

**Motion of Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn Northeast
Conferences to Join Together to Form the Keystone Conference**

Submitted by:

Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn Northeast Conferences

1 **SUMMARY**

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3 Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn Northeast Conferences of the
4 United Church of Christ (“movants”) recommend the General Synod of the United Church of
5 Christ grant standing to a new Conference, the Keystone Conference, with boundaries covering
6 the geographical area as movants’ boundaries, and terminate movants’ standing as Conferences
7 of the United Church of Christ, effective January 1, 2026.

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9 **BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL GROUNDING**

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11 As followers of Jesus, *“Together We Are Stronger”* is the “why” of the proposed Keystone
12 Conference. Our mission is to equip our Associations to provide better spiritual, educational,
13 programmatic, and financial support to our congregations. Our work is grounded in Ephesians
14 4:11-13: *“The gifts (Jesus) gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some*
15 *evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building*
16 *up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son*
17 *of God.”*

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19 The Holy Spirit is moving in innovative and transformative ways, and we are called as God’s
20 people to respond to the new thing that God is doing with conviction, compassion, and clarity.
21 We are resolved to trust faithfully in the collective wisdom and leadership to reimagine the Penn
22 West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn Northeast Conferences as one body
23 known as the Keystone Conference.

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25 These current times require fresh expressions of faith, rituals, discipleship, and leadership. We
26 hold in artistic tension the traditions that have formed deeply ingrained identities and practices
27 with the creative power of the Divine who is “making all things new.”

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29 We believe we are a people who are bound together by biblical covenants and guided by Jesus’
30 fundamental commandment to love one another. By that love, we work together to serve God
31 and our neighbors with compassion, to encourage and inspire one another with hope, and to
32 make bold and courageous choices.

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34 In January 2022, the Conference Ministers of the four Pennsylvania Conferences gathered to
35 discuss the urgency of issues confronting all settings of the UCC. Our four Conferences share

36 challenges, and we responded to them in partnership with each other by establishing first a
37 “Keystone Study Group,” then a “Keystone Working Group,” which spent many hours together
38 discerning our call to unity.

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40 We met with an eye toward confronting the divisions and hostilities of our world and listening
41 with a deep sense of our responsibility to answer Jesus’ prayer, “that they may all be one.” We
42 identified the spiritual hunger of our church people and pastors and the call to support and
43 develop the local church. We dreamed about new ways to serve Jesus and our churches by
44 drawing on the strength and giftedness of our clergy, congregations, leaders, and Conference
45 staff.

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47 We recognize that we are not the church that we were when the denomination was formed in
48 1957, and our current contexts of ministry are different. The pandemic exacerbated the
49 challenges we face. We acknowledge our responsibility to provide support and nourishment to
50 the local church. We recognize our duty to work in partnership with all settings of the church to
51 find and develop the leadership needs of our congregations. We acknowledge the very real
52 financial challenges that impact the future of all our ministries.

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54 After over a year of meeting to discern God’s call for our Conferences, we believe that
55 **“Together, We Are Stronger.”** Also, we believe that if we are to encourage and transform the
56 church we know, we must transform ourselves and the denominational structures and
57 expectations we have of them and each other. We believe there are compelling reasons to move
58 toward the creation of a unified Conference. This might allow us to:

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- 60 – Respond with dynamic faithfulness to a fluid world with the timeless truths of the gospel
61 of Jesus Christ and move forward into the future with confidence and vision.
- 62 – Embrace our understanding of discipleship and act like the Body of Christ, humanity’s
63 best witness to the interdependent unity of all living things.
- 64 – Provide stronger collective support for local churches.
- 65 – Strengthen outreach and mission so our passions can meet the world’s deepest needs to
66 reshape our communities with the love and care of Jesus Christ.
- 67 – Serve as a model for our congregations needing to take bold action to adapt themselves
68 and strengthen the mission and ministry of the UCC in our Conference.
- 69 – Equip Associations to promote justice, racial reconciliation, and spiritual revival in all
70 their forms.
- 71 – Increase our participation and positive influence in the wider UCC community.
- 72 – Create conversations and initiate new strategies for the sharing and implementation of
73 “best practices.”
- 74 – Blend together what each Conference does well, building on our individual and corporate
75 strengths.

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77 We believe it is time for us to be open to God’s work in the four “Penn” Conferences of the
78 United Church of Christ – Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn Northeast
79 – and to join together to form a new Conference of the United Church of Christ, named the
80 Keystone Conference.

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82 “See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” Isaiah 43:19 (NIV).

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84 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

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86 **WHEREAS** the Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn Northeast
87 Conferences of the United Church of Christ together discerned that they: *Affirm* devotion to our
88 Creator God, to Jesus Christ our savior, teacher, and friend, and to the Holy Spirit who binds us
89 together in one body and lights the way into the future; *Recognize* that division and change
90 surround and strain the Christian church, challenging faithful people of good will to create novel
91 communities of faith, action, and love for a new age; *Believe* a Conference must model unity and
92 healing in response to theological and ideological shifts in the Body of Christ as a whole and in
93 the United Church of Christ in particular; *Serve, Nurture, and Empower* authorized ministers and
94 all settings of the church within their boundaries; and *Desire* to live into Jesus’ hope for his
95 followers “that they all may be one” [John 17], reflecting the desire for unity in our predecessor
96 denominations and in the entire United Church of Christ; and

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98 **WHEREAS** the Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn Northeast
99 Conferences propose to join together to create the Keystone Conference; and

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101 **WHEREAS** the proposed Keystone Conference as a Conference of the United Church of Christ
102 aspires to be one body, affirming its commitment to unity centered in Christ Jesus, working
103 diligently to maintain a large tent wherein its members may experience authentic welcome,
104 mercy, empowerment, and hope, striving to share renewed life, fellowship, witness, and gospel
105 proclamation together; and

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107 **WHEREAS** the four Conferences have collectively discerned that the ministry and mission of
108 their Associations will be stronger as one unified Conference;

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110 **THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod of the United Church
111 of Christ does hereby recognize the Keystone Conference, created with geographic boundaries
112 encompassing those previously of the Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and
113 Penn Northeast Conferences, effective January 1, 2026; and

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115 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Thirty-Fifth General Synod grants the new Keystone
116 Conference of the United Church of Christ standing as a Conference of the United Church of
117 Christ, including all the powers, privileges, and responsibilities of a Conference of the United
118 Church of Christ; and

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120 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that** the Thirty-Fifth General Synod acknowledges that,
121 effective January 1, 2026, each Association of the said four Conferences shall automatically
122 become an Association of the new Keystone Conference of the United Church of Christ, as
123 determined by the new Keystone Conference; and

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125 **BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED that** the Thirty-Fifth General Synod does hereby approve the
126 termination of the standing of the Penn West, Penn Central, Pennsylvania Southeast, and Penn
127 Northeast Conferences with the General Synod, effective January 1, 2026.

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