

Jesus famously turned five loaves and two fish into enough food to feed a multitude. When Jesus started sharing his food, it inspired people to share food they had brought tucked into their garments and bags – a loaf here, an extra fish there, maybe even some wine. What at first seemed like a moment of scarcity became an experience of abundance as people realized they had all the resources they needed.

Dr. Erica Dollhopf thinks about this miracle as she leads her team at the Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARDD), a team of the national ministries supported by our gifts to OCWM Basic Support. “Many church leaders know CARDD as the team producing the Yearbook and Statistical Profile of the UCC,” Erica observed, “but helping people understand innovation and positive change in congregations is central to our mission.”

CARDD works to engage pastors and leaders in thinking about innovation through programs like the Exodus Experiment, facilitated by Erica’s colleague the Rev. Phiwa Langeni. The program prepares people to make meaningful and purposeful change in their congregations. “Sometimes people confine innovation to the business world, but I think of it as a powerful concept in Church,” comments Phiwa. “After all, we worship a God who created the world out of nothing.”

The program intentionally includes the word “experiment” in the title. “Experiment reminds us that the change doesn’t need to be permanent. We can just give it a try, play, see what happens,” Phiwa explains.

Part of supporting innovation involves delving into data and research that few local pastors or leaders could do on their own. Many congregations think that increasing the number of young adults or shifting to contemporary worship will be crucial to their vitality. However, looking at data on actual congregations, including the data provided by UCC congregations as part of the Yearbook and the national and interfaith Faith Communities Today (FACT) survey effort, Erica found something different. “Congregations with innovative and creative worship services – not necessarily contemporary – as well as a good fit between the pastor and a congregation were more likely to be vital congregations.”

“Here at CARDD,” Phiwa notes, “we help congregations ask new questions so that they can land in new places.” Like the crowd that Jesus fed, CARDD helps congregations discover their hidden resources and imagine new ways to being in mission.

Whether it’s through the Center on Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARDD) or one of the many other programs offered by the national ministries and conferences, the gifts of our congregation to OCWM Basic Support help us innovate and strengthen the ministry of our congregation.



Learn more about CARDD through their blog
[**www.carducc.wordpress.com**](http://www.carducc.wordpress.com)

BASIC SUPPORT



When we baptize someone into our faith, the people gathered for worship say to the newly baptized, “We promise our love, support, and care.” The gifts of our congregation to OCWM Basic Support help to make that promise a reality.

To help people understand their blessedness as children of God, the national ministries of the UCC, in partnership with the Unitarian Universalist Association, created a comprehensive lifespan sexuality curriculum called Our Whole Lives with companion Sexuality and Our Faith manuals. “This ministry is about dismantling shame and stigma about bodies and relationships, so that children, youth, and families can reclaim a positive, healthy and sacred frame about who they are and how they express their love. The church has done a lot of damage in these areas over many centuries. Our Whole Lives, along with Sexuality and Our Faith, provide resources to heal some of those wounds,” said Rev. Amy Johnson, UCC Minister for Sexuality Education & Justice.

The Wisconsin and Minnesota Conferences recently hosted two trainings for the Our Whole Lives Curriculum. Lisa Hart, an Associate Conference Minister in Wisconsin, observed, “The church has a responsibility to help people get factual information about their bodies, to empower them to make decisions for themselves, and to learn how to show care for others.”

The leaders trained at the OWL retreat will become facilitators in their local congregations. Working with groups of children, youth, or adults, they provide accurate, developmentally appropriate information that helps participants make informed and responsible decisions about their relationships, sexual health, and behavior in the context of their faith.

“Now that I spent a weekend learning about the Our Whole Lives sexuality program, I am so excited to share these resources with our youth,” said the Rev. Julia Hollister of First Congregational in Sheboygan, reflecting on her experience at the retreat. “I look forward to all the crucial conversations that will be generated through our engagement with this material that affirms body and soul.”

The national ministries continue to develop and improve OWL. Rev. Johnson notes, “Current efforts focus on updating our training materials, curriculum, and resources to be more intentionally anti-racist, as well as more gender-inclusive, and disability-inclusive. Newly revised Our Whole Lives for K-I is now available for pre-order through UCC Resources. OWL materials are available for all ages, inclusive of older adults. This is a life-changing and transformative ministry.”

Whether it's an OWL Training or one of the many other programs offered by the national ministries and conferences, the gifts of our congregation to OCWM Basic Support make possible all the work of the UCC beyond our local congregation and strengthen the ministry of our congregation.



Learn more about Our Whole Lives at www.ucc.org/owl

BASIC SUPPORT



The Prophet Isaiah heard the voice of God in the sanctuary ask, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah volunteered. And like Isaiah, people across our Christian movement hear a call to service and advocacy. The gifts of our congregation to OCWM Basic Support help to make their efforts more impactful.

The national ministries of the United Church of Christ staffs an office in Washington, DC, that advocates on public policy and educates our movement about critical public issues. Sandy Sorensen directs the UCC DC Office.

“One of my very favorite aspects of this work is meeting with UCC youth groups. Many come to DC for several days or a week of direct service ministry and visit our Washington office as part of their experience in DC. It is a true joy to journey with people of all generations as they become empowered, equipped and energized to take action for policy change.”

Last summer a youth group from West Avon Congregational UCC in West Avon, CT, came to Washington, DC. The youth volunteered with various service providers in the Washington DC providing support for people experiencing homelessness, poverty, and food insecurity.

