



**From the Ground Up:**

REIMAGINING  
THEOLOGICAL  
FORMATION

United Church of Christ

**A REPORT FROM  
THE UCC THEOLOGICAL FORMATION SUMMIT  
APRIL 2018**

## **Introduction:**

What one does in the world, what one thinks and believes is all about formation — the life experiences with family, friends, faith community, education, work and more that creates the context of each individual. A foundation of values and beliefs that form and focus us are concepts that are just as critical theologically. How might/should we shape the theological foundation that forms the denomination and defines who we are, what we think, what we do in the world?

This theological formation summit followed a call by denominational leaders at General Synod 2017 in Baltimore which urged the UCC to consider, as a denomination, ways to foster and support cradle-to-the-grave theological formation consistent with who we are called to be as the United (and uniting) Church of Christ.

In preparation for the event, as they registered participants were asked to reflect on two questions:

*If theological formation was intentionally embedded into all aspects of life in the UCC, what would change?  
What has been the most creative and/or impactful theological formation experience you have encountered?*

The summit brought together participants from various settings across the church to consider these and similar questions. The event audience included lay and ordained of all ages -- pastors, conference staff, seminary presidents and board members, UCC executive ministers, church school leaders, teachers, and others. Participants interested in forming and nurturing life-long theological formation gathered in large and small groups in an effort to identify and dispel false assumptions and encounter new formation possibilities.

## **I. Overview**

The summit was launched on Monday, April 9<sup>th</sup> with a keynote presentation by Bishop Yvette Flunder of City of Refuge UCC in Oakland, Calif., Bishop Yvette Flunder of City of Refuge UCC, who served as provocateur, and afterwards the 130+ participants moved into a rhythm of small group, panel, and plenary sessions geared to engage those in attendance in theological formation from a variety of denominational lenses. A panel presentation featuring the Rev. David Greenhaw, President, Eden Theological Seminary, Rev. Laura Arnold, Lead Pastor, Decorah UCC, Iowa, and Rev. Starsky Wilson, President and CEO, Deaconess Foundation and Pastor, Saint John's Church, St. Louis, MO.

Participants were invited to self-select small communities that met a total of three times over the two days formed around these focus areas:

Theological Formation and the Local Church  
 Theological Formation and Home/Family  
 Theological Formation in Direct Educational Experience  
 Theological Formation through the Lens of Social Justice  
 Theological Formation and the Worship Experience  
 Theological Formation - Church Writ Large  
 Theological Formation and Social Media  
 Theological Formation through Immersive Experience  
 Theological Formation as Spiritual Practice

Each small group community was invited to reflect on a series of questions during each of their three sessions together:

- What is it about theological formation in this context that affects you so significantly, that moves you so deeply?
- Why is theological formation in this context an important focus for our church?
- How might what moves you about theological formation in this context, inform and enhance our overall approach to theological formation as a denomination?
- What would need to change?
- When you consider the resources of the denomination, the national ministries, affiliated ministries, institutions, and academies:
  - What is effectively supporting theological formation?
  - What is not effectively supporting theological formation that needs to be discontinued or altered?
- Towards Framing The Vision For Theological Formation In The UCC:
  - What major pieces are missing that could strongly enhance and/or be a game changer for theological formation for our denomination?
  - What assets can we identify to support theological formation, game-changed and reimagined?

On Tuesday, April 10, the United Church of Christ (UCC) held the second day of its From The Ground Up: Reimagining Theological Formation Summit. Small group community experiences concluded and stakeholders participated in two facilitated plenary sessions where they cast their vision for an enhanced theological formation and discussed pathways for actualizing this vision as a collective. The plenaries built upon insights from the summit’s small group workshops, giving participants the opportunity to:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Share their workshop visions;</li> <li>■ Identify common themes and synergies among their visions;</li> <li>■ Enumerate and categorize the assets that the UCC can leverage to advance these visions</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Devise theological formation game changers that could advance positive breakthroughs;</li> <li>■ Combine and prioritize these game changers as pathways for innovation and transformation; and</li> <li>■ Chart next steps.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

What follows is a summary of participants’ insights, ideas and commitments going forward.

