

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

**2004 ASSESSMENT FINAL REPORT
PART II
(SECTIONS VI THROUGH VIII)**

April 27, 2004

**Submitted by
CONNECTION PARTNERS, INC.**

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UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section	Title	Page
PART I (SECTIONS I THROUGH V)		
I.	Executive Summary.....	4
II.	Overall Conclusions and Recommendations.....	6
III.	Summary Findings and Conclusions.....	12
IV.	Background and Methodology.....	32
	• Background: Why Was An RMC UCC Needs Assessment Conducted?.....	32
	• Methodology: How Was The Assessment Conducted?.....	33
	– Criteria for Credibility	
	– Communication About the Assessment	
	– Assessment Questionnaire Design and Sampling Strategy	
	– Questionnaire Confidentiality	
	– Questionnaire Anomalies	
	– Focus Group Design and Process	
	• How Were the Open-Ended Questionnaire Responses and Focus Group Responses Analyzed?.....	35
	– Questionnaire Content Analysis: Laity and Clergy Groupings	
	– Questionnaire Content Analysis: Grouping into Themes and Subthemes	
	– Questionnaire Content Analysis: Coding, Counting, and Numbers	
	– Questionnaire Content Analysis: Quotes	
	– Focus Group Analysis	
V.	Assessment Participation: Detailed Findings and Conclusions.....	38
	• Who and how many people participated in the assessment?.....	38

Section	Title	Page
	– Assessment Participation: Summary Findings and Conclusions	
	PART II (SECTIONS VI THROUGH VIII)	46
VI.	Questionnaire: Detailed Findings and Conclusions.....	46
	• What Makes Members Proud And/Or Joyful In Being A Part Of The Rocky Mountain Conference United Church Of Christ?.....	46
	– Summary Findings and Conclusions	
	• When members hear or see the words, "Rocky Mountain Conference," how do they define the Rocky Mountain Conference? What or who do they think of as the Rocky Mountain Conference?.	55
	– Summary Findings and Conclusions	
	• If Members Could Have Anything From The Rocky Mountain Conference, Without Limitation Of Time Or Cost, What Would They Ask For?.....	65
	– Summary Findings and Conclusions	
	• Was there a time when members wished that the Rocky Mountain Conference had been there for them?.....	81
	– Summary Findings and Conclusions	
	• What Events, Programs, Or Groups Help Members Feel Connected To The Rocky Mountain Conference Beyond Their Local Church?.	90
	– Summary Findings and Conclusions	
VII.	Focus Groups: Detailed Findings and Conclusions.....	99
	• What Can We Do As A Conference Together To Enhance And Invigorate Church Life?.....	99
	– Conclusions	
	• Given The Realities Of The Current Conference Resources, How Would Members Prioritize The Needs Identified By Questionnaire Respondents?.....	104
	– Conclusions	
	• If The RMC UCC Develops A Great Leader Or Leadership Team, How Will Members Recognize When The RMC UCC Has This Leadership?.....	107
	– Conclusions	
	• What would an ideal leader or leadership team look like for RMC?.	108
	– Conclusions	
	• What Contribution To Leadership Needs To Come From Individual Churches (Laity And Clergy)?.....	110
	– Conclusions	

Section	Title	Page
	• What Contribution To Leadership Needs To Come From Associations (Boards And Committees)?.....	111
	– Conclusions	
	• What Contribution To Leadership Needs To Come From The Conference (Boards, Committees, Staff)?.....	111
	– Conclusions	
	• What Would Help You Or Your Church To Feel More Included In Conference Actions And Decisions?.....	115
	– Conclusions	
VIII.	Appendices.....	118
	• Appendix A. Transition Task Force Moves In New Direction	
	• Appendix B. Cover Letter To Parish Clergy And Assessment Questionnaire	

VI. QUESTIONNAIRE: DETAILED FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

5. What Makes Members Proud And/Or Joyful In Being A Part Of The Rocky Mountain Conference United Church Of Christ?

For information about Questionnaire Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

LAITY

5A. Our Theology and Values (N = 32)

