

Ohio Conference United Church of Christ  
Fall 2011 Report  
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The Ohio Conference United Church of Christ is increasingly dealing with transition in all its settings. Urgency and pace both seem to be accelerating. We continue to struggle with finances as more and more congregations are challenged to support full time pastors.



Those realities, however, just remind us that we need to be faithful and diligent in our work to be relevant, as a structure of the wider church in a historic denomination, to the ministries of our local faith communities – many of which are vibrant and growing!

Our Outdoor Ministries program is on more solid footing following the call of Joyce Oyler as Executive Director. Joyce, the daughter of former Outdoor Ministries director Bill Wealand, brings both a sense of history and a new business model for the ministry. Outdoor Ministries partners with local congregations, providing leadership development and faith formation experiences. Staff is being expanded to provide a higher quality experience. Numbers of users is increasing.

Three of our five associations are in deliberate transition mode. Eastern and Western Reserve Associations have partnered and are seeking a single General Minister to lead them into the future, proposing a whole different model for the work of the association. Borrowing from the work of Richard Hamm, former GMP of the Christian Church (DOC), the new model will be more collaborative and networked than the old hub-and-spokes paradigm. Central Southeast Association has a transition team in place exploring what the future may look like following the retirement of Association Minister Forrest Hoppe. This team has been reading and consulting directly with Hamm.

Similarly, the Ohio Conference Board of Directors has begun a study on streamlining governance. The goal is to free up more of the board's time and energy for generative work, in addition to its routine strategic and fiduciary responsibilities.

Meanwhile, our new Coach for Congregational Vitality and Church Development, Jim Oates, is swamped with requests for workshops on vitality and leadership development. In only his second year in this position, Jim is well on his way toward creating a movement or culture of vitality and renewal.

On the other hand, we are having difficulty maintaining a staff position for financial ministries and capital campaigns. We have had a half time person in this position for two or three years. It is currently occupied by Sandra Lueschen Lindahl. While Sandy is doing an excellent job resourcing local congregations, we had counted on more local capital campaigns to fund her position. Although there is much interest from smaller local churches for stewardship development help and for small capital campaigns, the larger campaigns from larger congregations are tending to bring in outside consultants rather than take advantage of the expertise we have here in Ohio.

The work of grappling with transition is demanding, but also rewarding. We pray for wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in this journey toward uncertain futures.