## II. Casting The Vision For Theological Formation

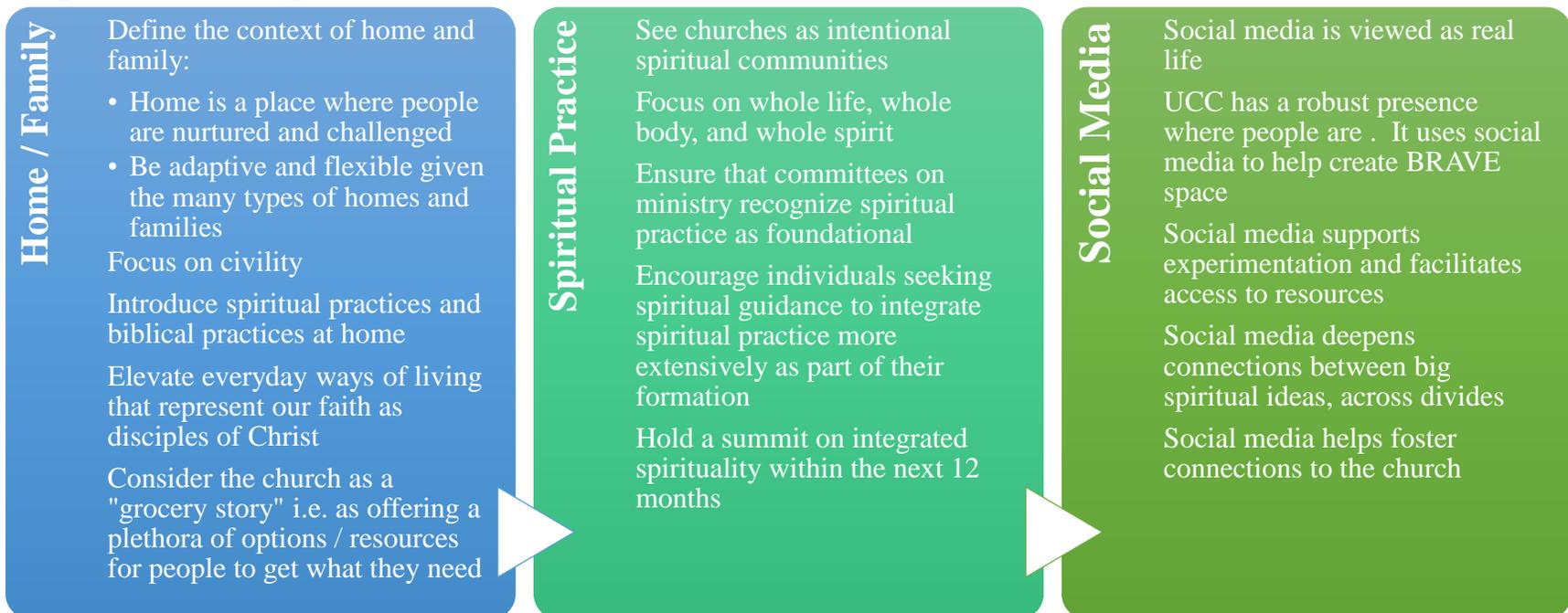
During the morning plenary session, participants in the summit's small group workshops presented their visions for a renewed theological formation. Each of nine small group focus areas considered theological formation in a specific context or domain. At the plenary, these groups were then aligned with several others to form a larger cluster of groups that shared overlapping interests, resulting in four clusters.

The four clusters of groups participated in the plenary session, enabling participants to listen for recurring themes and synergies within the clusters as well as for meta-themes that transcended individual clusters. All of the visions, themes and synergies explored at the morning plenary are captured on the accompanying pages.

### A. Small Group Visions for Theological Formation With Recurring Themes & Synergies By Cluster

#### *Cluster I: Home / Family, Spiritual Practice & Social Media*

##### Synopsis of Small Group Visions



## Cluster: Home / Family, Spiritual Practice & Social Media

Recurring Themes	Synergies
<p><b><i>Most Frequently Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Integration (9x)</li> <li>■ Intentionality (9x)</li> <li>■ Multiple resources (8x)</li> <li>■ Holistic (6x)</li> <li>■ Context matters (5x)</li> <li>■ Broadening idea of home/space-not just a building (4x)</li> <li>■ Places of nourishment-building, online, family, spiritual practice (4x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Accessibility (3x)</li> <li>■ Everyday life (3x)</li> <li>■ Brave and safe spaces (safe enough vs safe) (3x)</li> <li>■ Make connections to those already doing good work (3x)</li> <li>■ Platforms for formation including spiritual (2x)</li> <li>■ Opportunity for creativity beyond status quo (2x)</li> <li>■ Social media as opportunity (2x)</li> <li>■ Meet people where they are/can be (2x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Must happen in the home</li> <li>■ Embodiment- a lived experience</li> <li>■ Resonates with not only individuals, but as guardians of selves/others</li> <li>■ Pathway of whole life</li> <li>■ Think outside the box</li> <li>■ Transformational</li> <li>■ Grocery store metaphor for neighborhood and contextualized community relationship</li> <li>■ Seeking of integrity</li> <li>■ Overcoming barriers</li> <li>■ Adaptive change – no one size fits all</li> <li>■ Movement across lines</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Most Frequently Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Nurture (5x)</li> <li>■ Integration and integrity over time and space (4x)</li> <li>■ Social media is connective tissue (4x)</li> <li>■ Community (3x)</li> <li>■ Context as central and stories as real (3x)</li> <li>■ Multi-faith resources for home/social media (3x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Foster each other (spiritual practice in the home, using social media) (2x)</li> <li>■ Whole lifespan-change with growth of a person (2x)</li> <li>■ UCC as platform/network as opposed to institution (2x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Empowered to participate</li> <li>■ Communicate between settings</li> <li>■ Learn new vocabulary (words, meanings, structures)</li> <li>■ Tool for mobilizing people</li> <li>■ Spreading out of sacred ground beyond buildings, ‘holy ground’</li> <li>■ Okay with the “grocery store’ metaphor</li> <li>■ All of us have a “Christ-conscious”</li> <li>■ Adapt spiritual resources for diverse settings</li> <li>■ “Do It Yourself” element</li> <li>■ Formation of virtual connections</li> <li>■ Experience of God together</li> <li>■ Future focused (religion vs spirituality)</li> <li>■ Need for adaptive /technical (fluid/responsive)</li> <li>■ UCC can get wide, needs depth</li> <li>■ Faith invading spaces of life</li> <li>■ Nodes of connection between ‘church’ &amp; life</li> <li>■ Importance of food and table</li> <li>■ Require support (financial, etc.) that isn’t currently provided</li> <li>■ Forward orientation, future</li> </ul>

