

Keystone Project: Summary from February 3, 2023

The fourth meeting of the Keystone Study Group* took place Friday, February 3, 2023 at St. Thomas UCC, hosted by the Penn Central Conference Office staff. The KSG meets monthly to explore the possibilities of mutual or consolidated ministry among the four conferences in Pennsylvania toward the question, “could we become ONE Pennsylvania Keystone Conference?”

We reviewed progress in the first of four phases of our outlined process overview. We continue to ask about our common driving mission to identify the role of “the conference” to “the local church” in supporting and strengthening the faithful in the Great Commandment (Love God and neighbor) and the Great Commission (Go and share). Recognizing we are all called to live and grow as disciples of Jesus, we look for ways to empower the local church.

Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities were identified at the levels of conference, association and local church, and we looked for similar and unique characteristics and trends from all 4 conferences. We found encouragement in hearing the many ways which congregations and conferences have been creative over the pandemic years to establish new ways of being the church. While we can all identify problem areas and share common struggles, we clearly found areas where improvement can be achieved for us all collaboratively, especially with technology support.

We also began identifying “**Frequently Asked Questions**” (FAQs) for which we are developing responses which will be shared in upcoming Conferences’ E-news and website communications. A link will soon be available for sharing our unified message of anticipating your questions, such as:

- Why are we exploring becoming one Pennsylvania Conference?
- How will our ministry be strengthened?
- What benefit will joint relationships bring for resources and services to the local church?
- How will restructuring as one conference support the local church with personnel?
- How will assets of buildings, land, endowments and other financial resources be managed?
- What bylaws will be needed to support governance, authorization for ministry (CoM), and denominational structure?

With these weighty topics driving our work, our next priority is to develop and recommend a communication/engagement plan and the FAQs for what a possible merger would look like to be shared at upcoming conferences’ and associations’ Spring meetings. Forums and workshops will be planned to connect with all 4 conferences to solicit input and gather more data for potential options for a new vision and ministry model for the Keystone state.

Sharing our progress in grace and hope,

Communications Team

Steve Davis	St. John’s UCC, Fullerton (PNEC)
Sterling Fritz	Redeemer’s UCC, Littlestown (PCC)
Robin Hightower	Peace In Zion UCC, Zieglerville (PSEC)
Deb Long	First Trinity UCC, Youngwood (PWC)

*A study and discernment group of the 4 PA UCC Conferences – Penn West, Penn Central, Penn NE, and Pennsylvania SE