

8/17/2026

To the Members of the Nebraska Conference,

We, the following undersigned, are calling for an open conversation regarding our continued participation in the Tri-Conference Ministry (TCM) partnership. We believe we have reached a point where the Conference has a **fiduciary responsibility** to conduct a thorough and objective review of its value, cost, and effectiveness.

As leaders entrusted with the stewardship of the Nebraska Conference, we have a responsibility to ensure that the resources entrusted to us are being used in the most faithful, effective, and fiscally responsible manner possible. That responsibility includes periodically evaluating whether our current structures continue to serve the Conference's mission and the needs of our Local Churches.

While the TCM agreement was established with important goals, many of the assumptions upon which it was based have changed over the past five years. In practice, portions of the original agreement have not functioned as envisioned, and the arrangement has, in many respects, operated outside its original framework for a considerable period of time.

An additional concern is that our current covenant/agreement stipulates that Nebraska is to have an Associate Conference Minister dedicated to serving the Nebraska Conference at no additional cost. Yet, in reality, the Nebraska Conference has just had to approve the expenditure of roughly an additional \$60,000 in Conference funds, which is coming from our endowments, to support the work of a part-time Associate Conference Minister position for Nebraska.

While this decision may have addressed an immediate need, it also raises an important governance question. If we are now paying additional funds to receive services that the agreement contemplated would already be provided, then we have a fiduciary, spiritual and moral responsibility as a Conference Board and as Conference Community in Covenant to evaluate whether the current arrangement continues to fulfill its intended purpose and whether it remains the most faithful and fiscally responsible use of our resources and are we being good neighbors.

If an objective analysis demonstrates that the Nebraska Conference could employ its own full-time Conference Minister, together with appropriate administrative support, for less than or comparable to the cost of our current arrangement which is around \$360,000 (\$240,000 to TCM, plus \$60,000 in Conference Support Cost plus the additional \$60,000 for a PT- ACM) while providing greater responsiveness, increased services, and stronger accountability to Nebraska congregations, then we believe we have a responsibility to seriously consider that option.

This is not an argument that such a model is necessarily the correct answer. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that our fiduciary responsibility requires us to evaluate all reasonable alternatives using current information rather than relying on assumptions that may no longer reflect our present reality. The question before us is not whether we preserve the current arrangement because it has existed, but whether it continues to provide the level of service, accountability, and stewardship that Nebraska's Local Churches are contributing towards.

Responsible governance requires us to periodically ask difficult questions, examine the facts objectively, and determine which model best advances the mission and ministry of the Nebraska Conference.

We respectfully request that the attached Resolution be received for open discussion and consideration at the 2026 Nebraska Annual Conference. Our intent is not to predetermine the outcome, but to invite the Conference into a thoughtful, transparent, and fact-based conversation regarding the future of the Tri-Conference Ministry partnership. We believe this conversation reflects our shared fiduciary, moral, and covenantal responsibility to faithfully evaluate the stewardship of Conference resources, the fulfillment of existing agreements, the services currently being provided, and whether the current staffing and organizational model continues to meet the present and future needs of the Nebraska Conference.

We also believe this conversation should begin now. By notifying our covenant partners prior to the JAM meeting of Nebraska's intent to bring this Resolution before the 2026 Annual Conference, we demonstrate the openness, transparency, and mutual respect that are foundational to our covenantal relationship. Early notification provides Iowa and South Dakota with the opportunity, if they so choose, to begin similar conversations within their own conferences before additional volunteer hours, planning efforts, and financial resources are committed to the TCM Task Force for Visioning. We believe it is both faithful and responsible to provide our covenant partners with this opportunity so that each conference may engage in its own discernment process according to its own governance, priorities, and timeline. Such an approach allows all three conferences to participate in this discernment with the benefit of complete information and without creating unnecessary expectations or commitments before each conference has had the opportunity to prayerfully and thoughtfully consider the future of the partnership.

Whatever conclusions are ultimately reached, we believe our Local Churches deserve the confidence that these decisions have been made through careful analysis, faithful stewardship, discernment, transparency, and a shared commitment to the long-term health, vitality, and mission of the Nebraska Conference and our covenantal partnerships. We further believe that engaging in this conversation openly and deliberately is itself an expression of faithful governance, honoring both the trust our Local Churches have placed in us and the covenant we share with one another.

We thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this Resolution and for your faithful service to the churches of the Nebraska Conference.

Signed

The Nebraska Conference Board of Directors

Current Ministry Context and Organizational Realities

Before meaningful discernment can occur, it is important to understand how the Tri-Conference Ministry has evolved since the original Covenant/Agreement was adopted. The following information presents the current organizational realities of the partnership and provides the factual context needed for the Nebraska Conference to faithfully exercise its fiduciary, moral, spiritual, and covenantal responsibilities as it considers the accompanying Resolution.