**Note: The numbers behind the entries indicate the number of plenary discussion groups / tables that mentioned the theme or synergy. There were 17 discussion tables during the morning session.**

***Cluster II: Direct Educational Experience & Immersion Experience***

**Synopsis of Small Group Visions**

**Direct Educational Experience**

- Future orientation for those who we are baptizing as new UCC'ers
- Market resources and create a platform that catalogues and helps distribute them
- Decolonize the church – it's curricula, worship and music
- Host a national event to do church in the public square
- Have a national conversation about church death as part of the resurrection
- Support innovation and assessment as part of the culture
- Ensure that existing institutions in the ecosystem:
  - Cultivate passionate, holistic, heart-centered, awe-inspiring, theological formation without losing the robustness of our tradition of intellectual curiosity
  - Restructure so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ might find clear expression in our churches and in the world
  - Redesign General Synod
  - Are equipped for heart-centered conversations about theological formation beyond the church walls. This might require another summit

**Immersion Experience**

- UCC demonstrates living out its faith.
- Its immersion experiences are multigenerational and deepen faith
- Experiences:
  - Have global and local impacts
  - Advance a spirit of mutuality and accompaniment. The church engages with the others around alternate learning
  - Are not yet accessible to all, but will be made available to more people
- A toolkit is needed for greater awareness of existing resources and a better leveraging of financial resources
- UCC's culture of immersion needs to shift to better get to know our communities

## Cluster: Direct Educational & Immersion Experience

Recurring Themes	Synergies
<p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned Continued</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changing the gatherings that we have (3x)</li> <li>■ Educate -both call for collaboration (3x)</li> <li>■ Concern for accessibility (2x)</li> <li>■ Decolonization-move from “other” to create connection (2x)</li> <li>■ Holism-cause worthy vision (midwifery, hospice, etc.) (2x)</li> <li>■ Future oriented (2x)</li> <li>■ Heart/Head balance (2x)</li> <li>■ Expression of identity (2x)</li> <li>■ Intentionality (2x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reaffirmation about our curiosity of the unknown</li> <li>■ Crossing /moving the imaginary boundaries of sharing</li> <li>■ Turn around “cradle” UCC-consider whole life experience</li> <li>■ Immersion at “near-of-hand” experiences, no need to go forever</li> <li>■ Currently racially biased</li> <li>■ Public square as content</li> <li>■ Utilizing existing platforms</li> <li>■ Follow up to follow-through from this event</li> <li>■ Need for another gathering</li> <li>■ Name history and evolve</li> <li>■ Small is good</li> <li>■ Confession, validation, witness</li> <li>■ How to find resurrection</li> <li>■ Thinking locally</li> <li>■ Living out our faith</li> <li>■ Equipping others to do the work</li> <li>■ Better communication needed</li> <li>■ Humility</li> <li>■ Multidimensionality/multi-faceted</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned Continued</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Preserve what is good and change what is not. Harness the energy of what is working. Allow what exists to evolve and adapt (2x)</li> <li>■ Redefine educational and immersion experiences (2x)</li> <li>■ Christ oriented branding and evangelism (2x)</li> <li>■ Local and national collaboration (2x)</li> <li>■ Education- multiple ways and opportunities (2x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Follow up to experience</li> <li>■ Change</li> <li>■ Decolonization</li> <li>■ Value forgivers and recipients of “Mission”</li> <li>■ Need to bring together more of cross-section of the church</li> <li>■ Have a vision for member engagement</li> <li>■ Teach from “Jesus-centered perspective”</li> <li>■ Redesign synod</li> <li>■ Disruption</li> <li>■ Cultivate heart, spirit, and mind</li> <li>■ Resurrection-death to the old</li> <li>■ Evaluating/reassessing privilege</li> <li>■ Recognizing the worth of these in current context</li> <li>■ What’s the point (why?)</li> <li>■ Awe inspiring, impactful experiences</li> <li>■ Deepening faith</li> <li>■ Focus on people/shift to diversity</li> <li>■ Contextual ministry and then formational, reflection/action</li> <li>■ Broader access, wider understanding of recipients/partners</li> <li>■ To imagine and equip ourselves to do what we are called to do</li> <li>■ Clarify identity</li> </ul>

