

**A Covenant Agreement for Tri-Conference Cooperation  
among the  
South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa Conferences of the United Church of Christ**

In order to open the door for ongoing institutional reinvention, achieve more faithful and efficient allocation of resources, and enhance staff function for the welfare of the churches of our three conferences, the South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa Conferences of the United Church of Christ covenant together to share one staff according to the plan and structure described below.

This covenant consists of three distinct, but inter-locking areas of cooperation:

1. The creation of a Tri-Conference Executive Committee (TCEC) to coordinate personnel policy and a supporting budget among the three conferences and to supervise and hold accountable the Executive Conference Minister.
2. The formation of one staff, overseen by one head of staff (the Executive Conference Minister - ECM).
3. To move in an orderly and compassionate way to consolidate the existing three offices into no more than one physical office.

It is important to understand that this is NOT a proposal for the merger of these conferences. This proposal does imply a significant coordination of staffed ministry between and among the conferences, but each conference will maintain its own legal identity, financial assets, elected leadership and programmatic prerogative.

**THE TRI-CONFERENCE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

The Tri-Conference Executive Committee (TCEC) will be comprised of 9 individuals, 3 from each participating conference. The three members from each conference will be appointed by their respective Board of Directors. At all times at least 2 of the members from each conference will be current members of that conference BOD. There will be no less than one authorized minister and one layperson among the three representatives from each conference. Each member of the TCEC will serve a 3 year term and may be re-appointed once. Their terms of service will be staggered so that one member from each conference is appointed or re-appointed each year.

The TCEC will meet as necessary for the conscientious exercise of their responsibility, but no less than three times a year. They may meet face-to-face or by other virtual means as they mutually agree.

The TCEC will possess these authorities and responsibilities:

- To negotiate the missional priorities for the work of the one staff. It should be clearly understood that in addition to common priorities, each conference will continue to establish its own unique missional priorities. Therefore staff responsibilities might vary noticeably from conference to conference. The ECM and the TCEC will establish and continually monitor and adjust the overall work of the one staff, always mindful of the missional priorities established by the three conferences. (The current mission statements of the three conferences are attached.)
- To establish a common and consolidated budget for all staff and office related functions of the three conferences.
- To negotiate with the BOD's of the three conferences to fund adequately the budget. The ratio of funding for common ministries will be that of the aggregate local church memberships of the participating conferences (for example, 30,000/15,000/10,000) as reported in the most recent edition of the UCC Yearbook.
- To establish, implement and monitor a common personnel policy.
- To evaluate the ECM on an annual basis – twice annually during the ECM's first year in office.
- To provide for all logistics of staff compensation and benefits, payment of professional expenses, and provision of tax-related documents (including the adoption of housing allowances for ministerial employees).
- To appoint ACM search committees as needed (see more in next section).
- To pay all other expenses (particularly office expenses) as may be properly authorized and budgeted.
- To report annually and transparently to the Board of each conference (twice during the initial year of implementation). These reports will be financial and narrative.

To facilitate the start-up work of the TCEC, an interim staff person will be retained immediately upon the TCEC formation to support its mutual organizing work. This person will be appointed by joint action of a committee consisting of the three currently serving Conference Ministers and the three Board Chairs and will be accountable to that committee.

### **ONE STAFF**

All ministerial work is potentially lonely and isolating. Wider church work is especially so. Almost all humans work better and more creatively on teams than they do alone. A model which creates a team of highly competent and effective servant-leaders will resource the UCC congregations in our three conferences with greater impact and effect than will the same number of persons doing similar work on their own.

In addition, the collective allocation of staff responsibility in our three conferences overemphasizes executive function and underemphasizes programmatic function. Collectively we currently employ three executives and two program staff members. This model will

reallocate existing ministerial staff to employ one executive and four programmatic staff members. It will provide flexibility to alter the overall staffing structure further into the future as circumstances and available resources change.

Therefore, we covenant together to employ by call one ECM to serve as head of staff for those persons who will serve our conferences as Associate Conference Ministers, support staff and other staff as may be deemed important for the realization of our combined and distinct ministries.

This ECM will be called by vote of each conference acting individually, but in covenant with the other two. The candidate for election will be recommended by a search committee comprised of nine individuals, three selected by each conference Board of Directors. Each Board will select its 3 search committee members with a conscious intent to promote the various diversities important in our church and cultural contexts. The nine search committee members will organize to select a chair and other officers as they deem helpful. For the initial call, any incumbent conference employee who wishes to be considered for the position of ECM will be eligible for consideration. As a matter of first priority, the TCEC will adopt policy to address the potential situation of any incumbent staff member who applies to be ECM, but is not chosen.