- **Open, Affirming, Welcoming of Diversity (N = 19)**
 - That many of our churches are Open and Affirming, inclusive rather than exclusive. God loves everyone and so should we. (ID 71)
 - As an Open and Affirming denomination, we are working to abolish “isms” (racism, sexism, genderism, orientationism...) (ID 72)
 - ...for being Open and Affirming at the national level and then at the Conference level. (ID 107)
 - Because we are an inclusive, open, thoughtful community of faith...(ID 124)
 - I watch the struggles of the Presbyterians and Episcopalians and other denominations over the issue of gay/lesbian membership and ordination. I’d like to say, “We do this and it’s no big deal. WE are ALL children of God.”...(9)
 - I like the diversity of the people, worship styles, size of churches (ID 35)
 - I am proud of the fact that the Rocky Mountain Conference consists of churches of different backgrounds and a diverse membership but yet are able to work together so well when needed. (ID 79)
 - To be part of a denomination that has diversity and accepts you for who you are...The attempt to include both lay and clergy, adult and youth, and individuals from all three states of RMC in committees and the board. (ID 94)

- **Spirituality (N = 15)**
 - In the community in which I live, the RMC/UCC represents a unique way of living and being a person of faith and a community of faith, a way which is about inviting all persons to the feast of God, not excluding them on the basis of creeds, doctrines or dogmas. This welcome is the primary source of my joy and pride in the RMC/UCC. Our UCC tradition of congregationalism, with its openness, flexibility and valuing of diverse traditions and persons – is a source of great joy for me. The RMC/UCC represents an opportunity to unite people of faith in and through Christ which we live positively. This positive assertion of values is a living witness to the more predominant experience of religious exclusion in my wider community; all are welcomed to this faith community, and do not define ourselves by who we exclude. To proclaim and live the Christian faith in such a positive way is a constant source of pride for me. (ID 90)
 - ...the emphasis on a loving vs. judgmental God. (ID 93)

- ...being part of the Congregational-UCC heritage that brings a prophetic voice to the world. (ID 97)
- I am extremely proud to be a member of the United Church of Christ because I feel that its understanding of Christian living is most congruent with what Jesus modeled in his life on earth. (ID 82)
- **Peace and Social Justice (N = 10)**
 - Liberal tradition, peace and justice orientation, encourages heart AND head. (ID 7)
 - Our identification of key social justice issues and working for change! (ID 15)
 - I am joyful that the Rocky Mountain Conference is concerned about the smaller churches who are in the Rocky Mountain Conference and of the “least of these“ who are in our society and don’t have a voice in our culture, i.e., women, the poor and others. (ID 60)
 - The commitment to peace, justice, environmental, gay, lesbian and transgendered issues. All those matters of faith that give voice to those who have none. Not to overdo it, we should not seek to be martyrs yet we should be a place for those who have no place. A place of safety and love...(ID 84)
 - Proud to be a UCCer because of national church being a leader in ecumenical circles and peace and justice issues. ... We remembered the days when we had a Conference Minister, Clyde Miller, who cared deeply and will speak out on issues [sic]of Peace and Justice. It helps folks to know who and what the UCC is if our leadership has more of a presence in the media. (ID 135)
 - The Conference’s willingness to take a public stand on ethical/moral issues. (ID 86)

5B. The People/Community (N = 27)

- The faithful, caring work of the many volunteer lay and clergy members of the Conference boards and committees (ID 101)
- The Conference is made up of congregations in fairly close proximity that share a common faith and social conscience. We have many of the same goals, concerns, challenges, and joys. (ID 89)
- It’s nice to know you are part of a larger group than just your own church (ours is small)...that others believe what you believe and have your same concerns, values, etc. It’s good to be part of giving/projects outside ourselves – into the world – not just our own church. (ID 45)
- Regular association with committed UCC members. (ID 141)
- ...The most important to me is to have the connection with other churches to support and extend the mission of the UCC. (ID 68)
- It is a group of people who believe mostly the same that I do, and they are a group of people that I can completely be myself with. (ID 70)
- I enjoy the smallness of our congregation and the sense of community. (ID 88)
- What makes me most proud and joyful is not necessarily being part of the Rocky Mountain Conference but being an active member of [my UCC church]. Our congregation and our minister are dynamic members of our faith community and as such instill in all of us strong threads of courage and justice...Located far from everything, our little church does not necessarily rely on the Conference for administrative support or leadership. (ID13.