*Cluster III: Local Church & Worship Experience*

**Synopsis of Small Group Visions**

**Local Church**

'We' need to work on building stronger relationships with each other and God

- Paths begin in seminary and continue after
- Ministers are called to lead, not serve, a church

People articulate theology and align their behavior

Invest in lay leadership development

Create a relational culture among churches, people, settings, so we know what is needed

Churches say why they exist, with theologically sound visions

Faith is formed in all areas of local church life

- Provide opportunities to model and teach theological vision

Questions whose answers are being formulated now:

- 1) What is the ongoing theological formation of active clergy?
- 2) Where are the monks and nuns?
- 3) How can we identify a faithful and effective disciple of Christ?

Initiate database of spiritual directors and coaches

Contemplative practices are underdeveloped

**Worship Experience**

Power of testimonies expand opportunities for this in the context of worship

- Vitality of congregations can't be captured solely by numbers
- New metrics are needed

Desire for expansion of the canons of music

Theological Formation happens more in worship than anywhere else

Be an extravagantly welcoming denomination that honors the past, but moves/flows beyond it

## Cluster: Local Church & Worship Experience

Recurring Themes	Synergies
<p><b><i>Most Frequently Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Articulating who we are and what we believe for self and the community (7x)</li> <li>■ Integrating lay leadership; engaging laity (7x)</li> <li>■ Relationship building (6x)</li> <li>■ Marks of faithful disciples (6x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Witnessing and testimony (3x)</li> <li>■ Back to basics (3x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned Continued</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Collaboration (2x)</li> <li>■ Spiritual practices (2x)</li> <li>■ Maturing in faith/faith formation (2x)</li> <li>■ Openness to metrics (2x)</li> <li>■ Worship as primary focus of education/formation (2x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Equipping churches and people with the skills needed to deepen relationships</li> <li>■ Testimony</li> <li>■ Wellness and vitality beyond numbers</li> <li>■ Articulation may be the many forms of expression</li> <li>■ Have some foundation for variety of expressions and understanding</li> <li>■ Giving people respect, championing them</li> <li>■ Passion and gifts are out there already (lay expertise)</li> <li>■ Seek the beauty in every tradition for worship</li> <li>■ Religious “biosphere”</li> <li>■ Importance of Jesus and Church as center</li> <li>■ We are social experts</li> <li>■ Sense of identity</li> <li>■ Take care of pastors with continued education and wellness checks</li> <li>■ Recognizing gifts</li> <li>■ Authenticity</li> <li>■ Theological formation/reflection</li> <li>■ Expectation setting</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Most Frequently Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Intentional reflection on naming where God is in our lives/churches/denomination (5x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Synergy between cluster (2x)</li> <li>■ Listen to lay leadership (2x)</li> <li>■ Empowering disciples through relationship (2x)</li> <li>■ Whole life of church gives witness to Theological Formation (2x)</li> <li>■ Intergenerational (2x)</li> </ul> <p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Church is the Body of Christ and worship is among the Body of Christ</li> <li>■ The worship experience is a “place” of laying down Theological Foundation</li> <li>■ Neither is necessarily linked to a ‘brick and mortar’ space</li> <li>■ Worship is an element of being</li> <li>■ Some things can be done immediately</li> <li>■ Create timeline and priorities</li> <li>■ Time to act as if it has already started</li> <li>■ Sense of belonging to UCC</li> <li>■ Be the change we want</li> <li>■ Honor responsibility of lay people</li> <li>■ Knowing what the front of the local church and faith can look like</li> <li>■ Power of individual story</li> <li>■ Recognizing and celebrating the movements of the Holy Spirit</li> <li>■ Experiential/experience of God</li> <li>■ Giving permission for diversity of expression</li> <li>■ How to connect vitalities to the local church</li> <li>■ Renewed importance of local church as formational focus</li> <li>■ Reconstructing worship to better meet the needs of theological formation</li> <li>■ Is Pastor’s theological facility best focused primarily on worship/preaching?</li> <li>■ More training</li> <li>■ Why do people come on Sundays?</li> </ul>

**Cluster IV: Social Justice & Church Writ-Large**

**Synopsis of Small Group Visions**

**Social Justice**

Theological Formation is inclusive of all ages and not limited to authorized ministers

- We need to start from the ground up not top down
- Marketing across ecosystem of denominations
- Every congregation in UCC becomes an active center for social justice \*
- Every person is committed to anti-racism\*
  - Move towards the notion of “every” through enticements, not by authoritative assertion\*

Train 1,000 social justice ministers every year that take their learned techniques to their congregations and communities

