

Questions from the PSEC Association Meetings

These were some of the most asked questions from the Association Meetings. We've put them together along with the answers to give you as much information as possible before the Fall Meeting.

Why should we become one conference?

We want to be proactively moving into our future because we believe that God wants the church to live and thrive in Eastern PA (EPA). We also believe as the UCC, we have unique gifts to offer to our communities that can help unite and make us more caring. By strengthening our churches and better training our leadership, both pastoral and lay, we can equip our churches for the ministry we are called to be about in EPA, in our individual areas and move towards welcoming new churches and partners into our ministry as well as have new church starts ourselves.

Both conferences want to build leadership and churches for the ministry of Jesus Christ and as a part of that to create caring communities who share the good news of Jesus Christ. Through expanding our relationships by become one conference, we expand the possibilities of being able to do this work effectively. New perspective shared from both conferences will broaden us for the ministry of sharing the good news, creating communities that care and building the church in EPA.

As with most decisions of this magnitude, the move forward is a vote about trust—do we trust each other enough to find our way into the future together?

What is the process moving forward should the motion to unite and create a new conference receive the two-thirds vote to pass in both conferences?

This is not the last decision-making point for forming a new conference – but is the mid-point approval so we can go to the General Synod and request to change the boundaries of the conference and move into a newly birthed conference SHOULD the approval of the constitution and structure be made in the fall of 2019. If those structures are not approved in 2019, we will need to extend our functioning as two separate conferences.

The next year is the time when governance and ministry structures will be developed from the draft structures. A unified council will be authorized to create a constitution and by-laws, a proposed budget, and form policies for a new unified budget. The unified council will not take the place of the PSEC Consistory or the PNEC Board but augment the partnership work that is important to moving forward together.

The timelines we have established for the work of creating a new conference are not set in stone. They are goals to stretch our collective efforts and keep the process moving forward. We can allow ourselves as much time as the work requires.

Why isn't the governance and ministry structures not more detailed and why isn't there a transition plan?

Our Joint Conference Vision and Development Team (JCVDT) was too small to do the in-depth detail work for our governance and ministry as one conference; we needed more voices and time. We also found that people didn't want to commit the time and effort to this work because "it might not happen." We decided it was best to

offer a basic structure, vote in hopes of moving forward so we can do the detail work required in creating a new conference with multiple teams made up of members of both conferences, trusting that now that we are committed to this, people will want to be involved in the reshaping of our future in EPA.

The JCVDT was not tasked with creating a transition plan. Once both conferences committed to becoming one conference, a transition plan and teams would then be created by the PSEC Consistory and PNEC Board to move towards becoming one conference. The transition time will help us live into the new relationship that will require time, flexibility, experience with one another, successes and even some failure to live into the future God is preparing us for.

Why is the timeline so short (1 year) for the constitution and bylaws to be written? This is important work.

It is important work and it is time to be getting to it. Numbers speak on this. How many congregations merged or ended last year, in the past 5 years? We are not reinventing the wheel. A lot of people have put time and effort into bylaws recently and we can utilize their work. One year isn't a short timeline on the constitution and bylaws as long as there is an understanding that there can be amendments to it as the new Conference matures. Again, if the unified council finds it needs more time, we can give ourselves permission to extend the timeline.

Where is the conversation about middle judicatories happening—their distinctive roles, resources and gifts they can bring?

There has been conversation on this subject at the national level, among the conference ministers and within the conferences. The constitution and bylaws of the UCC spells out the role of the conferences in the national setting. The relationship of the conferences to the congregations in its conference are unique to the conference and have to happen there. PSEC is made up of five associations and PNEC is a conference serving as association.

Conferences do not hold authority over their associations. The associations have authority for the standing and oversight of authorized ministers. The JCVDT invited leadership from each association and area mission councils (PNEC) to begin these conversations. The JCVDT also invited the Committee on Ministries (COMs) from all the associations to come together to talk about best practices and better ways of doing the ministry work of COMs. These were just beginning conversations. Further conversations will need to happen during the transition time probably even beyond that.

Although spaces will be created for the associations to have these conversations as a whole, no changes to the associations will happen without the associations working together to create the change themselves. Until the associations, or the congregations within them (congregations have the right to choose the association to which they belong) decide to make changes, the present associations will hold together its committee on ministry responsibilities as the new conference forms and is lived into.

Do we have to be named EPiC?