Sorensen and her staff reflected with the youth about their service at the end of the week. Together, they made connections between the poverty the youth

witnessed, and the ways public policy can either exacerbate or alleviate poverty. Suddenly, questions of funding for job training, zoning for affordable housing, raising the minimum wage and extending the child tax credit wore the face of people the youth had met.

“It was exciting to see them claim their voice as advocates, feel empowered to make a policy difference and realize that their ministry in service of people living in poverty could continue after they returned home. We talked about ways to make a policy difference and, of course, talked about the importance of registering to vote when they turned 18.”

The youth visit to the UCC DC office helped to ground their faith formation in the history of the UCC witness for justice and in the theological foundation for justice advocacy.

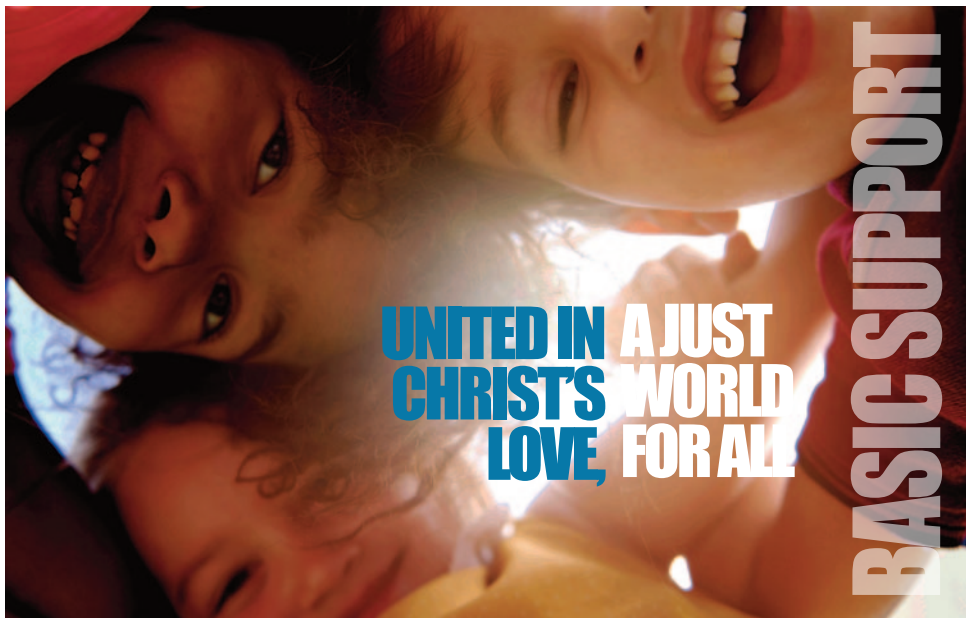
A similar journey happens in the hearts of adults who attend the Ecumenical Advocacy Days held annually in April. Over the course of several days, hundreds of people learn about pressing issues in our country, get trained in advocacy, and make visits to their legislators.

Not everyone can travel to Washington, DC. Sorensen and her team provide regular email action alerts so that people throughout the United Church of Christ can stay up-to-date on issues and know how to contact their representatives to express their opinions. “We help people find their voice to make a difference,” Sorensen explained, “and the response of people gives me renewed energy and hope for building a just world for all.”

Whether it’s through the Washington DC Office of the UCC or one of the many other justice initiatives of the national ministries and conferences, the gifts of our congregation to OCWM Basic Support make possible all the work of the UCC beyond our local congregation and strengthen the ministry of our congregation.

Learn more at www.ucc.org/office-of-public-policy-and-advocacy-in-washington-d-c/

BASIC SUPPORT



“Bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” (Galatians 6:2)

The Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization (MESA) ministry team of the national setting ensures that all ministry settings have gifted and accountable pastoral leadership. MESA also provides support to local Committees on Ministry (COMs). For example, MESA:

- Updates the Profile used by pastors and congregations in the ministerial search process
- Hosts online trainings for Committees on Ministry volunteers
- Provides support and guidance for pastoral relations committees

MESA also partners with other UCC national staff and external groups to uplift clergy excellence. One such group is Communities of Practice – A Sustaining Support (COMPASS) for conference led Communities of Practice. Through small group peer interaction, Communities of Practice equip clergy with needed resources to serve faithfully and well and help them reflect on their practice of ministry in light of biblical and historical examples. Communities of Practice also allow clergy to uplift their colleagues in prayer and offer other tangible support in challenging times.

Throughout the pandemic, the weighty, though typical, challenges of ministry were transformed in unprecedented ways, leading clergy to discern their future in a particular ministry setting. Communities of Practice provided a grounded way to discern with trusted colleagues, and many participants said they would have burned out without the support of this small group of peers.

MESA is proud to work with Conference leadership to provide ongoing resources for conference-hosted Community of Practice programs. COMPASS leaders hope to expand offerings so that groups can form across multiple conferences, providing more support to clergy serving in particularly challenging settings. In particular, COMPASS hopes to improve support for our clergy of color serving in predominantly white congregations. Other dreams include developing new programs in conferences where none exist so that every clergyperson can find help and growth with their peers in similar contexts throughout our denomination.

Our support of Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support resources local congregations through MESA and other programs offered by the national ministries and our conference. Basic Support helps ensure healthy, grounded clergy in all ministry settings of the United Church of Christ.



Learn more about the national ministries of the UCC at
www.ucc.org

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