Have deep compelling theological foundation for what justice means

**Church Writ-Large**

Culture eats vision for breakfast

- Innovation and disruption is key to shifting culture and Theological Formation
- Accelerators, examples and prototypes are needed

Cultural stories create the possibilities for our imagination

Must connect with other sectors for innovation

Church currently works for some, but systems failure is evident. Current structures are inadequate

Tech is a game changer

What will serve as catalysts – community organizers

Rethink how we’re using our facilities and buildings

Foster alignment between commitment and goals

People-centered design

Create loving humans who are like Jesus

Nodes and networks need to better interact

Form deep, authentic, nurturing relationships.  
Create field of trust

Cluster: Social Justice & Church Writ-Large	
Recurring Themes	Synergies
<p><b>Most Frequently Mentioned</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Change (6x)</li> <li>■ Innovation (5x)</li> <li>■ Focus on relationship (5x)</li> <li>■ Tap the power of culture (3x)</li> <li>■ Cradle to grave- include all (3x)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Most Frequently Mentioned</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Cultural shift (4x)</li> <li>■ People centered (3x)</li> </ul> <p><b>Occasionally Mentioned</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Thick network of relationships (2x)</li> <li>■ Leadership from below and in a circular motion (2x)</li> </ul>

<p><b><i>Occasionally Mentioned</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Fields of trust, safe communities, trust in leadership, nurturing (2x)</li> <li>■ Tech centered (2x)</li> <li>■ Failure as a “theme”-hospice churches (2x)</li> <li>■ Contextual place of social justice varies (2x)</li> <li>■ Diversity and culture (2x)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dialectic between individuals, local church and larger church network (2x)</li> <li>■ Shift power “every” UCC church/member (2x)</li> <li>■ Innovation (2x)</li> <li>■ Seeking alignment as opposed to consensus (2x)</li> <li>■ New churches should be bottom up-built on community (2x)</li> </ul>
--	---

**Cluster: Social Justice & Church Writ-Large CONTINUED**

<b>Recurring Themes</b>	<b>Synergies</b>
<p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Organizing</li> <li>■ Determine capacity</li> <li>■ Inclusive</li> <li>■ Foster intersectionality</li> <li>■ Autonomy-Alienation</li> <li>■ Doesn't work for all churches</li> <li>■ What purpose does this serve/who benefits</li> <li>■ Listen</li> <li>■ How can we create and sustain agents of change so that we create loving humans who are like Jesus?</li> <li>■ How can we have ears to hear and eyes to see</li> <li>■ What are the essentials we hold in common?</li> <li>■ Theological foundation</li> <li>■ No consensus on Social Justice, define justice</li> <li>■ Ground-up vs leadership</li> <li>■ Trust needed to get out of silos</li> <li>■ Accompaniment = trust</li> <li>■ Honor politely while pushing boundaries and reimagine</li> <li>■ “Doing” because it’s right</li> <li>■ Imagination</li> <li>■ The notion of “every”</li> <li>■ Mission vs ministry</li> <li>■ Alignment</li> <li>■ Cultural competency training</li> <li>■ Debunk notions of what a person of faith looks like</li> <li>■ Building community beyond the church</li> <li>■ Making discernment essential and not so ego-driven</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Duly Noted</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social justice misinterprets who the Church is</li> <li>■ Need to step back and do theological formation on what social justice is</li> <li>■ Both are political- appearing in many different communities</li> <li>■ Cast in a vision that unites individuals to create community</li> <li>■ Changing construct of one denomination</li> <li>■ How to utilize resources beyond the church</li> <li>■ Education begins from the ground up</li> <li>■ Importance of story and testimony</li> <li>■ Disrupting patterns</li> <li>■ Whose voice is missing</li> <li>■ Thoughts don't equal action</li> <li>■ Movement not conversation</li> <li>■ Margins bring wisdom</li> <li>■ Center “why” needed on dominant culture</li> <li>■ Intersection needed</li> <li>■ Connect existing resources</li> <li>■ Church is not just a building</li> <li>■ Formed to be reformed and transformed</li> <li>■ Church exists for the sake of the world</li> <li>■ Communication</li> <li>■ Discernment at local level that deepens covenant</li> <li>■ Rooted in our theological convictions</li> <li>■ Hunger for change</li> <li>■ Humans resist being change</li> <li>■ Balancing technology as a means of cultivating community</li> </ul>

### C. Meta Themes Across Small Group Visions

Summit participants identified many recurring themes during the morning plenary session. The **meta-themes** that were repeated across small group clusters included:

1. Centering of people and deepening of relationships
2. Widening the circle of engagement – leadership, laity, community, organizers, young, old, people on the margins
3. Innovation – new definitions and models of church, formation and education
4. Metamorphosis of the church – formation, death, reformation, transformation
5. Technology as an accelerator of transformation
6. Shifting and shaping denominational culture
7. Movement within and beyond church walls
8. Adaptability and responsiveness to context
9. Collaboration across silos, boundaries and borders
10. Attention to intersections as opportunities
11. Leveraging, connecting and accessing resources
12. Holistic / integrated approaches to theological formation
13. Need to continue this work / conversation

### III. Actualizing The Vision For Theological Formation

The afternoon plenary session was two and one-half hours long, giving summit participants an opportunity to explore ways to collectively actualize the visions put forth during the morning session. As a large group, participants considered the resources of the denomination that are available to support theological formation. They also discussed and, with the help of facilitators, prioritized game changing pathways that could positively transform the UCC’s existing approaches to formation. Both the ecosystem assets and the promising pathways are featured on the following pages.

