

Essential Functions Identified by the Keystone Working Group Handout

1) Faith Formation for All Ages

Psalm 32:8: *"I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."*

Faith Formation is one of the prime reasons our churches exist. Faith formation begins at birth and extends to the grave and beyond. It involves programs and meaningful encounters which help to deepen one's faith, understand God's unfailing love and prepares our members to share the good news beyond the church walls. Christian identity becomes rooted in the day-to-day religious practices of individuals and family units and their exposure to religious opportunities such as Sunday or Church School Programs, Bible Study Classes, Confirmation Preparation Classes, Outdoor Programming, and a variety of age-specific and intergenerational activities which build knowledge of and engagement in the Christian Faith.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Theological grounding or support for ministries across generations**
- 2) **Biblically informed and engaged disciples**
- 3) **Disciples whose lives bear witness to the fruits of the Spirit**

What might "better" or "new" look like compared to now?

- 1) **Increase in volunteerism [quantitative]**
- 2) **More involved as disciples in various settings [qualitative]**
- 3) **Deeper connection and wider engagement of people of all ages across the Keystone Conference [State]**
- 4) **Increasing trend of 2%/yr involved/engaged disciples in various educational, mission, outreach settings**

2) Generosity & Stewardship Ministries

2 Corinthians 9.11: *You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us.*

The essential functions of financial ministry are to expand the spirit and attitude of generosity, increase financial literacy, provide transparent management of all funds, and leverage their use for mission accomplishment. A conference provides education for stewardship development, fundraising best practices, and budget planning and management. It administers endowment funds and maximizes potential investment income in accordance with a donor's intent. A conference directs grant programs aimed at supporting specific ministries or projects. It serves as a local church model for financial policies, procedures, and internal controls that safeguard all assets, and ensures transparency with clear and consistent reporting that complies with applicable laws and regulations.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Increased financial literacy**
- 2) **A culture of abundance**
- 3) **Expanded attitude of generosity**
- 4) **Appropriate management of \$ at local settings.**
(Largely done by Continuing Education. Touch on OCWM, budget literacy, endowments, investments, grant policies, gift acceptance policies, fund-raising, etc.)

What might "better" or "new" look like compared to now?

- 1) **Churches able to talk more openly about money**
- 2) **Increased trend in giving of x%/yr at all settings**
- 3) **Wide access to information about on-line giving**
- 4) **Access to resources regarding alternative sources of financial support**

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3) Oversight/Authorization/Support

1 Timothy 4:15-16: *Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Preserve in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Authorization/Oversight/Support includes tasks related to preparation, formation, and standing for those seeking and holding ministerial authorization in the United Church of Christ. The UCC Constitution assigns this work to an association's Committee on Ministry (or a conference acting as Associations). Initial authorization decisions include assessment of competency across the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers in the UCC and validation of authorizable calls. Oversight includes monitoring clergy status necessary to maintain standing including ethical behaviors in line with the Ministerial Code, annual information reviews, situational support consultations, continuing education, and fitness reviews. Oversight of churches may include practices recommended by the forthcoming Manual on Church and its adoption.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Consistent, objective expectations of authorized ministers and Committees on Ministry**
- 2) **COM members approach their work with expertise and intentionality**
- 3) **Consistency of competence and excellence of authorized ministers**
- 4) **Support of authorized ministers**
- 5) **Established clearinghouse for resources and coursework**
- 6) **Comprehensive Boundary Training and excellence in pastoral ethics**
- 7) **Comprehensive support for Committees on Ministry**
- 8) **Culture of Call nurtured and promoted**

What might "better" or "new" look like compared to now?

- 1) **Authorization process values excellence and competency**
- 2) **One process for authorization following the Manual on Ministry**
- 3) **Consistent oversight of Continuing Education across whole Conference**

4) Search and Call

Acts 13:2-3: *While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands upon them and sent them off.*

Search and Call includes processes which involve transitions among churches and authorized ministers. These processes include but are not limited to: assisting authorized ministers and churches with profile completion, sharing clergy profiles with congregations as requested, sharing church profiles with interested authorized ministers, conference to conference reference checks for final vetting, finding and negotiating contacts with interim pastors, and assistance with and review of call agreements.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Adequate staff to support churches in transition with the process of finding new leadership**
- 2) **Consolidated and streamlined resources and support documents for ministry settings in transition**

What might "better" or "new" look like compared to now?

