



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
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“I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)



Our Conference Connections eNews is so aptly titled for this time in our history. I was 7 years old when the UCC was formed and awareness of such things as Associations and Conferences were always associated with the relationships and connections in each of our regionally named bodies. I grew up in the Eastern Ohio Association, my wife in the Western Reserve Association, (now together Living Waters Association), attended college in Northwest Ohio Association, attended seminary in Central South East Association with extra course work in Southern Ohio Northern Kentucky Association. The Ohio Conference, now the Heartland Conference, gave birth and substance to my entire life. I've spent time in Illinois and in Michigan as

well finding new connectedness in every place. My life is about the importance of connections and about my excitement for every part of each of the places lived and served where new things are learned; new relationships are formed.

In previous Conference Connections eNews you have heard about the Why and the Calling Statements of those things that will be foundational in our being together into the future. Each Association has been reviewing the words below, adding thoughtful editing and prayerful consideration to produce the best way forward to guide us, as a whole. I would ask you to turn your attention to the Covenant Statement for this newsletter with its 5-part call to commitment to answer God's call "to build a just world for all".

Heartland Conference (Why and Calling Statement)

Why Statement:

Together in Christ's love, we collaborate to reconcile and restore all God's creation.

Calling Statement:

Empowered by the Holy Spirit we are called to connect, equip and support our faith communities to grow as faithful disciples and responsible stewards, following Jesus' call to extravagantly love all God's children and creation.

Heartland Conference Covenant Statement

Answering God's call to build a just world for all, we commit in our shared life to:

- **Live the love, unity and compassion of Jesus**
 - *“I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:26)*



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- **Collaborate to mutually share resources.**
 - *“...love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. **11** Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.^[a] **12** Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. **13** Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers”. (Romans 12:10-13)*
- **Communicate with openness and transparency.**
 - *“But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ...” (Ephesians 4:15)*
- **Empower generous and responsible stewardship.**
 - *“They are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share.” (1 Timothy 6:18)*
- **Honor God’s diverse gifts among us in all settings.**
 - *For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, **5** so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)*

As with any process of collaboration to identify a way forward, every word was parsed, every word agonized over, every word understandably not able to fully represent every concept, yet packed full of enough space for everyone. When I think of the first word of each of the covenant statements: Live, Collaborate, Communicate, Empower, Honor, they cover so many facets of how we might be together that my head spins with the possibilities. While each clause shows specific paths to travel in accomplishing the work of the Conference, each is assumed to cross over any perceived or real boundaries and link us all into a future guided by the encouragement of scripture and our desire to show tangible ways we will strive to work together.

So the question is...will you commit to our shared life together? Are these intentions both big enough to include you and specific enough to motivate you to say yes...yes to being together...yes to affirming one another...yes to love, unity, compassion, sharing, openness, transparency, generosity, responsibility, and the giftedness of all? I hope so.

This type of exploratory question and others will be lifted up in many places over the next few months as the process of unpacking this document continues. The hope is that a final version will find its way to the floor of our September Annual Gathering for affirmation. Please pay attention to any future iterations of it that might come forth so that at our September 24/25 meeting we can, for this chapter in our life together, close the chapter labeled “Our Vision Document” first drafted in 2018, to a finished chapter titled, “Our Value/Covenant Statement” that will lead to the rest of the story that will become ours in the Heartland Conference book that shares our story, on behalf of God, with all we meet.