

FEEDBACK
UNIFIED GOVERNANCE DIALOGUE AND DISCERNMENT
CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
(NEW JERSEY, DELAWARE, MARYLAND,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, VIRGINIA)
May 7, 2010

Approximately 22 persons participated in the dialogue. Most were from New Jersey, Maryland, the District of Columbia, or Virginia. We also had a representative from United Church Funds (New York). The session lasted a bit longer than one hour.

We began with introductions and a one sentence statement from each participant about unified governance. The one sentence statement produced the following comments from those who desired to make an initial comment:

Generally aware of unified governance, but still discerning.
Want it to be decided.
Want it to be fair
More or less aware.
In it up to the eyeballs; waiting to get out; not on healthy ground.
Time to take action.
Confused.
Conflicted; want it resolved; worry about disparate voices.
Hope its on the path of resolution.
Don't have a clue; we need good governance.
Afraid about what's going to happen.
Generally aware.
Want it resolved.
Hope it gets resolved.
Want consensus.
Want it to affirm inclusiveness and seats at the table for newer constituents.
Concerned that 4 executive ministers will not be there next summer; it will be a different Collegium.

We then focused on the two dialogue questions, and the following comments were made:

Question 1: What do you believe God is calling the UCC to be now and into the future?

Be a witness to humanity. God accepts everyone who looks for acceptance.

Remember the core roots - - local congregations. Nothing matters if the UCC is not

strong at the local level. There must be help and goodness in each local house.

For the future - - maintain a position of being open and willing to change. There may be external circumstances that we cannot control.

We are Christians who have carved out a leadership role way beyond our numbers. We are a far bigger church than the numbers would suggest.

Be a voice to the culture we live in that is counter-cultural. God calls men and women to move beyond their own self-interest to the well-being of the whole. There must be personal and communal transformation. This is at the heart of learning how to be good stewards and disciples and followers of Christ.

Be one of the more sensible versions of Christianity while living in a hostile society.

Be an alternative church to the way society behaves. Be an alternative to that which is.

Hope UCC will be a more open church; the organizational structure frustrates.

The pluralist message captures the imagination. The speaker has a religiously plural church - Catholics come to the church. Be humane. We are living in the most rapid period of history. The average high school student spends 8 hours a day on a computer. This is a changed society. Asking what God would do in this culture is difficult. It requires imagination. About 10% of the people in the speaker's church did not grow up in the church. There are some Jews and a Muslim as well.

The speaker showed the Still Speaking ad in the local church a few weeks ago and also during the middle of the morning worship. The speaker's congregation is 50 and older, and of European descent. Comments were made such as: the ad is powerful but moves too fast. Congregants did not grasp the whole thing. The feeling is that all of society is moving too fast. The unified governance process may be moving too fast. How does one define the future of the church when one is not comfortable with it now?

To be the church at the local level that we are at the larger level. We need to move from the ground up.

We have just passed the 40th anniversary of Kent State. We have a passion when we are young that we can change the world. We can be passionate as older people, but people now don't feel a sense of passion. We are not where God is calling us to be - - followers of

Jesus. How we are going to create the world we want is up for grabs. God is calling us into the future - - follow Jesus, but the hard part is figuring out how to do it in the world we live in.

The UCC should be willing to evolve and let go of some of the traditions. Young people are leaving the church and don't want to come back. We need more excitement.

Not to be involved in governance but ministry.

Difficult question to answer. Speaker feels pressured to say it nicely and in a nutshell. God is calling me as a UCC member. The speaker thought about attending a UCC church (First Church) in Harvard Square, at age 15. The speaker, who grew up in a Korean church - - an immigrant church - - walked around the church in Harvard Square and read the bulletin board. The speaker originally thought that church was for Sunday, but the bulletin board had information about the BHM, the BWM, the Sandanistas, issues in Salvador, and mission in Turkey. The church was engaged in the world. There was liturgical music and Bible study, but First Church was in the world, locally and globally - - serving the least of these - - people who had been marginalized. That was the speaker's first introduction to the UCC, and the speaker wanted the UCC to be like that. God is calling all of us to be that. Change is great. It can't happen fast enough. It is important to be in dialogue with each other and hear what the other person is saying. Don't rush the process.