- 1) **Dedicated and knowledgeable staff who can recognize and encourage truth-telling in church and individual profiles**
- 2) **Consolidated and streamlined processes for UCC and non-UCC candidates**
- 3) **Better connectivity between church and conference measured in presence of staff, participation of congregational members and spirit of hope & possibility**
- 4) **Create new models for staffing churches [other than, in addition to, lay ministry training/authorization], new models for being the church**
- 5) **Increase in candidates applying for PA churches**
- 6) **Broad recruitment and development of interim ministers**

Essential Functions Identified by the Keystone Working Group Handout

5) Digital Ministry/Technology

Romans 10: 14-15: *How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

Digital media is a critical ministry platform for communication, engagement, and outreach. Through websites, social media channels, online streaming, and video presentations geographic distances are bridged. Digital media facilitates the sharing of worship services and educational events, enables individuals to connect with the best spiritual and ministry practices and it provides a space for meaningful conversations, the exploration of faith, and social activism. Use of these tools will engage, inspire, and connect diverse congregations and clergy and inviting them to be part of a vibrant and inclusive community of faith.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Dedicated staff person for this function**
- 2) **One administrative database**
- 3) **Evangelism present in discussions, actions, and education (story-telling)**
- 4) **Effective digital meetings, worship events, and church technology training across the Conference.**
- 5) **Broader connections across the diversity of the Conference for educational and programmatic support.**
- 6) **Access points in conjunction with federal & state programs and grants for finding internet access**
- 7) **Centralized digital library for podcasts, sermons, music, conference records**
- 8) **Churches with updated digital ministry/technology**

What might "better" or "new" look like compared to now?

- 1) **Consolidation and streamlining all digital media**
- 2) **By 2030 fully digitized conference and congregational records and files**

6) Communication

Matthew 7:24-25: *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.*

An essential function of conferences is communication. The challenges and opportunities of sending and receiving messages, as well as providing occasions for feedback to demonstrate understanding, are among the most significant aspects of ministry. Communication in conferences frequently occurs on a large scale to promote sharing of resources and to build connections across broad constituencies. E-newsletters and other mass communication forms are examples of the media used to send messages widely within the conference and beyond. Lower-level methods of communication occur with groups within the Conference such as communications with groups of pastors, local churches, ministry teams and committees, etc. and provides opportunities for them to engage in mission and ministry.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Regular, consistent communications regarding Conference news, activities, programs, etc. across all platforms.**
- 2) **Communications are faith-filled and forward-looking.**
- 3) **Consistent branding across all communication sites including social media platforms.**
- 4) **Successful feedback loops to ensure inclusion in reception of messaging.**
- 5) **Central platform for information, continuing education opportunities, events, etc.**

What might "better" or "new" look like compared to now?

- 1) **Dedicated staff expertise**
- 2) **Streamlining and consistency**

Essential Functions Identified by the Keystone Working Group Handout

7) Congregational Futures

Acts 2:42: *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.*

Local congregations are the central setting of the United Church of Christ and as such require support, assistance, and guidance from the conference. In some cases, associations or other regional bodies may have oversight of some functions, but ultimately the conference is often the “bridge” between and among local congregations, associations, and the national setting of the church. Conference staff assist congregations which are going through times of transition. A key function of a conference is to provide and oversee the deployment of resources to support the local congregations.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Effective congregational self-assessment**
- 2) **Sufficient resources to congregations seeking to determine their future legacy or assistance for thriving (including: revitalizing, closure/legacy, sharing ministries, conflict management, systemic issues, etc.)**
- 3) **Facilitate creation of a ‘plan of action’ with congregations to move them forward**
- 4) **Entrepreneurial ideas for funding ministry/staffing**
- 5) **Education and commitment to sacred partnerships between and among congregations, associations, and the Conference**
- 6) **Compassionate exit path for those who do not want to remain/be in covenant with the UCC**
- 7) **Welcome plan for those who wish to affiliate with the UCC**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1) **Expansion of resources for local congregations**
- 2) **Innovative processes for birthing new faith communities and ecumenical opportunities**
- 3) **Clarity regarding realistic expectations for the future**
- 4) **Expectation of a congregational-cultural shift toward thriving and spiritual growth**