5C. Conference Events & Programs (N = 13)

- I was joyful as a delegate to the conference held in Bountiful, Utah. (ID 44)
- We have been church delegates off and on for many years and look forward to Conference events to renew acquaintances and visit with friends as well as contribute to the affairs of the Conference. (ID 004)
- La Foret – I love going and remembering memories from childhood camps – coming back as an adult with Middle School youth and knowing how much my son will enjoy the camp when he grows older. (ID 114)
- I ... appreciate the commitment of RMC churches in reaching the basic goal of the Make A Difference Campaign of a few years ago... the action of the RMC and its Stewardship and Ministry Committee in supporting Mission Partners, and the efforts toward our partner church in Venezuela. (ID 004)
- Partnership with UEPV. (ID 101)
- National Youth Programs (ID 105)
- OCWM (92)

5D. Support From the Conference (N = 11)

- The support of Bill Dalke and Conference staff when we were in an interim situation seeking a permanent pastor. (ID 101)
- Availability of Conference Staff to help the local church. (ID 105)
- ... The great thing for our church to identify as a UCC church is the help we get and guidance we receive from this affiliation. At times that can also be a problem since the local church and Conference leaders don't always interpret the problem the same way. However, overall, the association between the two is a joy. (ID 23)
- ... We realize Conference is going through transition yet we continue to feel connected. The joy comes from the "open door" policy or, in our case the "open phone" policy. We are not turned away. The staff is gracious when taking our calls even though we are not the biggest financial supporters. (ID 26)
- We are not that closely connected with the RMC but when we need help it is there. Tom Rehling was the guest Steward for our 2004 Stewardship program and did an outstanding job. It was a very positive program with positive results and a great part was due to his expertise and steward leadership. Otherwise it is just another part of the organization. (ID 96)

5E. Don't Know (N = 2)/No Response (N = 5) (Total N = 7)

- Hadn't given any thought to whether the Conference to which my church was part of affected my belief and faith in God. (ID 49)
- I don't really know much about the Conference and where I may be affected by our affiliation in some way. I'm not sure what it is. (ID 135)

Joys and Sorrows

- **Sorrows**
 - The previous year's conference held in Englewood, Colorado seemed intent upon making all UCC members uphold the same political and environmental views. It did not seem to support diversity. It was more intent upon having the entire membership of one point of view and this point of view had been pre-determined and speakers against it were not supported. (ID 44)

- ...I am concerned thought that we don't talk or concern ourselves about God's loving grace in connection with our concern for these people [the "least of these who in in our society"] and that is why the church and our Conference exists. We need to emphasize God's love for all of us. (ID 60)
- At the moment, it is a detriment, not an asset. It's finances are in disarray—One has the feeling the entire office needs to be replaced and new staff involved. If there is leadership, it hasn't been evident for more than two years. (ID 67)
- Nothing. I find the Conference to be more of a hurdle than a help. (ID 120)
- ...RMC has a great deal of work to do in communicating with the congregations and facilitating their needs. Most lay people are not sure why we have a Conference. (ID 131)

CLERGY

5A. Our Theology and Values (N = 31)

- **Peace and Social Justice (N = 20)**
 - It represents the denomination and we appreciate its stand on social justice issues, etc. (ID 132)
 - I am intensely proud of my denomination – at the local level, in the Conference, and nationally – when we stand firmly and faithfully for God's "Shalom" (peace, justice and harmony for all of God's creation). I see that in our Conference's leadership for affordable housing, in our open and affirming stance, and in peace and justice work. (ID 104)
 - The witness to peace and justice which so many of our churches take seriously. (ID 042)
 - I'm proud when churches and groups within the Conference show courage when following through on the justice and human rights stands of the national UCC. I'm proud when the Annual Meeting passes resolutions backing such stands and pledging to follow through on the implications of such stands. I'm proud to be part of a denomination that steps out in a leadership role on the crucial issue of the day. (ID 081)
 - The United Church of Christ is a just peace, whole earth, open and affirming, and restorative justice church at its national level and in some of its local and regional expressions. It has a history that includes the abolition of slavery and the education of freed slaves. It believes in an educated clergy and in theological openness. It has been active in the Civil Rights movement. It has the humility to confess its complicity in the 19th century imperialism, especially in Hawaii. It puts its action where its mouth is in regard to ecumenical unity. It is trying to be faithful to the religion of the prophets and of Jesus of Nazareth. To the degree that the RMC participates in this I am very joyful to be part of it. The Just Peace Offering, the Annual Meeting resolutions, the efforts made by local churches to witness to the structures of power in our society and to recognize that both sin and salvation are a communal and structural thing as well as personal, including our participation in the Colorado Council of Churches, and other ecumenical mission efforts are all a part of this. (ID 99)
 - UCC tradition of social justice. (ID 021)
 - I am proud and joyful to be a member of the United Church of Christ because I like the social justice stands we take, and because on the local church level and national level, I like the way we do business and make decisions. (ID 100)