Question 2: What is your response for the Unified Governance Working Group?

The Group may have to come up with a decision about which there is not complete consensus.

Is there a plan to deal with the worst case scenario if that happens?

There is frustration within the elements of the church. The speaker recently helped with the ONA process. ONA is about inclusion from the perspective of the church, but the materials are focused on orientation, not inclusion. We need to build a structure that allows everyone to be one.

Fear of the whole process. The speaker comes from the United Methodist church, and fell in love with the newness of the UCC. Now discussions are focused on restructuring, not how we can live out Christ's mission. Churches that have been around for so many years go back to the cycle - - a focus on governance, bureaucracy and not the work of the church.

Learn from our heritage. Keep on rising from the dead. Finish it and let's get it over,

but don't forget the constituent parts. Don't focus so much on speed and money. Focus on the last point of the Core Concepts and flush it out.

The conversation has become heated - - what will happen if I don't get what I want? Sometimes you don't get what you want. Are we willing to continue if we don't get what we want? Remember to stay when you don't get what you want. The speaker hopes that people who get what they want won't be arrogant.

“Power” is not expressed anywhere in the unified governance documents but that's a huge part of what is wrong in the local church and the national church - - how power gets used and abused in the local church, the ugly head of power. We are not dealing with it in a straight-forward way. We need to be honest.

The speaker mentioned preparing a sermon for Sunday, which will focus on Lydia's stand and Paul. Lydia was a merchant, the seller of purple cloth, practicing radical hospitality and being transformed.

Courage. The gospel calls us to be courageous. The speaker worried about the UCC's tendency to be overly politically correct. We need to have courage. Sometimes we forget that when we share the gospel message, the intent is not to hurt people. In this dialogue, where sides claim loss of power, we need to remember there is struggle in community and we can't always make everyone happy. Sometimes you can't make it work after you purchase an item. We want to make everyone feel good. We need to convey this message at both local and national levels. People have lost jobs.

We needed more time. The speaker felt pressured. Don't characterize the dialogue discussion as being about power; that's not fair. Real concerns have been raised about the process. Always remember what God is calling us to do. It's not about two groups that are fighting it out. It is important to ask if the structure is flexible. How will the covenantal relationship be strengthened? The speaker does not see in the model other expressions of the UCC. How effective Cleveland will be is tied to the local level. The speaker wonders if there is an assumption in the proposal. Is there an implied criticism of the consensus model? There are different conceptions of consensus. Must everyone agree to move forward? Or, should we move forward with fewer voices? Make the assumptions about consensus explicit. There are assumptions about how we operate and where we come from that are not fair.

The last speaker later offered expanded comments in writing. The two pillars of our denominational polity, covenant and autonomy, are our strengths. How will this single board ensure that we do not violate our polity? There needs to be more clarification, e.g., specific ways on how a single board contributes to effective governance. What is lost in the move

to a single board? When the Collegium officers have disagreements, how do they come to consensus? As the GFT II proposal makes clear that the current financial situation of the national church is the main driving force behind this restructuring discussion, there should be a spreadsheet document that shows a comparison of the current operating costs and the projected operating costs under a unified governance model. What are the savings? How will this new single board nurture and strengthen the relationship between the local congregations and the national church?

We will develop a unified board or governance that won't work, but we will drift away from it.

There are questions about whether the unified board can meet its fiduciary obligations. If the board is cut significantly, how will it function and make decisions that cover legal issues and endowment decisions? The speaker wants to see this fleshed out.

Concern was expressed about when the local churches would dialogue about unified governance. Many of those present had not heard about a June 30th date for feedback from the dialogue and discernment sessions. Local churches had not received the letter of invitation that is in the unified governance packet.