8) Disaster Ministries

2 Corinthians 4:8-9: *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

Disaster Ministries provides spiritual care, material resources, and collaboration between and among local churches, ecumenical partners, and other organizations to provide immediate relief and long-term recovery assistance to human-made and natural disaster-impacted communities. It can include one or more types of response: emergency response to provide quick reaction to a victim’s needs; long-term recovery to rebuild and restore homes and livelihoods; preparedness and education to equip individuals and communities with the knowledge and resources to better prepare for and respond to future disasters; and advocacy work that seeks to address systemic issues that exacerbate the impact of disasters on marginalized communities.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Respond to disaster-impacted communities in a timely and effective manner.**
- 2) **Maintain effective partnerships with PEMA and PA VOAD.**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

1. **Disaster Response Coordinator position who can facilitate easier and stronger relations with ecumenical partners.**
2. **Removes current conference boundaries to allow for single geographical response.**

Essential Functions Identified by the Keystone Working Group Handout

9) Leadership: Training Pastors/lay leaders

Deuteronomy 1.13: *Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable, and I will make them your leaders.*

Leadership is a key component of every essential conference function. Faithful and effective ministry requires faithful and effective leaders who follow the example of Jesus Christ. All settings of ministry rely on the collaborative efforts of spiritually grounded, mature lay and pastoral leaders who are trained, equipped, and inspired for their particular service. The conference is a partner in the call process and helps train competent and qualified leaders who possess the broad range of gifts and skills required of pastoral leaders (as identified by the Marks of Faithful and Effective Ministers). The conference offers ongoing training to local church pastors who recruit, train, support, and celebrate lay leaders of all ages and abilities for faithful and effective ministry with the local and wider church. The conference offers ongoing opportunities for leaders to reflect on their practice of essential leadership characteristics and skills including but not limited to spiritual vitality, vision casting, honesty with self/others, integrity, appropriate risk-taking, healthy exercise of power and authority, self-awareness and differentiation, and lifelong learning.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

Identify and nurture collaborative and empowered leaders who can provide forward-focused, strategic direction for their setting.

- 1) **Facilitate the development of healthy, self-differentiated leaders leading to better- and well-functioning systems.**
- 2) **Leaders who are hopeful, spiritually grounded, and forward-thinking who foster the health and mission of their settings.**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1) **Keystone leadership development will allow for greater breadth and depth in developing leaders.**
- 2) **Very intentional focus on developing leaders as one comprehensive Conference program.**
- 3) **Keystone can provide far-reaching partnerships with seminaries and other leadership programs to engage with historic, new, and creative leadership models.**

10) Mission

Acts 4:33-34: *With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them.*

“Mission” describes the ways in which the church reaches out to show God’s love in the world. From social justice and advocacy initiatives, to local, national, and global ministry partnerships, missional outreach is essential to ministry in all settings of the church. Conferences have opportunities to support local churches in their missional efforts as they reach out to their communities and to the world. Programs supporting mission in conferences include but are not limited to justice and witness teams (racial justice, LGBTQIA+ justice, climate justice, mental health justice, etc.), local and global ministry initiatives (global mission partnerships, etc.), and even mission grants (these may also be considered a financial ministry).

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Articulated mission focus at every setting**
- 2) **Multiple ways to engage with larger community provided by every setting**
- 3) **Respect and affirmation for mission choices across all geographical ministry settings**
- 4) **Churches engage with other churches who share similar mission**
- 5) **Conference wide advocacy at state level**
- 6) **Intentional implementation of Synod action steps**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1) **increase by 2%/yr. # of hours of disciple engagement in “hands-on” mission, social justice advocacy programs**
- 2) **increasing trend of 2%/yr. in financial support of mission/social justice advocacy giving**

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11) Ecumenism

Matthew 5:16: *In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

Conference functions include connecting with partners and colleagues in other denominations for engagement in common goals including placement of authorized ministers, joint actions for justice, addressing community needs, providing collegial support to authorized ministers and congregations, offering programmatic and training resources, and seeking unity through the UCC commitment to be a United and Uniting church.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Create intentional relations with our Formula of Agreement siblings around programs and partnerships.**
- 2) **Clarify our own UCC identity around our own ministerial practices and doctrine.**
- 3) **Participation in regular meetings of judicatory partners. (modeled on PNE)**
- 4) **Shared information and resources regarding search and call. (clergy shortage crisis)**
- 5) **Active participation in regional or statewide ecumenical organizations and events.**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1) **Intentional broadening of connections between us and ecumenical partners.**
- 2) **Streamlined connection between partners and us. Ecumenical partners to connect with us**

