

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHY DO THE PROPOSED BYLAWS STATE A DIFFERENT PURPOSE OF THE VERMONT CONFERENCE THAN THE ONE STATED IN THE CURRENT BYLAWS?

In order to be in greater alignment with the United Church of Christ's statement of purpose, vision and mission (see www.ucc.org/mission), the Conference Board of Directors decided to adopt a statement of purpose, vision and mission as incorporated in the propose Bylaws.

WHY DO THE PROPOSE BYLAWS ELIMINATE DEPARTMENTS?

The current Bylaws created Departments to do the work of the Conference under a Department Council made up of a chair and co-chair (one being a minister and one being a lay person), a representative of the Board, chairs of the Department's committees and other Department entities, and a representative of each Association. Under the current Bylaws, Departmental Committees also had rigid membership requirements. Almost immediately after the adoption of the current Bylaws, it became apparent that the Department structure was cumbersome and an impediment to the working of the Conference. In a conference with many small churches, a number of which have part time pastors, and with associations whose vitality waxes and wanes, it was very difficult for the Departments and their committees to maintain their full membership compliment, including the required division between clergy and laity. Having Board members serving as representatives to the Department Councils was also ineffective, so that communications between the Board and Departments suffered. The rigidity of the Department structure makes it difficult for the Conference to respond to the changing needs of the Conference.

WHAT REPLACES THE DEPARTMENTS AND WHAT IS THE DEAL OF STANDING AND NON-STANDING COMMITTEES?

Under the Proposed Bylaws, if adopted, the work of the Conference would be done by standing and non-standing committees of the Board. There would be no entity, such as a Department Council, between the Board and the committees doing the work. This arrangement would give the Board direct oversight of the entities doing the work of the Conference, while eliminating the need for so many volunteers in a conference having a relatively small pool of volunteers. The standing committees are: nominating, stewardship, finance, investment, justice and witness, ministerial standing and standards, and personnel. Except for the Stewardship, Finance and Investment Committees, which

all must have at least three members, the standing committees would not have a prescribed number of members. The proposed Bylaws give the nominating committee flexibility in recommending committee members, emphasizing that its recommendations, in consultations with Associations, reflect a cross section of Vermont's population and geography, while taking into account required skills and experience, rather than taking into account ministerial or lay status or membership in one of the Associations. The responsibilities and duties of the standing committees are clearly spelled out in the proposed Bylaws.

Under the proposed Bylaws, non-standing committees can be created by the Board to quickly respond to newly arising ministerial needs of the Conference. Non-standing committees would serve at the pleasure of the Board, so that the Board would be able to disband a non-standing committee if the immediate ministerial need has been fulfilled and/or there are no longer members of the Conference ready, willing and able to conduct that particular ministry.

UNDER THE CURRENT BYLAWS, EACH ASSOCIATION HAS A REPRESENTATIVE ON THE CONFERENCE BOARD OF DIRECTORS. THAT IS NOT THE CASE UNDER THE PROPOSED BYLAWS. WHY IS THAT?

The strength and vitality of Associations waxes and wanes over time. There have been instances where Associations have not, for whatever reason, provided suggested names of individuals to serve on the Board. That has resulted in vacancies on the Board, some of which have been persistent. Respecting the various geographic regions of Vermont and the covenantal relationship between the Conference and Associations, the proposed Bylaws provide that the nominating committee will make recommendations to the Board of nominees for election as Board Directors by the Annual Meeting, in consultation with Associations, taking into account geography and the wide range of skills and experiences that would contribute to the good governance of the Conference.

WHAT DO THE PROPOSED BYLAWS SAY ABOUT COVENANTAL RELATIONSHIPS IN THE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND LOCAL CHURCH AUTONOMY?

The second paragraph of the Preamble to the proposed bylaws clearly states in accordance with UCC documents that “Local Churches are in covenant with each other and with their respective Associations, and through those Associations to the Conference and through the Conference to the General Synod.” And the last sentence of Article III of the proposed Bylaws clearly states that “[N]othing herein shall be construed as limiting in any way the autonomy of Local Churches in the conduct of their respective affairs.”

WHAT CHANGES DO THE PROPOSED BYLAWS MAKE REGARDING THE MODERATOR, VICE MODERATOR, AND CONFERENCE MINISTER?

The proposed Bylaws eliminate the current Bylaw requirement that one of the Moderator and Vice Moderator needs to be a minister, while the other one must be a lay person. Additionally, the Moderator and Vice Moderator are no longer limited to a one year term. The proposed Bylaws provide that they **may** serve two consecutive one year terms, and may also serve additional two consecutive one year terms with a gap of at least one year between sets of terms. These changes should make it easier to find Conference members willing to serve in these roles, and give those willing to serve the flexibility to serve for additional, but limited, time if they wish.

In addition to being the spiritual leader of the Conference, the Conference Minister, under the proposed Bylaws, would be the Chief Executive Officer of the Conference, having the responsibility for interpreting and implementing the Conference's policies, for providing leadership for the oversight and strategic planning of the Conference and for the day to day management of the Conference.

WHAT ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE BOARD?

The proposed Bylaws make it clear that the Conference Board of Directors, subject to the Authority of the Annual Meeting, has the the general management and control of the Conference's affairs, including setting policy and providing strategic planning. From the lessons learned from the pandemic, the proposed Bylaws, specifically provide for meeting via electronic communications and that in the absence of an Annual Meeting the Board shall adopt a budget and appoint Directors [and Officers] subject to ratification by the next Annual Meeting or Special Meeting. With the elimination of the Departments and their Councils, the Board will conduct the functions and ministries of the Conference through its standing and non-standing committees, as discussed above.

WHAT ABOUT CONFERENCE MEETINGS?

The proposed Bylaws make explicit what has been implicit, that the Conference may have Special Meetings and that Conference Meetings may be held electronically. The changes in Voting Delegates are primarily ones of nomenclature, so that the term Members in Discernment is substituted for students in care and Authorized Ministers includes ordained ministers, as well as licensed ministers.

The proposed Bylaws provide for three lay delegates for Local Churches having under three hundred members, and an additional lay delegate for Local Churches with three hundred or more members, with one additional delegate per one hundred members. Thus, Local Churches having two hundred ninety nine or fewer members would have

three lay delegates, those having membership between three hundred and three hundred ninety nine would have four lay delegates, and those having a membership of four hundred and four hundred and ninety nine members would have five lay delegates.

Under the proposed Bylaws, a Local Church of any size would be entitled to one youth delegate, under the age of 25.