The Search Committee will strive to conduct its work in a spirit of consensus rather than by majority rule, and will be formally staffed by an individual assigned by the General Minister and President of the UCC in cooperation with the Council of Conference Ministers. The search committee may also seek counsel from a mentor of its own choosing.

The Search Committee will present its recommended candidate to each of the conferences' Board of Directors for recommendation for that conference's election. The call to the ECM-elect will be formalized once all three conferences, at a regular or specially called meeting, have voted to extend the call. The actual date of assumption of office as ECM will be as negotiated.

The specific job description of the ECM will be crafted in ongoing dialogue and negotiation with the TCEC but will generally include these responsibilities:

- Head of Staff for the One Staff
- Staff to each of the conference Boards of Directors
- Principle representative to the wider settings of the UCC

Associate Conference Ministers will be called by action of the Tri-Conference Executive Committee. The number and portfolio of all ACM's will be determined by the ECM and the TCEC with attention to the missional priorities of each conference and in meaningful consultation with all the conference BOD's, mindfully aware of budgetary constraints and other considerations. ACM's will be called by the TCEC. They will be recommended to the TCEC by search committees formed by the TCEC and staffed by the ECM. All the ACM's will be supervised by and accountable to the ECM.

Support staff will be hired by and accountable to the ECM.

The programmatic staff (the ACM's) will be four (4) and deployed 2 to Iowa, 1 to Nebraska and 1 to South Dakota, though specific additional portfolio responsibilities (potentially cross-conference) will be assigned by the ECM (in consultation with the TCEC) according to the gifts and abilities of the ACM's, the missional priorities of each conference, and the overall needs of the churches and conferences.

All members of the common staff will be formally employed by the TCEC. Whether or not the TCEC will need to be formally incorporated will be determined by the TCEC in consultation with legal counsel.

### **JOINT SUPPORT STAFF & OFFICE**

The ECM in ongoing consultation with the TCEC will plan the structure of the support staff and any physical office necessary to support that function. It is not assumed that a physical office will or will not be necessary now or into the future. Because all three conferences currently own or lease office space and employ support staff who work from those spaces, any plans for change will be conducted with utmost care, compassion and justice. Nonetheless, the accomplishment of the mission of the common staff will be primary and the support staff and office structure will be shaped to advance that mission.

### **OTHER ISSUES**

While this program of covenantal cooperation implies a significant coordination of ministry among our respective conferences, it is to be explicitly asserted that this is not a merger of these conferences. Each will retain its own legal identity, financial and other assets, elected leadership and budgetary and programmatic prerogative. We cannot predict with any degree of certainty the long-term future of the shape of the middle settings of the UCC (conferences and associations), but this agreement only intends to enhance the cooperative function of three of those conferences, not end their distinct and individual existence.

While we believe that the missional imperatives of our respective conferences significantly overlap, they are not identical (for example, we have significantly different relationships with camping facilities and programs). Programming prerogative for all work not explicitly assigned to the TCEC will remain with each individual conference. Among other things, this implies that OCWM sharing ratios will be established by each conference according to its own values and processes. It also means that programs not explicitly held in common (for example, camping and support of other organizations) will remain the responsibility of each conference on its own.




It is recognized that challenges will arise during the implementation of and the ongoing work of this common enterprise. Therefore we commit ourselves to transparent processes of good will in working through those challenges as they arise, and will call upon outside and commonly respected mediation should we fail to resolve difficult issues among ourselves. Any of the partners may request modification of the working agreements established in this covenant. Any such modification must be adopted by all three conference boards to become effective.

Should a conference wish to leave the common ministry it may do so according to its own processes, but only with at least a full year's notice to the other conferences.

This covenant agreement will become effective immediately upon its adoption by vote of each of the three conferences at either an Annual Meeting or a special meeting called specifically for consideration of this issue.

The precise timetable for implementation of this covenant will be as negotiated among the three Boards of Directors, and will move forward in as timely a fashion as good process permits. A working timeline for such implementation is attached.

Signatures of duly authorized representatives from the South Dakota, Nebraska and Iowa Conferences (including the dates approved by each) will follow at the end of the document.

 Authorized Representative – South Dakota Conference	<u>BOD Chairperson</u> Title	<u>12-6-16</u> Date
 Authorized Representative – Nebraska Conference	<u>BOD Chairperson</u> Title	<u>12/13/16</u> Date
 Authorized Representative – Iowa Conference	<u>BOD Chairperson</u> Title	<u>11/28/16</u> Date

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