The Tri-Conference Ministry was established to strengthen ministry through collaboration, shared leadership, and responsible stewardship of financial and human resources. Since its formation, however, the ministry context has evolved. Congregations require different forms of support; Search and Call has become increasingly complex; concerns have been expressed regarding Conference responsiveness, and the demands placed upon Conference leadership have continued to increase.

The staffing structure has likewise evolved significantly from the model originally contemplated by the Tri-Conference Ministry Covenant/Agreement. ([See Attachment for Details](#))

Today, the Executive Conference Minister serves as the Sole Conference Minister for both the Nebraska and South Dakota Conferences, leads the Iowa Conference team all while simultaneously continuing to provide executive leadership and administration for the Tri-Conference Ministry partnership. In fulfilling these roles, the Executive Conference Minister essentially carries the full range of responsibilities traditionally associated with a Conference Minister for both conferences, including Search and Call, Ministerial Placement, Clergy and Congregational Pastoral Care, Committee on Ministry Support, guidance for local churches, leadership development, conflict consultation, ecclesiastical oversight, and participation in the many boards, committees, and ministries of the Nebraska and South Dakota Conferences. These responsibilities are carried out in addition to providing executive leadership, strategic planning, financial oversight, and administration for the broader Tri-Conference Ministry.

By comparison, Iowa is served by a full-time Associate Conference Minister together with a part-time Associate Conference Minister whose responsibilities are focused exclusively on the Iowa Conference. Administrative services, including financial management, bookkeeping, records management, communications, and office support, are provided through a shared staff serving all three conferences.

The Nebraska Conference contributes approximately \$240,000 annually to the shared Tri-Conference Ministry budget. Those shared resources support the Executive Conference Minister, the Full-Time Associate Conference Minister serving Iowa, the Part-Time Associate Conference Minister serving Iowa, and the shared administrative staff who provide financial management, bookkeeping, records management, communications, and operational support for all three conferences. In addition to this shared investment, the Nebraska Conference provides approximately **\$60,000 annually** to support Nebraska Conference operations, an amount that has steadily increased over time, and now has approved an additional **\$60,000 annually** to provide a dedicated part-time Associate Conference Minister for Nebraska. **Together, these commitments represent an annual investment of approximately \$360,000 by the Nebraska Conference.**

As a practical matter, the Executive Conference Minister's responsibilities are divided among Five major areas: serving as the solo Conference Minister ~~and~~ for Nebraska, serving as solo Conference Minister for South Dakota, serving as the Conference Minister for Iowa in addition to providing executive leadership for the Tri-Conference Ministry, and supporting the broader shared ministries of the partnership. While the actual distribution of time necessarily varies from month to month, this organizational structure means that only a portion of the Executive Conference Minister's leadership can be devoted exclusively to Nebraska-specific ministries. This is not a reflection on the dedication or effectiveness of the Executive Conference Minister. Rather, it is the natural consequence of one individual carrying multiple full-scope leadership responsibilities within a shared ministry model.

Another important organizational reality is the ministry of the Nebraska Conference Deacons. These positions were not part of the original Tri-Conference Ministry staffing model. Rather, they were established by the TCM after the dedicated Nebraska Associate Conference Minister position stipulated by the original Covenant/Agreement was eliminated as part of efforts to reduce Tri-Conference Ministry staffing costs, a restructuring that also included the elimination of the dedicated Associate Conference Minister position for South Dakota. And now all three states have Deacon Positions that are funded by Nebraska's Contributions to the TCM as well.

The Conference Deacon ministry was created to provide the local physical pastoral Conference presence, congregational relationships, and support that had originally been anticipated through a dedicated Nebraska Associate Conference Minister. Today, Nebraska receives the ministries of two Conference Deacons, although the original Nebraska Deacon Model envisioned and started with three. These positions were established as part-time ministries of approximately five hours per week.

Given the geographic size of the Nebraska Conference, five hours per week is often insufficient even for travel to and from many congregations, leaving limited time for pastoral presence, relationship building, consultation, Search and Call support, or follow-up.

Nevertheless, the Conference Deacons have faithfully served well beyond the expectations of their original roles and have become an important connection between Nebraska congregations and Conference leadership.

When considered together, the current staffing model now relies upon the combined efforts of the Executive Conference Minister, two Conference Deacons. The Nebraska Board has recently recognized this is inadequate and approved the addition of a Nebraska-funded part-time Associate Conference Minister to provide additional ministry support. This observation is not intended as criticism of any individual serving within the Tri-Conference Ministry. Rather, it documents the evolution of the staffing model over time.

