

PROPOSAL FOR THE HOPE FUND!

This proposal is for the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ to consider establishing and raising money for a HOPE fund to encourage innovation, societal impact and new ministry in our midst. As we near the end of this pandemic and look to the future of a post-pandemic world, our churches need help to imagine new ways to be the church in this new landscape. We live in the most unchurched state in the country, and we look to connect with people who don't go to church with the Good News of our faith. We have had experience with doing ministry in new ways during this Pandemic, so let us come together to invest in that! Our churches also need assurance that we as a Conference can look boldly into the future and see hope! We seek to have a major Conference initiative to raise the money for the fund.

The purpose of this Campaign and the creation of the Fund would be two-fold. The first purpose is to help our churches and leaders in the Conference to see that there is hope for our future together. Throughout this COVID pandemic, we have seen many of our churches do innovative things with new technologies to touch people that they have never met in person. We have seen new ministries form among us to address societal issues, and the impact is being felt in our communities. Through the power of the Spirit in Jesus' name, we will encourage current ministries to innovate into new forms, and new ministries to come into being. This Hope Fund would remind us that God is not done with us yet through lives that are transformed and a society that becomes more just.

The second purpose of this Fund is to obtain the financial resources to support innovation, societal impact and new ministry in our midst as a Conference. We would invite churches, Associations, individuals and organizations through grants to contribute while relying on God's grace and vision for the future.

The Board of Directors have approved the creation of this Fund pending a vote at an in person Conference Meeting on Saturday, Nov. 13th where we will also vote on a revision of our Conference Bylaws. This summer, we are recruiting a Fundraising team made up of gifted leaders from across the Conference. If the Conference vote to approve the Hope Fund is successful, we will then commission the Fundraising team so that they can begin their efforts in earnest in the Fall. When the Fund has been at least partially capitalized in 2022, the Board will create a granting group of four members of the Conference and one staff member to establish how the money will be distributed. The HOPE Fund will not be an endowment fund, but will seek to distribute all the money given within 10 years. It will continue to accept donations though into the future.

The Board has also approved the use of two small bequests given to the Conference for pilot Hope Fund grants which are being given to New Ministry Team pastors and their churches. This group of seven pastors have met with Paul Sangree for the past year and a half to think and pray about new ways to do ministry in our time. Each of their churches is receiving a grant of \$2500 to use to share God's love with people who don't go to church in their community by building relationships that flow out of their mission. They will then share the result of their pilot grants at the October Conference meeting and at the 2022 Annual Meeting to spur the creativity of other churches so that they will then apply for Hope Fund grants.

Our mission as a Conference is to love God and our neighbor as ourselves. United in the Spirit and Christ's love, we seek as a Conference to welcome all, love all, and seek justice for all. May this HOPE Fund help us live out this mission, to the glory of God!