

Documents for Keystone Town Hall #3
Topics: Associations and Timeline



Keystone Merger Town Hall #3

Association Discussion Talking Points:

1. **A Conference cannot determine any of the factors that shape an Association.** A Conference cannot make decisions related to Association mergers or resource sharing. The Keystone Working group hopes Association leaders will begin to have those conversations (some have already begun in numerous Associations), but a Conference cannot mandate those conversations. [PNE, a Conference acting as an Association, is an exception] For more detailed information, see excerpts from the UCC Constitution and Bylaws regarding Associations at the end of this document.
2. What a new Keystone Conference can expect from Associations:
 - a. **Engagement** - Be fully engaged and committed to a relationship with the Conference and to the Association member churches.
 - b. **On-boarding of new clergy** within the association. Set up a plan for welcome, mentoring if desired, introductions, expectations, etc.*
 - c. **Pastoral Care of Association clergy** – including visitation if in hospital, etc. if that is not already happening. *
 - d. **Search and Call Team support**, e.g., 2-3 individuals who would be connected to the Association Executive Committee. The Exec Comm would track the Team members and work with Regional Minister to find replacements and facilitate the search and call process when necessary.
 - e. **Association President** would serve on a Presidents' Council and attend the regularly scheduled meetings.
 - f. **Provide recommendations** to the Conference for experts/experienced individuals to serve on various teams within the new Conference. For example, Associations may be asked to provide 1-2 names of people with expertise in areas such as financial consulting or conflict management. This makes the connection between the Exec Committee and the local church critical so Association leaders can tap the clergy to recommend experts/passionate people who might be open to serving on various teams at the Association, Conference, and National Church setting.

3. What the Conference would provide to Associations/Clergy:
- a. **Education and training** – perhaps part of RM role’s will be trainings that currently happen for clergy, but shorter and zoom recorded, on topics of Association interest/need (possibly written materials for those without internet)
 - b. **Regular infusions of best practices** and educational events, including boundary trainings, anti-racism trainings, lay leadership trainings, etc.
 - c. **Regular written communication from ECM to the Association executive committees** with Conference-wide updates and ECM-specific updates (preferably monthly or bi-monthly).
 - d. **An Association Presidents’ Council** that would meet on regular basis (quarterly?) to be determined by the new ECM.
 - e. **Staff will resource COMs** but will not be at all COM meetings
 - **Fitness Reviews** will likely remain with a Unified or Regional Team
 - Some associations (PCC) appreciate a separate **MID Assessment Team** – so this will be up for further discussion over time
 - f. **Support when requested**, such as conflict issues or leadership coaching - there will be someone to assist but it may not be a staff member (will likely be specialized team members).
 - g. **Search and Call** will be overseen by staff, but staff will be working with a Search and Call team made up of members from various associations.
 - h. **Reliable (scheduled), clear communication** to clergy specifically *with the assumption that* clergy will pass on information to their congregations.
 - i. Steady, reliable **social media usage and videos** that allow for conference staff to be present with multiple settings.

**Asterisk indicates something that may have been done by Conference staff in the past*

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What does the UCC say about Associations?

United Church of Christ Constitution
Article III: Covenantal Relationships

Within the United Church of Christ, the various expressions of the church relate to each other in a covenantal manner. Each expression of the Church has responsibilities and rights in relation to the others, to the end that the whole Church will seek God's will and be faithful to God's mission. Decisions are made in consultation and collaboration among the various parts of the structure. As members of the Body of Christ, each expression of the Church is called to honor and respect the work and ministry of each other part. Each expression of the Church listens, hears, and carefully considers the advice, counsel, and requests of others. In this covenant, the various expressions of the United Church of Christ seek to walk together in all God's ways.

Article IX: Associations and Conferences

Associations and Conferences are bodies organized on a territorial basis to perform functions in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ.

Associations: An Association is that body within a Conference of the United Church of Christ which is composed of all Local Churches in a geographical area, all Ordained Ministers holding Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing therein, all Commissioned Ministers and Licensed Ministers in that Association. The boundaries of any new Association, or any adjustment of boundaries between Associations, shall be determined by the Associations concerned with the approval of the Conference or Conferences involved. The standing of an Association as a body of the United Church of Christ is determined by the Conference in which it is located. An Association is that body which determines, confers, and certifies to the standing of the Local Churches of the United Church of Christ within its area. An Association is that body which grants authorization that is required for various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the Church. Such authorization is granted through the rite of ordination, through commissioning, licensing, granting either Ordained Ministerial Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing and other acts of authorization. Such authorization may be terminated by the Association. An Association may retain or secure its own charter, and adopt its own constitution, bylaws and other rules which it deems essential to its own welfare and not inconsistent with this Constitution and the Bylaws of the United Church of Christ. An Association is related to the General Synod through its Conference. When an Association meets, its voting membership includes the lay delegates selected by and representing the Local Churches of that Association, all Ordained Ministers holding Standing or Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing therein, all Commissioned Ministers and Licensed Ministers of that Association, and such additional members as may be specified by the Association in its constitution or bylaws. Meetings of the Association are held annually and at such other times as may be necessary for the discharge of its responsibilities.