#### A. Ecosystem Asset Map

Where possible, assets have been clustered around four common themes – training and curricula, people resources, systemic / collective assets, and UCC platform and polity.

Ecosystem Resources: Training & Curricula Assets		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Curricula</li> <li>■ Spiritual wellness checks –regular checks on the spiritual well-being of our pastors</li> <li>■ Ensure that our leaders are engaged in theological/spiritual formation so that formation can happen where they lead</li> <li>■ Have small successful models of justice trainings and immersion experiences that could be used as templates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Have national setting staff and those within Conferences / Assoc. develop curriculum built for all ages</li> <li>■ Discipleship development that is grounded in faith development and tied to ordination</li> <li>■ How can we engage the world if we aren’t developing our leaders- engaged or otherwise?</li> <li>■ Resource training for adult discipleship for unchurched newcomers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Working method for creating theological formation goals for each age group within a congregation</li> <li>■ Church communication</li> <li>■ Curriculum development skills that can design social justice learning for all ages</li> <li>■ Theological burnout prevention</li> </ul>

**Ecosystem Resources: People / Human Assets**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Celebrity members</li> <li>■ UCC Lobbyists</li> <li>■ Regional Theological Education Consortium</li> <li>■ Transplants to the UCC that bring best practices of other traditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ National program staff and leaders</li> <li>■ Leadership and content creators who already exist and are doing things well</li> <li>■ Connections with under-represented groups</li> <li>■ Our people</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Justice leaders</li> <li>■ Local community organizers</li> <li>■ Lay leaders</li> <li>■ People who are modeling how to leverage social media well</li> </ul>
---	--	---

**Ecosystem Resources: Systemic / Collective Assets**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Lay skills in non-religious settings</li> <li>■ The Damascus Project</li> <li>■ Wisconsin Conference- Lay Academy</li> <li>■ Our semi-names</li> <li>■ Middle judicatory staff</li> <li>■ Partnership with other denominations</li> <li>■ Multi-conference/ regional meetings on an annual basis that educate around effective protection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Chaplains appointed in each conference and at General Synod to model prayer at the heart of our business as a church</li> <li>■ Attempt to amplify theological work about the ecclesiology of the UCC</li> <li>■ Identify/connect with, apply substantive grants to support breakthrough, vision</li> <li>■ Internships that have meaning and messaging regarding social justice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ UCC colleges, seminaries, lay academies and regional schools</li> <li>■ Invite congregations to identify specific goals for their Faith/Theological Formation</li> <li>■ Model programs that can be used: Social Justice Leadership programs</li> <li>■ Endowment</li> </ul>
---	--	---

**Ecosystem Resources: UCC Platform, Polity, and Energy Assets**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ UCC history and ancestral heritage</li> <li>■ Prayer- supporting, directing, relationship building, inspiring</li> <li>■ Ability of LGBT community to think outside the box</li> <li>■ Camps and retreats</li> <li>■ Seminaries as sandboxes to test and experiment with new methods</li> <li>■ Transplants to the UCC that bring best practices of other traditions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ The Bible</li> <li>■ Deep theology already within our church</li> <li>■ Partnership with existing and established faith-based organizing efforts</li> <li>■ National Faith Formation work with people to form conference that can be customized to reflect local customs</li> <li>■ Creation of: “The Marks of Faithful and Effective Disciples”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Church-wide project/consultation on identifying and naming the “marks” of mature Christian faith</li> <li>■ Curricular/programmatic development team to create a comprehensive resource/program/curriculum for the formation of “new Christians”</li> </ul>
--	--	--

### Ecosystem Resources: Miscellaneous

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Innovation</li> <li>■ Passion</li> <li>■ Ease of access to technology and apps</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Theology about our tradition such that a “useable past” and an evolving understanding of ‘us-ness’ can develop</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Impatience</li> <li>■ Contemplative prayer</li> </ul>
--	--	--

## B. Organizing Pathways Towards Theological Formation Reimagined

Having reviewed the UCC’s ecosystem assets, plenary participants shifted their attention to potential areas of focus and action that if properly resourced could be game-changers for theological formation. They listened to the recommendations developed at the small group workshops earlier in the day and worked with facilitators to cull from this list seven promising pathways. The small group recommendations and prioritized pathways are presented below.

