

Proposed Changes to the Pacific Northwest Conference, United Church of Christ Constitution and Bylaws (to be voted upon at Annual Meeting, March 13-15)

- 1. What are bylaws?** Bylaws are legal documents that name and explain the structure, expectations and guidelines by which an organization will operate.
- 2. Do we need bylaws?** In the state of Washington, nonprofits (including churches) are required to have bylaws that outline their governance structure, operational procedures and comply with state law.
- 3. Why were the PNC-UCC Constitution and Bylaws rewritten?** As is stated in the UCC Constitution (and called out in the proposed changes), it is “the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God.” That is a call to which we are seeking to begin to respond to with these proposed revisions.

Our conference of churches is ever-changing in a world that is ever-changing. We need a constitution and bylaws that:

- better remind and faithfully call us to our shared commitments of faith and discipleship for “such a time as this” in our world
 - empower us to the work to which God is calling us as the Church grows and changes rather than encumber us in doing that work with a structure-heavy model
 - honor the essential need for representation of Conference members who belong to non-dominant culture identity groups
 - help us return our focus to the local churches and the good work being done in and among our churches. The Conference is not an entity separate from the local churches; it is an amalgamation of all of us, striving together in covenant for Christ’s Kin-dom realized on earth.
 - are simpler overall in ways that both ensure we can follow our bylaws while creating some spacious invitation for how we might work together
- 4. I know the Constitution and Bylaws have been completely rewritten, but can you point to the larger substantive changes made?** Larger, substantive changes include:
 - a more robust Constitution focused on our mission and ministry together
 - the elimination of “areas:” While we continue to care about community-building between churches, and while we continue to care about geographical diversity of members on our Board of Directors (BOD) and standing committees, the loss of some churches and the decline in membership in others has greatly impacted some of the “areas” named in

the present bylaws. At the same time, online meetings and gatherings have made it possible to build community with those at greater distances. While “areas” may have served us well in the past, they no longer feel justifiable for inclusion in the bylaws.

- the removal of “ministry networks:” While we should always encourage people to meet, share and/or work together around common interests, passions and commitments, this section in our present bylaws feels unnecessary and cumbersome given that the process for forming a “formal ministry network” is not being followed. Informal groups will continue to gather (bylaw permission is not needed for the Church to be the Church), and those seeking formal paths forward may do so through the Board of Directors (BOD).
- simplifying our named standing committees to those essential to operational procedures and administrative tasks. To be clear, approval of the revisions will remove these bylaw-mandated conference groups: Education Ministries Committee (not presently active, though an Outdoor Ministries team addresses some of the work this group did), Annual Meeting Planning Committee and Justice and Witness Ministries Committee (not presently active, though JWM previously recognized some overlap with the “Dismantling Racism” informal ministry network). The work of the Ministry Resource Committee, Stewardship Committee and Church Development Committee will be absorbed into various proposed standing committees. While the removal of mission-oriented committees from the bylaws may lift eyebrows, the hope is to un-silo the work of justice, service and witness to which all of us are called, turning attention back to the good work of our churches and grassroots efforts that may emerge as we better acknowledge the good and innovative work happening every day in our Conference.
- a more detailed description of the Board of Directors and their role in the life of the conference (Article 10), with our hope that this helps in some reorientation around what the role of the board is and what role all of us play as “the Conference” (as the Board exists to support our collective body in that work)
- the removal of the “Conference Council,” which has not effectively met in recent years. The expectation for a post-annual meeting planning session of standing committee leadership and the BOD remains in Article Seven.
- a more detailed description of the Conference Minister (Article 11) and the role they play in the life of our Conference
- in general, changes that reference current resources approved for use and recognize present practices in line with those resources (eg: UCC Manual on Ministry, Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers, the Ministerial Code of Ethics, the UCC Manual on Local Church, Marks of

Faithful and Vital Local Churches, and the Congregational Code for Local Churches)

- codifying expectations regarding diversity on the BOD and standing committees not found in our present bylaws

5. Why will there only be an up or down vote at the Conference Annual meeting on these proposed changes? Given the extensive changes, the tedious nature of revising bylaws and the challenge of editing as a large group, the Board of Directors does not feel it in the best interest of the Conference to seek to continue editing work from the floor.