Your Minnesota Conference UCC Contact

Rev. Cindy Mueller
Minister for Congregations in Transition
cindym@uccmn.org
612/871-0359 ext. 4 (office) - calls are forwarded to her cell phone

Church closures are not a sign of failure—

Legacy program leaders say church closure is theologically consistent with Christian faith, which teaches that death is followed by new life. Just as Jesus rose from the dead, so too, congregations can give birth to new ministries, either by turning over their buildings to another congregation or non-profit or by selling the property and gifting their assets to fund new church plants, church leadership development , ministry projects and so much more….

"Legacy work is about coming in before [churches] get down to the bitter end and offering them a better end -- the idea of finishing well and finishing strong and doing that with more care, with more empowerment -- giving them the chance to close of their own accord and leave a legacy for the future."

- Rev. Cate Noellert

Minnesota Conference UCC

122 West Franklin Ave. Suite 323
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404

cindym@uccmn.org
612.871.3059 ext. 4 (office) - calls are forwarded to her cell phone

Is Your Church Facing an Uncertain Future?

Minnesota Conference
United Church of Christ

God calls the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ to equip a courageous Church alive with Christ's transforming love.

Take this Survey

The following survey can be used to evaluate the indicators of a congregation's viability.

Please indicate the degree to which you believe the following descriptions reflect the situation in your congregation by indicating **"very much," "somewhat," or "not at all."**

1. Total concentration on member-oriented activities ○○○

2. Excessive emphasis on the past ○○○

3. A neighborhood church without a neighborhood constituency ○○○

4. A rebellion against denominational requests for financial support ○○○

5. A firm resistance to change ○○○

6. Lack of persons to maintain ministries ○○○

7. Unable to sustain FT pastoral ministry ○○○

8. Average worship participation under 50 ○○○

9. Church mentality is 'maintenance and survival' ○○○

If you respond by agreeing 'very much' with 5 or more of the questions, it is time to consider a consultation with our MN conference Minister for Congregations in Transition.

The goal/core purpose of congregational legacy planning is passing on the spirit of a congregation through a living legacy that continues to give glory to God and aides in bringing about God's will for this world. Thus truly being a beautiful thing.

Threshold Moments in a Congregation's Life Cycle

All churches face times when they need to consider their next most faithful steps to be taken. Ministry in such congregations calls for faithful honest conversation. These conversations include examining the faith community's capabilities, their community relationships, their facilities and their finances. These conversations, if not begun too late (when the congregation is already exhausted), can birth new opportunities for their future – re-visioning, re-missioning, merging/consolidation/federating with another congregation, re-location or closure. But no matter which option is chosen, all require a depth of organizational strength, leadership assets and willpower.

Congregational experience shows that churches who face their future well, no matter *what* the outcome, do so when congregational leaders, pastors and congregational members are all involved in discussing their church's future and making the necessary decisions.

If a church, **after having done an honest assessment** of its own vitality, human capacity and financial assets, determines it is at a point that it can no longer continue forward, it begins a process of "completing" its ministry; doing the legacy planning necessary to ensure the mission of their church continues in a new way.

If the *result* of conversations among members is, in fact, to *complete* the ministry (closure), then the efforts of the leadership will entail many things including, but not limited to, tending to the grief & pastoral care of members/friends of the church, close examination of all assets, bylaws, incorporation papers & titles, obtaining legal assistance to ensure all state laws for non-profits are followed, archiving historical documents, developing a plan to ensure all members are taken care of after closure, a plan put in place that describes how the church's mission will continue through its legacy planning after its closure.

This can be accomplished with the guidance of the MN conference & the national setting of the denomination, a minister whose gifts/skill set makes them a good fit for such ministry (or their current pastor open to learning new skills) and the involvement of a church's members/friends. *Communication is critical at such a threshold moment.* Now is the time for all people who are invested in the church's future to get involved in the important conversations that will need to take place. The result of such significant conversations will help birth something new as your church takes its next most faithful steps which as the church's mission continues on through its legacy.

If the decision is to close, when it is done well, can mean so much more than death – rather it can be a culminating time to faithfully complete the mission of a congregation with thanksgiving for the ways the Spirit of God has moved through the congregation's life and death. A congregation's legacy includes it mission, core story, members, and historical records as well as financial and property assets.

Possible Ways Forward

⇒ Re-visioning, Re-purposing, Re-missioning your ministry

⇒ Sharing your building with another congregation or non-profit(s)

⇒ Merging/Yoking/Consolidation/Federating with another congregation

⇒ Re-locating/Selling building & renting space

⇒ Part-time clergy/Lay licensed minister

⇒ Completing ministry in your location and doing intentional legacy planning; closure