United Church of Christ Bylaws

Article II

- An Association elects officers and elects or appoints such committees as it deems necessary for the transaction of its business and the correlation of its work with that of the Conference and the General Synod.
- An Association determines its own method for securing financial support.
- An Association is concerned with the welfare of all Local Churches within its boundaries.
- An Association seeks ways and means to assist Local Churches when they are undergoing unusual difficulties requiring help beyond their own resources.
- An Association offers encouragement, guidance, and assistance in the organization of new Local Churches.
- An Association, with the counsel of the Conference, receives Local Churches into the United Church of Christ.
- An Association covenants with members of the United Church of Christ within that Association as together they discern God's call to authorized ministry and prepare for ordination, commissioning or licensing.
- An Association ordains, commissions, and licenses qualified candidates; grants standing as a covenantal relationship with Ordained Ministers, Licensed Ministers, Commissioned Ministers, and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; certifies to, transfers, and terminates Ordained Ministerial Standing, Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing, commissioned ministerial standing and licenses; installs Ordained Ministers and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; covenants with Licensed Ministers, Commissioned Ministers, and the Local Churches to which they are called; grants Privilege of Call and Leaves of Absence; reviews and ecclesiastically oversees Ordained, Commissioned, and Licensed Ministers and persons with Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing; and verifies that an Ordained Ministerial Partner has demonstrated knowledge of, and appreciation for, the history, polity, and practices of the United Church of Christ.
- An Association receives and acts upon business referred to it by its Local Churches, its Conference, the General Synod, and other bodies. An Association may petition and overture its Conference or the General Synod.

Current Working Timeline

Major Tasks/Milestones/Events	Who?	Start Date	Complete Date	Done √
Joint 4 PA Conference Spring Meeting	All	6/7/24	6/9/24	√
Training – to build relationships/scaffolding for Committees on Ministry, etc.	Bonnie Bates Nora Foust	6/2024	12/2026	
*Working group of Association presidents will clarify Association roles, responsibilities & expectations	Nora Foust will staff	7/2024		
Transition info added to draft Bylaws	Carrie Call	7/8/24	8/6/24	✓
Staffing and finance drafts reworked (for Townhall Meetings)	Bill Worley Bonnie Bates KWG	8/5/24	9/3/24	✓
Keystone Mission Focus drafted, distributed, and discussed	Mission Sub-team of KWG	9/10/24	10/31/24	
Reservation of Keystone Conference name for Corporation	Carrie Call		8/15/24 3/15/25	
Reservation of Keystone domain name for website	Steve Davis	9/15/24		
Town Halls, info meetings, and forums held in person and by Zoom - covering Transition Timeline, Staffing, Finance, PA-specific Mission Focus, and Associations	ALL Staff, Keystone Working Group	9/14/24	10/31/24	
Each Conference VOTE separately/simultaneously on Motion for Synod	ALL Conference Delegates	11/9/24	11/9/24	
IF MOTION PASSES on 11/9...				
Create Personnel Policies for new Conference	Bonnie Bates and HR sub-team	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	
Submit Formal Motion to GS 35	David Ackerman		11/30/24	
Each Conference Submit formal motion to National	ALL Conference Ministers		11/30/24	
Determination of Regional Areas (for staffing)	Staffing sub-team		5/1/25	
Each Conference VOTE on New Constitution and Bylaws including Transition Plan	ALL Conference Delegates at Spring Meetings of each Conference	5/2025	06/30/25	
General Synod 35 VOTE on Keystone motion	Synod	7/2025	7/2025	

Keystone Working Group work Complete (special gathering)	KWG & 4 CMs	Fall 2025	Fall 2025	
Penn Northeast moves from Conference Status to Association status as of January 1, 2026	Bonnie Bates and Penn Northeast Board	Summer 2025	12/31/25	
Transitional Keystone Conference Board established (TKCB), choose officers	Led by selected representatives from original 4 PA Conference Boards	06/14/2025	6/30/25	
Subgroup formed of personnel chairs from original boards creates Transitional Conference Minister (TCM) job description	TKCB	July 2025	August 2025	
TCM hired/contracted by TKCB **	TKCB		By 11/01/25	
Begin Transitional Board & Officers plan (in new Bylaws)	ALL	08/01/25	08/01/29	
4 PA Conferences become the “Historic Conferences” and retain skeletal boards	ALL Conferences	12/31/25	12/31/29	
Four current Conference Ministers resign their positions	4 CMs		By 12/31/2025	
Keystone Conference Begins		01/01/26		
Three Transitional Regional Conference Ministers (TRCM) hired/contracted	TKCB		By 03/01/26**	
Transitional Admins Contracted	TCM	01/01/26	03/01/26	
Transitional Staffing Plan in place	ALL	11/01/25	By end of 2026	
Subgroup of TKCB creates Job Description for Settled Executive Conference Minister	TKCB	03/01/2026	05/01/2026	
First Keystone Conference Annual Meeting	All	Spring 2026		
Committee Appointed from TKCB for Settled Executive Conference Minister search	TKCB	By 06/01/2026		
Search for Settled Executive Conference Minister (open search, national)	Search Committee	06/01/2026	01/01/2027	
Subgroup of TKCB creates Job Descriptions for three Settled Regional Conference Ministers	Subcommittee of TKCB	07/01/2026		
Committee Appointed from TKCB for running three Settled Regional Conference Ministers searches	TKCB	By 09/01/2026		

Searches for 3 Settled RCMs	Search committee(s)	01/01/2027	05/01/2028	
Hiring of 'settled' admins runs in parallel with calling of settled ECM and RCMs (previous staff are eligible)	ECM, RCMs, and Personnel from Board	By 01/01/2027	By 05/01/2028	

*The timing and scope of this work may depend on job descriptions for Regional Conference Ministers

** All current staff positions are guaranteed through 03/01/26. The contracted Transitional Conference Minister, Regional Conference Ministers, and Admin staff may come from current staff. All current staff will be eligible to apply for the settled positions.