- That it is a Conference that takes seriously: peace, justice and the integrity of creation. (ID139)
- **Open, Affirming, Welcome of Diversity (N = 16)**
 - That we are an open and affirming Conference. That we have a voice of progressive Christianity among many conservative voices. (ID 118)
 - Glad that some congregations are publicly and unapologetically open and affirming. (ID 030)
 - Strong advocates for diversity; we walk the talk. (ID 005)
 - I am proud to be a part of the RMC because I think, in its own way it is attempting to be faithful – and that involves costs. It has been a leader in the justice and witness issues of our denomination including eco-justice and has taken a lead in declaring itself as an open and affirming Conference. In so doing it had given energy and support to the gay marriage initiative of our denomination. (ID 002)
 - I respect the diversity and openness, and the work for social justice and peace. I respect the dedication they have to youth and the equality of women in clergy and lay pastors. (ID 058)
 - Freedom to be who I am in open dialogue with those who differ. (ID 126)
- **Spirituality (N = 11)**
 - It is thrilling when those perspectives [peace, justice and harmony for all of God’s creation] and commitments are embedded in our core expressions of what the gospel is all about – when they are part and parcel of our educational programming, our worship life and our outreach ministries. (ID 104)
 - Our diversity of thought and permission to think. (ID 020)
 - Our inclusive, liberal approach to Christianity. (ID 034)
 - That we have many courageous churches offering a progressive Christianity in a pretty conservative state. (ID 066)
 - There is a great diversity theologically among our churches. In SE Association we have a great cluster of clergy who like and enjoy each other. (ID 031)
 - The capacity that each congregation has to be moved and shaped by the Spirit in way that differs so wonderfully from church to church. The beauty of God’s creation which informs our shared spirituality. (ID 042)
 - The way our denomination witnesses for Christ by attempting to live out (Mathew 25:31-40) (ID 053)

5B. Conference Events and Programs (N = 19)

- **Camping And La Foret (N = 13)**
 - La Foret and our camps/retreats/regional events are faith filled and unifying. (ID 136)
 - Many great experiences at La Foret and Dillion (no longer) over the years. ... Men’s retreats; contemplative camp and retreats. (ID123)
 - Access to the RMC Conference and retreat center at La Foret. The primary point of our local Congregations support of RMC. (ID 054)
 - The Conference provides excellent programs at and through La Foret. My children have experienced enormous benefit from these programs and have developed a life long affection of La Foret. (ID 137)

- That we have such a fine facility in La Foret. That it is the setting for dynamic youth events that give teens a genuine experience of Christian community. (ID 122)
- **Programs, Education, And Outreach (N = 11)**
 - Prayer and mission extended beyond doors of our local church. (ID 123)
 - The potential interaction and contacts at Annual Meetings; working together and building relationships. (ID 113)
 - New section of UCC newspaper devoted to RMC activities. (ID 054)
 - I am proud of our Youth program and the extensive commitment shown by leaders and youth in continuing to ensure the spiritual enrichment of children and youth. From my time in other Conferences, I have not seen the kind of youth leadership development that takes place in the RMC in other Conferences. I am proud to be a direct product of that youth program as it was the place that first planted a seed for me to consider ordained ministry. (ID 111)
 - The Rocky Mountain Conference has good activities, like the upcoming Spirit Alive. (ID 003)
 - Global partners programs. Our support of Mission Partners. (ID 034)
 - Involvement in ecumenical outreach in the name of RMC. ... Our global partners in Venezuela. (ID 054)
 - To witness ordination of new clergy – to know how much time is spent on examination to assure the fitness of candidates. (ID 078)
 - Programs such as Worship Alive help us to enliven our worship and church life. (ID 108)

5C. The People / Community (N = 16)

