENTS, REGIONAL AND NATIONAL
- LOOK FOR THE DESTINATIONS FOR YOUTH MISSION TRIPS AND NOTE THOSE MISSION PARTNERS

26) Do you work with local youth agencies or programs today?

27) What have been your church's 3 largest benevolence or mission partners?

- LOOK BACK THROUGH ANNUAL REPORTS AND SCAN FOR THE BENEVOLENCES THAT KEEP COMING UP YEAR AFTER YEAR. OFTEN TIMES IT IS "OUR CHURCH'S WIDER MISSION". BEFORE 1965 IT WAS CALLED "OUR CHRISTIAN WORLD MISSION" AND BEFORE THE FORMATION OF THE UCC IN 1957, IT HAD OTHER NAMES IN THE PREDECESSOR BODIES.

28) What prayers, creeds or other worship elements have been repeated in certain eras of church life?

- LOOK BACK THROUGH WORSHIP BULLETINS AS FAR AS YOU CAN FIND FOR THESE ELEMENTS.

29) What got the church in the newspaper?

- SEARCH LOCAL NEWS ARCHIVES

30) At the apex of the church's life, what was it like?

- COLLECT ORAL HISTORY FROM THOSE STILL ALIVE DURING THE 'HEYDEY'

31) Where are the current financial records and reports located?

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- FIND/CREATE INVENTORY OF FINANCIAL RECORDS

32) What kinds of restricted funds are on your books?

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- ANNUAL FINANCIAL REPORTS

33) Does the Church have a Memorial Fund?

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- MEMORIAL FUND RECORDS OF THOSE HONORED, GIFTS AND DONORS
 - MEMORIAL FUND WRITTEN POLICY

34) What Bequests did the Church receive from Members and Friends and for what purposes?

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- ASSEMBLE FILES ON ALL BEQUESTS OF PROPERTY OR FUNDS. THIS COULD INCLUDE CORRESPONDENCE WITH DONORS, ATTORNEYS, COURTS, ESTATES

35) Who has been a part of your congregation? What were our unique cultural roots? Who have you become today? What kinds of diversity have been present over the years?

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- COLLECT ANY PICTORIAL OR MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORIES YOU CAN LOCATE FROM CHURCH FILES AND MEMBERS' OWN FILES.



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