The original Tri-Conference Ministry Covenant/Agreement stipulated that Nebraska would receive the services of a dedicated Associate Conference Minister as part of the partnership. It is a matter of fact that, for several years, Nebraska has not received those dedicated Associate Conference Minister services while continuing to fulfill its financial commitments under the Covenant/Agreement. In response to Nebraska's ministry needs, the Nebraska Conference has approved approximately **\$60,000 annually** to provide a dedicated part-time Associate Conference Minister for Nebraska.

This circumstance should not be interpreted as criticism of the faithful ministry of the Executive Conference Minister, Associate Conference Ministers, Conference Deacons, or Conference staff. **Rather, it presents an important fiduciary and covenantal question.** If Nebraska has found it necessary to create new ministry positions and provide additional funding for services that the Covenant/Agreement stipulated would be provided, while continuing to contribute to the shared staffing model, it is appropriate to objectively evaluate whether the current partnership continues to fulfill the expectations of the Covenant/Agreement and whether the allocation of staffing and financial resources continues to best serve all covenantal partners.

Scripture reminds us that **"it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy" (1 Corinthians 4:2).** Faithful stewardship is not measured by preserving existing structures simply because they have served well in the past. Rather, faithful stewardship calls us to prayerfully examine whether those structures continue to serve God's mission as faithfully, effectively, and responsibly as possible. Such discernment is not a sign of dissatisfaction or distrust. **It is an expression of faithful Christian leadership.**

Given the Nebraska Conference's projected annual investment of approximately \$360,000, for 2027, our fiduciary responsibility requires us to ask whether the current partnership continues to provide the most effective, accountable, responsive, and sustainable model for serving Nebraska congregations. It is equally appropriate to evaluate whether an alternative staffing or organizational model could provide equal or greater ministry focused exclusively on Nebraska while making equally faithful or better use of the resources entrusted to the Conference. This proposal does not presume that such a model exists. Rather, it recognizes that faithful governance requires these questions to be asked before additional long-term commitments are made.

The timing of this review is equally important. The Nebraska Conference has already invested nearly **\$8,000** in the TCM Visioning Committee (Task Force), with countless additional volunteer hours contributed by members of all three conferences. As the committee continues its work, additional planning, recommendations, and implementation efforts will require even greater investments of time, leadership, and financial resources.

Completing this review by February 2027 does not slow the work of the Visioning Committee. Rather, it protects the work already completed while allowing that work to continue. If the review concludes that the current Tri-Conference Ministry partnership remains the strongest model, the committee's work can move forward with renewed confidence, knowing its recommendations rest upon a current and objective assessment of the partnership. If, however, the review identifies opportunities for modification or an alternative organizational model, those findings can be incorporated before final recommendations are adopted. **This approach protects the substantial investments of time, volunteer leadership, and financial resources already made while reducing the likelihood that the Visioning Committee or the partner conferences would need to revisit foundational assumptions or repeat significant portions of their work.**

This timing is equally important to our covenantal relationship with Iowa and South Dakota. Faithful covenant calls us to honesty, transparency, and mutual respect. If Nebraska believes an objective review is warranted, we have a responsibility to communicate that intention openly with our covenant partners before the Visioning process advances further. **By doing so, this review creates the opportunity for our partner conferences, if they so choose, to undertake similar reviews during the same timeframe rather than one or two years later.** Conducting these conversations concurrently allows each conference to discern its future within the partnership while the Visioning Committee's work continues. Whatever conclusions are ultimately reached, the committee's recommendations can then be informed by the collective discernment of all three conferences rather than requiring significant portions of its work to be reconsidered after the fact.

Rather than delaying the Visioning process, this approach strengthens it. It protects the work already completed, respects the investments still to be made, and honors the covenantal relationships among our conferences by ensuring that future decisions are shaped by objective analysis, faithful stewardship, transparent governance, and shared discernment.

The proposed review is intended to objectively evaluate:

- The extent to which the current partnership fulfills the expectations of the original Covenant/Agreement.
- The stewardship of the Nebraska Conference's financial investment.
- Current staffing allocations, leadership capacity, accountability, and responsiveness.
- Ministry effectiveness in serving congregations, authorized ministers, Search and Call, and other Conference ministries.
- Alternative organizational or staffing models that could provide equal or greater ministry while strengthening accountability, responsiveness, and stewardship.
- The impact of any recommendations upon our covenantal relationships with Iowa, South Dakota, and the wider United Church of Christ.

If the current Tri-Conference Ministry partnership continues to represent the strongest model for shared ministry, an objective review will strengthen confidence in that conclusion. If opportunities exist to improve ministry, accountability, stewardship, or responsiveness to Nebraska congregations, the Conference should have the benefit of that information before making additional long-term commitments.

The question before the Nebraska Conference is not whether the Tri-Conference Ministry has accomplished meaningful ministry. It clearly has. The question is whether the current structure continues to represent the most faithful, effective, accountable, responsive, and financially responsible model for carrying out the mission of the Nebraska Conference today and into the future.