- It has a lot of good people in it. (ID 069)
- It is a joy to participate with people from various UCC churches as we put our strong faith into action to make a difference. (And so I have to admit it is disappointing to see so many of our clergy not encouraging, motivating, and prodding more churches and members into action on these issue. We could show the younger generation what vital communities of faith we are if we could be more active.) (ID 081)
- That people care about each other. (ID 139)
- Being part of a very diverse group. Emphasis on improving stewardship. (ID 117)
- Fellowship and good classical music make us joyful. (ID 123)
- The committed, open and faithful people I have worked with and grown to know from the churches across the Conference. (ID 050)
- It is about being connected to the churches in the Conference. I'm just starting to get to know the Conference. What I enjoy about it is getting the Reflections from Tom Rehling and other lay people on Sunday mornings. (ID 040)
- Churches that care about each other, and that care about our Conference, even when they may be far from the Conference office, or have pastors that don't encourage connection. I also like and respect many of my clergy colleagues, and the work they do in their churches. (ID 039)
- The covenant we have with each other. The openness we have and acceptance of each other. The way we can disagree and still remain together. The respect we sometimes show for each other's differences. (ID 076)

- The churches and the people, we have wonderful churches and caring, interesting people. (ID 022)
- Dedicated leaders – Tom, staff and lay people on committees. Leaders have integrity. (ID 126)

5D. Support From the Conference (N = 11)

- Receiving assistance from staff members when our pastor suddenly resigned. Occasionally being enlightened by Conference staff who attends our Association meetings. ... Being a little more in touch with what the UCC is doing and proposing on the national level. Occasional workshops repeated in Utah by conference staff and leaders from Colorado. (ID 036)
- I admire the RMC's financial and leadership support of churches, financial and leadership support of Camp La Foret. I am proud of their concern for Christian education for all age levels, their support for church growth and evangelism, health care, and racial justice. (ID 087)
- Commitment to church growth and renewal. (ID 117)
- The Conference has provided a sense of identity for its churches and ministers. (ID 103)
- A great effort is made to communicate well. I appreciate the efforts to start new churches and renew established ones. The Conference "subscription" to Percept and Link2Lead has been helpful. Conference staff members have always been available for problem-solving and advising us. They have also been a strong presence at clergy cluster meetings. (ID 108)
- The Conference works very diligently supporting local churches of each membership Association. The Conference provides training events for members and is an active part of each Association attending meetings and providing guidance and leadership in times of challenge and crisis. (ID 051)
- There is usually good support from the Conference staff; in the past Tom Rehling, Clairnel Nervick, and Alan Johnson have all been to our church to speak on different occasions. Resources available to Conference churches include programs like Natural Church Development and Precept; these are a bonus.

Joys And Sorrows

- **Joys**
 - There is a spirit of hope and optimism in the Conference. I find that comforting and helpful in difficult times. The resilience expressed during a very difficult year is inspiring. (ID 002)
 - Several excellent candidates for ministry have presented themselves through the associations in the RMC. We seem to be doing a good job "calling" out such candidates of promise. (ID 137)
- **Sorrows**
 - The Conference has given at least nominal support (verbal only) to Conference-related affordable housing efforts. (ID 103)
 - In the 50's and 60's the Conference did a good job with new church starts – not so good in the 90's and 00's. (ID 103)
 - I know that the UCC churches of the Conference are united in recognizing each one's right to manage their own affairs and that Conference personnel supposedly stand ready

to offer their help to any church or clergy when asked to do so. But I do think said Conference personnel should continuously be sensitive to churches in trouble (or being successful) and take the initiative to help or celebrate without necessarily being invited to do so. (ID 048)

- The RMC is that vital connection between the national community and the local community. Unfortunately, the leadership of the RMC has failed in this primary function by assuming the national role maintaining international relationships through world travel (possibly from ambitious personal aggrandizement and recognition with a goal toward higher office at the national level) and leaving a vacuum, void of interpersonal connection with churches (members and clergy) at the Conference level. The pride and joy is now missing. (ID 032)
- However, the Association often feels like just a way to get people ordained, and the Conference feels even farther away. Our Annual Meetings are not filled with joyful worship and strongly argued perspectives that once lent vibrancy to our togetherness. If I felt a stronger connection and respect among our churches, along with a willingness to claim our identity, I would once again feel proud and joyful in being a part of the RMC. (ID 100)

Summary Findings and Conclusions

What makes members proud and/or joyful in being a part of the Rocky Mountain Conference United Church of Christ?