### Recommended Game-Changers – Small Groups

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Impact of technology, particularly virtual reality on spiritual formation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Toolkit for theological resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Moving away from church as a “building”</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Creation of a contemplative order within the UCC</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Development of a clear sense of purpose – the why – that can be shared via our direct educational experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Opportunities for skill building for congregations that want to have a social media presence</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Creation of a document – The Marks of Faithful and Effective Discipleship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Sharing what we do well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Spiritual retreats that deepen immersion experiences</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Development of a national program that puts a Biblical definition on justice – training 1,000 ministers / year</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Financial support for churches that could use an associate pastor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Openness to a variety of music and spiritual expressions</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Intentional personal spiritual practices introduced in the family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Establishment of a clearinghouse for sharing content</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Prioritizing Committees on Ministry’s existing spiritual practice language</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Free, low cost or subsidized seminary theological education for those called to ministry and for education of lay leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Creation of small groups and connections that allow each person to be part of an integrated and connected community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Understanding the theological issues of local congregations through Biblical, historical and contemporary storytelling that reimagines pietism</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Adequate funding for ministries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Effective marketing strategy</li> </ul>	

## Seven Prioritized Game Changing Pathways – Large Group



### Charting Next Steps

Plenary participants identified the pathways in which they had the greatest interest and then formed discussion groups around these pathways. Each discussion group was tasked with answering three questions that would help the UCC chart its next steps:

1. **FOCUS:** On this game changing pathway, what might we focus on that has the potential for great impact?
2. **INITIAL ACTIONS:** If we were to take action and put our feet on this pathway, where might we begin or start?
3. **ARE YOU IN?:** Would you like to stay involved in future conversations and work for this pathway? (*names and contact info has been deleted from this public report.*)

### The Pathway Response

Pathway: Engaging Technology and Supporting Its Use	
Areas of Focus For Great Impact	Initial Actions On The Pathway
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Use tech to communicate and as a delivery system</li> <li>■ Access-training, fluency</li> <li>■ Tool, not a toy or game</li> <li>■ Way of building connections beyond our silos that will change us</li> <li>■ Strategic, positive introduction to the use of technology</li> <li>■ Dedicated buy-in by leadership</li> <li>■ Focus on innovators and early adopters exclusively</li> <li>■ Be honest about available resources and values- be willing to go outside if necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ New UCC tech guy</li> <li>■ Resource sharing                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-List and testimonies</li> <li>-Who’s doing this well</li> <li>-Who’s willing to share (within and outside UCC)</li> <li>-Testimonies to positive experiences</li> <li>-Support for those struggling</li> <li>-Basic etiquette, best practices</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Tech guy needs a team for this</li> <li>■ Extravagance UCC connections</li> </ul>

## Pathway: Resourcing Ordained Clergy & Laity support/ Advance Theological Formation

<i>Areas of Focus For Great Impact</i>	<i>Initial Actions On The Pathway</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Financial support</li> <li>■ National conversation: Discernment -which institutions need to die for others to live</li> <li>■ Consider owed debt/gaining debt</li> <li>■ Weave together in one fabric seminaries, church settings, lay schools</li> <li>■ Resources for specialized ministers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Start with the question: Why are we training leaders? For what? Apostleship-Affirmation of Faith-Discipleship</li> <li>■ What is motivating us?</li> <li>■ Listening campaign in the local churches</li> <li>■ Present a compelling vision: -what the church can be -how can we help that happen?</li> </ul>

## Pathway: Marks, Benchmarks, and Systemic Endorsements

<i>Areas of Focus For Great Impact</i>	<i>Initial Actions On The Pathway</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Articulate “The Why” for Theological Formation in UCC</li> <li>■ Guideposts/best practices faith development</li> <li>■ Concrete expressions of faith in practice/action</li> <li>■ Expand our understanding of what constitutes authorized ministry</li> <li>■ Including the fullness of the Church in our discernment</li> <li>■ Leverage healthy communication to shape Theological Formation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Begin working on shared “Why” (deep purpose)</li> <li>■ Bringing together a diverse group to define marks of faithful and effective disciples (update Cambridge Platform)- begin with national faith formation team</li> <li>■ Collect and share stories of faith and Theological Formation and paths to authorized ministry from MESA and others</li> <li>■ Reflect on our own faith and purpose</li> </ul>

## Pathway: Integrating and Activating the Biblical Platform for Justice

<i>Areas of Focus For Great Impact</i>	<i>Initial Actions On The Pathway</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Renaming, reframing and defining our relationship with justice</li> <li>■ Articulating what the marks of a just world are</li> <li>■ Reenergizing high level theological reflection that’s available for all</li> <li>■ Unchaining it from Social Justice work</li> <li>■ Active/practicing/implementing -Training must give the depth of the issues and doing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Resources –money, time, energy, commissioning</li> <li>■ Naming our complicity</li> <li>■ Repeat from our complicity</li> <li>■ Forming a group to develop or provide Social Justice curriculum for all ages</li> <li>■ Justice and Witness Ministries to leverage prof. and articulate a justice platform that we can leverage</li> </ul>

