

Dear Members of the Eastern Association,

Greetings in the spirit of fellowship and grace.

At the Fall Eastern Association meeting, the gathered body engaged in conversation and discernment about the future of the Association. We together remembered the years of dedicated service and shared ministry, and we together wondered about what structures within the Wider Church were needed to best support, equip, and empower the ministry of the Local Church into the future. We acknowledged that the role, function, and energy of Associations have changed since the United Church of Christ's founding, and we were honest with one another about the ways we have felt these changes, too. We learned that many Associations throughout the UCC have voted to conclude their ministry and assign their responsibilities to their Conference, and that doing so has liberated people to use time and energy for building relationships, connections, and ministry with neighboring congregations.



At the conclusion of the Fall Association Meeting, the gathered body discerned that it was time for the Association's ministry to conclude. They asked the Executive Committee to research the needed steps and to bring a motion to the Spring Eastern Association meeting. Accordingly, the Executive Committee completed the necessary steps, in accordance with the bylaws, and will bring forward a motion for the gathered body. The full text of the motion is available on the Association's website. In summary, the motion:

- Concludes the ministry of the Eastern Association
- Confers the ecclesial roles and responsibilities of the Eastern Association to the Southern California Nevada Conference
- Directs the remaining financial assets of the Eastern Association be given to the Southern California Nevada Conference for use in continuing to support ministries (ex. cost sharing contribution for Member in Discernment's psychological assessments) within the Conference

You are invited to prayerfully review the motion in advance of the Spring Association Meeting and to join us for the **Spring Association Meeting at 9:30 am on May 18, 2024**. The meeting will take place via zoom. Registration is now available online at: <https://easternassociation.org>.

In preparation for the Spring Meeting, the Executive Committee will also host a **community conversation and learning session on at 2 pm April 28, 2024**. This is an opportunity to learn more or ask questions in community. The zoom link for this event is also available at: <https://easternassociation.org>.

We recognize that even though the ministry of the Association is drawing to a close, we have much to celebrate and that our covenant with one another as members of the United Church of Christ continues. **In Fall 2024, we hope to host a final in-person gathering for churches and clergy in our area to come together, celebrate what has been, and listen for what the Spirit is calling the Church to next.** John DiNapoli and Linda Lang will be coordinating this event and will share details via email with churches and clergy later this summer.

In closing, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your support, love, and commitment to the United Church of Christ. May our shared memories continue to illuminate our hearts and may the Spirit of connection and compassion that has animated our community continue to inspire us in all our endeavors.

With deepest gratitude and warmest regards,

The Executive Committee of the Eastern Association

FAQs

Is this common? What Associations have made these changes?

It is increasingly common. Associations within Northern California Nevada Conference, Central Pacific Conference, Pacific Northwest Conference and Rocky Mountain Conference as well as Minnesota, Kansas-Oklahoma, the Southeast Conference (covering a geography of 5 states), and a variety of others have discerned that they wanted to use their energy differently. The Associations within the Wisconsin Conference are current in discernment after no longer having the volunteers needed.

How will ministers and churches connect? Can we still gather?

Connection is built by investing time and energy in one another. Clergy clusters, partnerships of churches, shared ministries, yoked congregations...all remain possible. The only limit is your imagination. Plus there are opportunities to connect for installations, ordinations, and ecclesiastical councils! Conference Annual Gathering remains an additional opportunity to gather with folks from far and wide for worship, learning, and celebration.

Is there a polity term for this?

UCC polity (aka governance) has a provision that allows a Conference to be given the responsibilities of an Association. When this happens, the “Conference is acting as an Association.”

What happens if the Association votes “no”?

If the Eastern Association determines it wants to continue as an Association, then it must establish the Association as a legally formed entity, apply for an EIN, set up a bank account, and establish financial policies. We learned last fall that the Association had been improperly using the Conference’s EIN and did not have its own. This led to a closure of the account. If the Association were to continue, leaders will need to work diligently to manage the affairs. Concurrently, the nominations committee would need to meet, recruit volunteers, and another Association meeting will need to be called to consider the nominations.

Will churches still owe Association dues?

Association dues would conclude if the Association concluded.

Where will my Ministerial Standing be held?

Ministerial Standing would be held by the Southern California Nevada Conference

Will this change discernment processes?

All processes for Ministerial Authorization and Standing in the UCC will continue to happen through the Covenanting Committee on Ministry (CCOM). The CCOM is a combined, collaborative set of specialized teams that attend to the roles and responsibilities otherwise assigned to Associations. The Eastern Association covenanted with and joined the Covenanting Committee on Ministry in summer 2023.

Who will coordinate services of ordinations, installations, and other in-person events?

The CCOM Teams utilize a variety of additional volunteers (ex. advisors for candidates, partners for Local Churches, etc.) so in much the same way, the CCOM will coordinate a pool of volunteers in various geographic regions so that there is representation from the wider Church at these very important events. As always, administrative staff in the Conference office are available to help get the word out about these events.

The Executive Committee of the Eastern Association met March 5, 2024, and unanimously approved bringing forward the motion to conclude the Eastern Association at its Spring Meeting on May 18, 2024.



Concluding the Ministry of the Eastern Association and Transferring
Ecclesial Responsibilities to the Southern California Nevada
Conference

Whereas, the Eastern Association has sought to fulfill its ecclesial roles and responsibilities with faithfulness; and

Whereas, in light of changing circumstances, it is prudent to facilitate a smooth transition of these roles and responsibilities to ensure sustained support of Local Churches within the Southern California Nevada Conference; and

Whereas, recognizing the value of shared resources, it is deemed fitting to allocate the remaining financial assets of the Eastern Association to further enrich and fortify the ministries within the Southern California Nevada Conference;

Therefore, be it resolved, that:

1. The ministry of the Eastern Association shall gracefully conclude, marking May 18, 2024, as the effective date of this transition.
2. The ecclesial roles and responsibilities, which have been previously held by the Eastern Association, shall now be entrusted to the Southern California Nevada Conference, with the transfer of Standing of Local Churches and Ministers taking immediate effect upon the passage of this motion.
3. All remaining financial assets of the Eastern Association shall be transferred to the Southern California Nevada Conference, for the expressed purpose of nurturing and empowering the ministries of the United Church of Christ.
4. The Southern California Nevada Conference, guided by a spirit of collaboration and compassion, shall thoughtfully allocate these financial assets to sustain and uplift ministries, including providing essential support such as cost-sharing contributions for Member in Discernment's psychological assessments and others seeking to pursue a call to serve in ministry.
5. In a spirit of unity and cooperation, the administrative bodies of both the Eastern Association and the Southern California Nevada Conference shall joyfully undertake all necessary actions to bring this motion into fruition, including the transfer of legal responsibilities and financial assets.

Be it further resolved that the adoption of this motion by the gathered body of the Eastern Association shall signal its immediate implementation, reflect the faith community's ongoing commitment to covenantal ministry with the Southern California Nevada Conference and the United Church of Christ.