Similarities and Differences Between Laity and Clergy:

THEMES*	
LAITY (N = 69)	CLERGY (N = 72)
A. Our Theology and Values (46%) - Open, Affirming, Welcoming of Diversity (28%) - Spirituality (22%) - Peace and Social Justice (14%)	A. Our Theology and Values (43%) - Peace and Social Justice (28%) - Open, Affirming, Welcoming of Diversity (22%) - Spirituality (15%)
B. The People/Community (39%)	B. Conference Events and Programs (26%) - Camping and La Foret (18%) - Programs, Education, and Outreach (15%)
C. Conference Events and Programs (19%)	C. The People/Community (22%)
D. Support From the Conference (16%)	D. Support From the Conference 15%
E. Don't Know/No Response (10%)	

**Percentages add to more than 100% because people submitted multiple responses.*

There are four areas that evoke pride and joy for both laity and clergy participating in the assessment: Theology and Values, The People/Community, Conference Events and Programs, and Support from the Conference.

Both laity (46%) and clergy (43%) say that their greatest pride and joy comes from the theology and values of the RMC UCC. By this they mean the policy of being open, affirming and welcoming of diversity; spirituality, and the stand on peace and social justice issues. Taking a position on peace

and social justice issues is more important to clergy (28%) than to laity (14%), while laity emphasizes the policy of being open and affirming (28%) more than clergy (22%). Laity also say their joy comes from their spirituality (22%) more than clergy (15%), but both are proud and joyful when their spiritual beliefs are aligned with and manifested by their actions.

For laity, their second greatest source of joy comes from the people and the community of RMC UCC (39%). Comments suggest that laity enjoy being part of and connected to a larger community with shared goals and beliefs. For clergy, Conference events and programs are their second greatest source of pride and joy (26%), slightly more than the people and community (22%). However, both groups place value on human connection, and both clergy and laity speak highly of enriching experiences of camping at La Foret as well as pride in Conference programs such as Mission Partners and global partners in Venezuela. A likely component of the differences in their reported sources of joy is that both laity and clergy seek connection and community with their peers, and laity are more likely to meet that need within their church while clergy have more of an opportunity to do so at Conference-wide events.

Both groups equally appreciate the support from the Conference (laity 16%, clergy 15%), but the support is not their greatest source of pride and joy in being part of the RMC UCC.

Overall Conclusions: While there are differences in degree, both laity and clergy are proud of and receive joy from the same things – the RMC UCC’s:

- Theology and values, including both open and affirming policies, and stands on peace and justice issues
- People and community
- Events and programs
- Support from the Conference.

Both laity and clergy are thankful that they are in community with people with similar values, and that the RMC UCC enables them to connect with others with whom they can work, grow, and share ideas. Both are proud and joyful when programs and actions are in alignment with RMC UCC spiritual beliefs.

When people feel proud and joyful, they mean that in these four areas the RMC UCC is meeting needs for spirituality, meaning, making a contribution, human connection, learning and support.

6. When members hear or see the words, "Rocky Mountain Conference," how do they define the Rocky Mountain Conference? What or who do they think of as the Rocky Mountain Conference?

For information about Questionnaire Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

LAITY

6A. Geography and/or Churches (N = 51)

- The region consisting of UCC churches in Colorado, Wyoming and Eastern Utah (ID 49)
 - The organized group of UCC churches located in the area of the Rocky Mountains consisting of churches in Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah. (ID 98)
 - All churches in the Conference. (ID 134)
 - A large collection of western regional UCC churches. (ID 7)
 - Affiliate of group of UCC churches in Rocky Mt. States. (ID 56)
 - In the past, I confess I thought of the Rocky Mtn. Conference, not as a group of churches working together, but as an office in Denver. It seemed we only heard from them when it was felt we needed to change something we were doing. As a result of the work that I participated in during the past 2 years, searching for a minister, I see it as a group of churches working together to further the development of the individual churches and members. (ID 119)
 - I think this is a geographical identification to me. However, I am not sure of the boundaries...are they the four sections of Colorado, plus Wyoming and Utah? (ID 105)
- **Specific Designations (N = 10)**
 - The churches who live in the area where they can see the Rockies: I guess I think of the Conference as the churches on the East side of the Rockies...I don't know if that's true. (ID 45)
 - I just think of Colorado and have to be reminded of the neighboring states. (ID 124)
 - Several states, mostly rural congregations. (ID 63)
 - Every church in Utah. (ID 47)
 - Often though when I hear RMC I think of Denver because that is where so many of our dynamic leaders, big churches, and conference office are located. (ID 84)
 - The office over in Denver that once in a while gets a rep. to our church. (ID 38)