<p>work while also thriving to be active, etc.          -Theological and spiritual tools</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Grace and gratitude             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are we more explicit?</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Role of encounter, relationship building, community connection             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bring to them then pulling them out</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ The Bible             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Justice Bible, Green Bible</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Training leaders in justice             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Pre-supposes a training</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ What do we believe in our relationship to God?</li> <li>■ Why do we do ‘it’ in context of faith</li> <li>■ How do we yoke them back together?</li> <li>■ Education and programming across multi-generations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ A platform that can be used at home and community and not just at church</li> <li>■ From the Ground Up             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-offering plate cards</li> </ul> </li> <li>Experience of making God’s love and justice</li> </ul>
---	--

<b>Pathway: Deepening Community and Contemplative Practice</b>	
<b><i>Areas of Focus For Great Impact</i></b>	<b><i>Initial Actions On The Pathway</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Be a Mary and Martha”</li> <li>■ What has worked             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In UCC (Corpus Christi)</li> <li>Outside/beyond UCC</li> <li>Other denominations-other cultures</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Formalize the process (e.g., Continuing education)</li> <li>■ Balance the inward and outward journey and establish flow one from another</li> <li>■ Strengthen the spiritual component</li> <li>■ Small groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Benchmarks</li> <li>■ Start a?</li> <li>■ Encourage every pastor to find a spiritual director and document an expectation of commitment</li> <li>■ Find those interested in contemplative practices across the UCC</li> <li>■ “Introvert Room” at Synod</li> </ul>

## Pathway: Resourcing Local Churches to Support Theological Formation and Spiritual Practice Geared towards Individuals, Home, and Family Life

<i>Areas of Focus For Great Impact</i>	<i>Initial Actions On The Pathway</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pray for direction</li> <li>■ Commitment from the national office for resources and money toward home/family</li> <li>■ Start with a centralized location of current resources</li> <li>■ Bring in stakeholders to train</li> <li>■ Tools to help identify resources</li> <li>■ Intentional UCC resource that is multigenerational</li> <li>■ Local stakeholders intentionally networking (church to church)</li> <li>■ Identifying best practices/needs/resources locally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Pray</li> <li>■ Create a survey of what we already have</li> <li>■ Pull notes from: Social Justice, Tech, Cultural groups to develop an action plan</li> <li>■ What we do is: multigenerational, multicultural, and multiethnic</li> <li>■ Lack of communication from: National, Conference Association</li> <li>■ Focused listening sessions on how they (families) are practicing their faith</li> <li>■ Create our own spiritual practice within our group</li> </ul>

## Pathway: Process and Cultural Change

<i>Areas of Focus For Great Impact</i>	<i>Initial Actions On Pathway</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Changing culture</li> <li>■ Create different models and prototypes</li> <li>■ Change culture of leadership Equip and empower ID, recruit, and train leadership from within and outside of church</li> <li>■ Redesign how we <i>gather</i></li> <li>■ Adaptive learning</li> <li>■ Church-wide conversation about innovative models and prototyping</li> <li>■ Create a new lens for how we perceive/ conceive of who UCC is (e.g., more Catholics in Philly Archdiocese than ALL UCCers)</li> <li>■ Identify a census of effective, vibrant churches</li> <li>■ Truth telling</li> <li>■ World Café, Art of Hosting, Creative Imagining</li> <li>■ Truth and Reconciliation process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Completely redesign</li> <li>■ Prototype a new church</li> <li>■ General Synod 2020/21</li> <li>■ A track @2019- Art of hosting, Design thinking, ULAB (Otto Scharmer @MIT)</li> <li>■ Explore denominational and service innovation models- Jet Blue, Southwest, Zappos, IDEO</li> <li>■ Develop and disseminate resource list/ resources on innovation, new models</li> <li>■ Intentionality at God Being at the center of what we do- Christ centered</li> </ul>

### *What next? The Ensuing Conversation and Work in Process*

Over the course of the summer, conference participants who expressed commitment to ongoing participation in the Pathway conversations have organized and begun regularly scheduled Zoom meetings where exploratory conversations regarding the Pathway areas of focus have continued, and further exploration of feasible, manageable initial actions are being discerned. These include further clarification regarding why theological formation is important, charting the UCC's existing resources that support theological formation, considering what may need to be created that does not yet exist, and establishing what existing resources may need to be more robustly developed.

Preliminary planning is in process towards organizing a From the Ground Up: Reimagining 2.0 web-hosted conference in the 2019, all towards considering how theological formation might be more firmly and intentionally embedded into all aspects of life in the United Church of Christ.

For more information about this effort to develop a vision for theological formation for the UCC in our increasingly adaptive culture, please contact the Office of General Minister and President at the UCC National Office.