Original TCM Model	Current Reality
Dedicated Nebraska ACM	Eliminated
Dedicated South Dakota ACM	Eliminated
Iowa ACM	Full-time + Part-time + Plus ECM oversight
Nebraska Conference Deacons	Created after ACM elimination, currently staffing 2 instead of 3
Nebraska-funded ACM	We likely now will be adding (\$60,000/year) for a PT position – that is already stipulated in the original agreement.
ECM	Now serves as the sole Conference Minister for Nebraska and South Dakota while assisting the Iowa team plus leading the TCM

Resolution Calling for a Fiduciary Review of the Tri-Conference Ministry Partnership for the Nebraska Conference

Whereas,

The Nebraska Conference of the United Church of Christ is called to exercise faithful stewardship of the ministries, financial resources, and mission entrusted to its care; and

Whereas,

The Nebraska Conference has fiduciary, moral, spiritual, and covenantal responsibilities to periodically evaluate significant financial commitments, organizational structures, and ministry partnerships to ensure we continue to advance the mission of Jesus Christ through the United Church of Christ; and

Whereas,

The Tri-Conference Ministry (TCM) partnership was established to strengthen ministry through collaboration, shared leadership, and responsible stewardship; and

Whereas,

The original Tri-Conference Ministry Covenant/Agreement stipulated that the Nebraska Conference would receive the services of a dedicated Associate Conference Minister as part of the partnership; at no additional charge and

Whereas,

Since January of 2021, the Nebraska Conference has not received the dedicated Associate Conference Minister services as stipulated by the Covenant/Agreement, while continuing to fulfill its financial commitments to the partnership; and

Whereas,

The Nebraska Conference has recently approved approximately \$60,000 in additional annual funding to provide a dedicated part-time Associate Conference Minister for Nebraska, resulting in what appears to be a total annual investment in excess of \$360,000 for Conference leadership and administrative support; in 2027 and

Whereas,

The Nebraska Conference has begun investing additional leadership time, volunteer effort, and financial resources (Almost \$8000) through the TCM Task Force for Visioning, making this an appropriate time to objectively evaluate the partnership before further long-term commitments are made; and

Whereas,

Faithful covenant calls us to engage our partner conferences with honesty, transparency, mutual respect, and timely communication regarding significant matters affecting our shared ministry;

Therefore, Be It Resolved

That the Nebraska Conference authorizes a comprehensive and objective review of the Tri-Conference Ministry partnership.

Be It Further Resolved, that the review shall include, but not be limited to:

1. The extent to which the current partnership fulfills the expectations and provisions of the original Tri-Conference Ministry Covenant/Agreement.
2. The financial commitments of the Nebraska Conference and the stewardship of those resources.
3. Current staffing allocations, leadership capacity, organizational accountability, and responsiveness to Nebraska congregations.
4. Ministry effectiveness, including support for congregations, Search and Call, authorized ministers, and Conference ministries.
5. Alternative organizational and staffing models, including modifications to the existing partnership and the feasibility of providing Conference ministry independently if such models could provide equal or greater ministry while strengthening accountability, responsiveness, and stewardship.
6. The impact of any recommendations upon the Nebraska Conference and its covenantal relationships with Iowa, South Dakota, and the wider United Church of Christ.

Be It Further Resolved, that the Conference Board shall appoint or designate an appropriate review body to conduct this evaluation, utilizing Conference leaders and, when appropriate, individuals possessing expertise in nonprofit governance, finance, organizational leadership, and ministry.

Be It Further Resolved, that the review body shall complete its work and present a written report, together with recommendations, to the Nebraska Conference Board **no later than February 28, 2027.**

Be It Further Resolved, that the Executive Conference Minister and Conference leadership notify our covenant partners prior to the upcoming Joint Annual Meeting that the Nebraska Conference has initiated this review, inviting them, if they so choose, to undertake similar discernment within their own conferences.

Be It Further Resolved, that upon presentation of the review, the Nebraska Conference shall convene a duly called meeting for prayerful discussion and an official vote of record on the recommendations, which may include, but are not limited to:

- Continuing the current Tri-Conference Ministry partnership without modification;
- Continuing the partnership with mutually agreed modifications;
- Renegotiating the Covenant/Agreement;
- Implementing an alternative staffing or organizational model;
- Pursuing another course of action determined by the Nebraska Conference and/or Board following prayerful discernment and objective review.

Be It Finally Resolved, that throughout this process the Nebraska Conference reaffirms its gratitude for the faithful ministry of all who have served within the Tri-Conference Ministry and its commitment to conducting this review in a spirit of Christian charity, faithful stewardship, covenantal integrity, transparency, and mutual respect.