6B. People (N = 29)

- **Laity and Clergy (N = 20)**
 - I think of it as a group of ministers and lay people concerned with the care of the work of the church. (ID 60)
 - I have belonged to two very different UCC congregations both within the RM Conference. The first is a very small rural church, the second a large metropolitan

church. Thus I see the Conference as very diverse but, for the most part, comprised of people with common beliefs and values. (ID 18)

- I think...of the many enthusiastic people, caring and willing to reach out to others. (ID 9)
- This operates on several levels-first the person next to me in the pew on Sunday and at the table during coffee hours. Those who I struggle to follow Jesus with.(ID 84)
- The youth and adults that I have come to know and love from Utah, Wyoming, and Colorado. (ID 70)
- I define Rocky Mountain Conference as a group of people, open and affirming and advocates of peace. (ID 115)

- **Conference Staff (N = 14)**

- I think of people in Denver – coordinating events and programs (ID #15)
- I know that we have Conference ministers and other staff, but I still am not sure what the current job functions are – I feel like they are just maintaining, which will probably happen until they begin a search. (ID 131)
- The staff and office that our church secretary and treasurer call from time to time for help with administrative issues. (ID 101)
- The staff of the RMC. (ID 86)
- The staff, the Board of Directors, and the delegates who are at the Annual Meeting. (ID 102)
- RMC is the full time professional leaders to help us if we have problems locally. (ID 77)
- The higher echelon of the UCC in Colorado, Wy., Montana and Utah who run the church. (Except, we are a congregational church who takes responsibility for itself-so what does the Conference do? (ID 130)

6C. Connection to Larger Church Community (N = 15)

- I think of the RMC as the linkage of UCC churches throughout Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah, with a staff of people working to help meet the needs of the local churches and their clergy. (ID 107)
- The churches' connection to the National Association. (ID 77)
- I think of the RMC as our connection to like-minded congregations throughout our region. (ID 72)
- A resource which unites us and serves us as part of a larger whole. (ID 85)
- I think of the Rocky Mountain Conference as a conduit for us to the larger UCC community, as a guiding and facilitating group for local congregations with questions, issues or needs. (ID 82)
- ...The RMC is the connection to our wider church keeping us updated as to the spiritual condition and happenings of the local churches...Conference is the glue keeping business flowing, communication open, giving spiritual health to us as a whole people of God, our connection (through the written word) to issues of global importance, and a place to find answers. Please don't turn us away as did the past administration. It was so painful. It would be appreciated if Conference would continue to show an interest in rural churches. (ID 26).

6D. Services and Support (N = 14)

- **Support (N = 8)**
 - ...and the conference staff who are in place to support and guide the churches. (ID 138)
 - The Conference is the group on the state level who helps to look for a minister when a church is in need of another one...keep(s) us informed through the Conference Newspaper...I think of it as a supporting part of the UCC churches to give help and guidance with its youth and possibly mission trips. (ID 60)
 - I think the Conference helps support and establish new churches, helps support UCC theology students, helps church search committees find the right minister for their church, provides guidelines for the member churches...helps ministers in the area find a church to employ them, and much more work of which I am unaware. (ID 44).
 - I think of a bureaucratic organization that can be a resource when developing programs. (ID 114)

- **Coordination (N = 7)**
 - ...coordinating events and programs (ID 15)
 - One of the things I think of it as is a coordinating group to keep the churches in these several states informed and caring for their various needs and keeping us tied together as a people of Christ (ID 60)
 - The role of the conference is to facilitate cooperation between its members as well as nurture and minister to them. (ID 89)
 - ...I tend to think of the RMC as a resource for organizing and promoting our faith in this region (ID 68).
 - The governing body over this region of UCC churches (ID 88)
 - The Conference is directly responsible for the wonderful happenings at La Foret. (ID 72)

6E. Theology and Values (N = 8)