12) Spiritual Revival

Galatians 5: 22-25: *...The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ¹² have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit.*

A vital function of a Conference is to attend to the spiritual well-being of its churches and pastors and to cultivate the gifts of the Spirit (Galatians 5) which leads to deeper discipleship. Spiritual revival in Conferences may be nurtured in numerous ways including hosting events with uplifting worship and inspirational programming; cultivating faith-forming activities with churches and faith leaders; intentionally focusing on Biblical/spiritual reflections in Conference communications; and rooting Conference ministries and missions in spiritual practices. As a church called by God to proclaim and work for the realm of God in this world, this function is essential for Conferences of the United Church of Christ.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) **Communication of Conference events and programs in a timely manner.**
- 2) **Access to large scale worship events by authorized ministers and laity (e.g., ordination vows renewal).**
- 3) **Regular biblical/theological reflections in Conference communications.**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1) **Intentional focus on discipleship**
- 2) **Large events with strong, diverse leadership**

13) UCC Identity

John 17:20-23: *The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one.*

The Conference exists as a bridge between the UCC national setting and local churches and authorized ministers. This bridgework includes upholding the UCC identity and values as they are lived out in various settings of the Conference and sharing updates, initiatives, and resources from the UCC national setting. It also includes serving on national boards and committees and encouraging others to do so, preparing Conference delegates for General Synod, mediating the implementation of Synod resolutions as needed, and serving as a resource regarding UCC history, theology, and polity. The conference work in building UCC identity awareness is balanced with unique congregational, association and area mission councils. It is the conference’s responsibility to keep relevant and at the forefront the ongoing interpretation of the UCC polity of speaking among and between settings.

Essential Functions Identified by the Keystone Working Group Handout

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) Familiarity and congruence among associations and congregations in adopting The Marks of Effective Authorized Ministers and forthcoming Manual on Church.**
- 2) Greater congregational clarity around UCC Essentials (e.g., “Foundational Theological Claims” document from UCC Historical Council).**
- 3) Growth in development of UCC identity among all settings and authorized ministers.**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1) Greater numbers can articulate UCC identity and values.**
- 2) Availability of UCC History, Theology, and polity classes open to wide variety of lay leaders and authorized ministers.**

14) Administrative, Legal and Fiscal Oversight

Matthew 20:26: *It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.*

As with all non-profit entities, the conferences of the United Church of Christ have legal responsibility for assuring the governance and fiscal management of the conference. This may include but is not limited to adhering to Constitution and Bylaws requirements, providing guidance for the development of Vision, Mission and Goals, overseeing programs and program evaluations of the conference, managing legal requirements and filings, providing fiscal oversight of income, expenses, and adherence to budgetary requirements, and resource administration for human, property, and financial assets. All legal, property, administrative, and fiscal requirements prescribed by law are overseen by the Conference and the Conference Minister as President of the non-profit corporation.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1) All legal/moral/ethical expectations upheld in all Conference functions.**
- 2) Office or position of Conference Legal Counsel established.**
- 3) Fiscally responsible management of Conference assets.**
- 4) Best business practices balanced with faithful management.**
- 5) Effective oversight of human resources. (staff and volunteer)**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1) Combined financial investments to leverage the goals and objectives of our ministries**
- 2) Streamlined and effective staff and volunteer personnel policies**

15) Pastoral Care

Galatians 6:2 *Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.*

Mirroring the deep compassion of Jesus, the Conference provides contact, reference, and presence for clergy and congregations as they face health concerns, loss and grief, ministry transitions, legal issues, and other personal/corporate challenges. The Conference embraces God's desire for healing and may, at times, financially support those requiring direct assistance.

What are the essential outcomes for this function?

- 1. Direct contact within 48 hours of receiving pastoral concern.**
- 2. Trained regional chaplains to serve across Conference.**
- 3. Confidentiality in all contacts.**
- 4. Timely communication to wider Conference of clergy deaths or significant health issues (assuming permission).**

What might “better” or “new” look like compared to now?

- 1. Staff position to oversee and coordinate pastoral care and regional chaplains.**
- 2. Single location to collect all pastoral care information to share digitally across entire Conference.**