The proposed official name of the Conference is the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. Under that name new articles of incorporation would be filed. "EPiC" is a nickname; one that allows for creative play as well as dreaming and visioning and captures of the magnitude of this effort *at this time* in the lives of both conferences. It may, or may not, carry into the future. But EPA will.

Is there a “safety net” and flexibility built into the merger process? Is there a way that our rules and procedures will allow us to live into our life together in real time? What are the rules of engagement?

The JCVDT has tried to emphasize this is a new conference not a merger. Obviously, there will need to be staged transitions into our new Conference. That being said, there has to be a commitment to knowing that we will be uncomfortable with the unfamiliar for a period of time and respect that this is a part of change. We’re not clear what is meant by the “rules of engagement” but if it is about managing expectations and clarifying expectations, the Conferences’ consistory and board will be responsible for transitional planning. . As for flexibility, we are extremely flexible because we haven't cast anything in stone yet.

How was the time management of staff determined? Or what was/is the thought process for proposing the number of staff in regard to ministry expectations? In our current conference, staff is already spread thin. How will it be different for staff in a larger conference?

The current draft staff structure was created from looking at the staff budgets from each conference and creating the number of positions in relationship to the current combined budgets. The positions were created by what is required by the constitution and by-laws of the UCC, what positions are required for a viable conference and from the visioning process of what ministry focuses we would have if we had unlimited resources. The ACM position for faith formation/ leadership development and the position of communications/information-technology coordinator/assistant for faith formation and leadership development ACM came out of the most mentioned ministry focuses.

In the transition time, additional study will need to take place to know how to engage in new ways of ministry in a new conference attentive to God doing new things. We need to look at new ways of utilizing staff resources, including what might be described as itinerant ministry with regular contact with churches in the far corners of the new conference.

As the proposed staff structure is a draft, it may change as our further understanding of our ministry together would shape the number of staff, their location (or mobility) and how to provide for adequate support of the ministry. How we as the JCVDT have initially envisioned it is that no staff person will succeed without building teams of people within the congregations of the conference committed to the work that the staff person is engaged in. If the staff person does not build a team, there will be limited success. As the job descriptions are fleshed out during the transition time, every effort will be made to be sure that our staff are as successful at fulfilling their role as possible.

What is the “Way” in which we would be doing ministry differently?

We would be working out of our covenant with one another as churches, associations and conference. Agreeing to be accountable to each other...is one of the key aspects of covenant that our current structure does not stress. We have provided accountability for our pastors....but there must also be accountability, i.e. honest assessment for our ministry and mission as churches, associations and conference as covenantal partners.

Associations can provide that accountability, congregations could select, from among the conference congregations, a team of other congregations with whom they will meet on a regular basis and share ideas and

struggles as a means of getting some feedback. Our vision is that congregations who share similar ministries or congregations that have similar goals for growth, revitalization, hospitality and/or community engagement would come together to work towards these ministry goals, care for and support one another in their ministry together and hold each other accountable. This approach of letting congregations self-determine the peer group they wish to be part of continues their ability to choose the direction of their ministry and have their efforts strengthened by peer support, suggestions and accountability.

In any relationship, we need to work together, with commitment and conviction. There is vulnerability in doing something new and most of us are risk adverse, but the benefit is growth, revitalization, hospitality, inclusiveness, and community connection. Let's state here and now that fear of change will not prevent us from serving Christ together!

Will there be FULL financial disclosure by both conferences, including debt obligations/assets/savings, and will it be made PUBLIC?

Full financial disclosure is essential and we cannot see any reason why this will not happen in the transition time. The proposed budgets for PSEC and PNEC for 2019 are currently available under their Fall Annual Meeting resources on their respective websites. Although this does not disclose everything at this time, it may be helpful to gain a basic understanding of where both conferences lie financially.

The UCC has taken a position on being open and affirming (OnA). All new church starts are expected to be open and affirming. If this is a new Conference for the UCC, shouldn't it be an open and affirming conference?

This is still to be determined. When the JCVDT held a ZOOM meeting to hear perspectives on this, we did not have enough voices present to make a decision. What we can say is one of our goals in a new conference is to be inclusive. In the transition time, it is our hope that one of the conversations that will happen is how will we live out inclusivity in a new unified conference. Just as we can't dictate love but instead need to teach it, if we continue to work from a place of patience and inclusion, remembering that "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things endures all things," we may find hearts and minds opening to God's love that we may all be united in Christ.