- When I think of the RMC, I envision a multitude of people, all ages, coming together for a common belief/goal/mission. A group of people who are alike in their beliefs and express this through mission, reaching out to each other, and supporting each other. (ID 52)
- An organization of local churches committed in general terms to an open, mainly liberal theological position. (ID 141)
- I see the RMC as a family of churches spread over three states and trying to do the work of the church in each of our locales and at the same time trying to provide a Christian witness across a vast geographical area. (ID 4)
- A coherent, weighty, regional presence to be counted on for leadership in ecumenical and interfaith dialogue as well as walk-the-walk inclusiveness. (ID 129)

6F. Programs (7)

- I struggle with this definition. My immediate response is LaForet. For my congregation and myself, I feel La Foret represents 'the conference,' more than any other location, institution or experience...Intellectually I know that the RMC represents the 80 odd UCC congregations of Utah, Wyoming and Colorado. Emotionally, I have connected more with the conference office than our sister congregations in the

Conference. The conference meetings I have attended have been very good experiences for me, but at those meetings, I did not feel a connection with other UCC members in the conference. (ID 90)

- I think about the camp and Annual Meeting. (ID 38)
- I think of RMC foremost in view of OCWM and its programs. (ID 93)
- ...the various Conference programs: Camping Program with events for all ages; Mission, Nurture, Stewardship, Church & Ministry. (ID 97)

Joys and Sorrows

• Joys

- When we as members do figure out important issues and we remember that the Conference can be a resource that is when the Conference is most helpful. (ID 15)
- I'm always glad to read in the news or hear reports from the meeting of people whose values coincide with mine. (ID 38)
- ...I am impressed by the lay leadership of the Conference, especially young people. Also, the office staff is very nice and helpful. I love La Foret and have spent many, many wonderful times there. I was very impressed by the leadership of Clyde Miller who put peace and justice issues much more in the center of the Conference's life. (ID 135)
- The past interim Conference minister and the past Conference Minister gave our church support in our long and disappointing search for a minister. We were brought into conversation wherever those two ministers were and the leads were advantageous to our congregation's growth (spiritually). We have been given a renewed sense of support through the present conference staff. Please continue. (ID 26)

• Sorrows

- Ideally, the conference would be an integral part in the visioning of our congregation, however I don't feel this is currently happening. The conference should represent a link with the National UCC, however generally we just deal with the national office directly. (ID 72)
- [The RMC is]...at its "worst," a puzzling collection of churches and ministers crippled, even starved, by those "who sit this one out" or punish with grudging dollars those who cannot meet their expectations. (ID 129)
- ...I do feel removed from any current issues and policies that are local-just seems to bubble up as churchy news, bordering on gossip. Personality driven, rather than issue driven. (ID 15)
- The Conference meetings I have attended, have been very good experiences for me, but at those meetings, I did not feel a connection with other UCC members in the Conference. (ID 90)
- Over the years, I have been active, semi-active, and inactive. Much of our church's time is spent surviving and trying to find answers. We muddle through it in our own way. Not sure there is any arm of the RMC that could help us directly. (ID 96)
- The RMC has difficulty with its staff. (ID 110)
- Most people in my congregation have very little idea of what the Conference is or what it represents even though it is mentioned from time to time. (ID 109)
- Lack of concept of covenant relationship on the part of the churches (possibly due to the fact that there is no mechanism in place for the Conference to *listen* [italics the author's]

- to members of local churches, lack of prophetic voice on social issues, lack of vision beyond “survival.” (ID 97)
- Many church leaders at a recent church council meeting, when talking about this survey, said, “What is the Conference?” When I hear the words RMC, I think that it is taking too high a percentage of OCWM and wonder how I’m going to interpret this through our Social Justice and Outreach Board as we try to increase our church’s giving to OCWM. Often I’m embarrassed that we take high a percentage [*sic*] of OCWM. (ID 135)
 - I unfortunately do not feel like we have a very loud voice at a Conference level, and even less of a voice nationally. (ID 19)
 - I have a clear picture of what constitutes the Conference, both in terms of member churches and functions. I think, however the majority of our congregation does not hold that picture. This is due to the fact that we have a very diversified membership in terms of church background. Many have not been members of the UCC for very long and with the separation of churches within the Conference do not have a “close” feel for either the conference or other UCC churches. (ID 4)
 - Extraneous. Not productive. (ID 120)
 - Please don’t turn us away as some did in the past administration. It was so painful. It would be appreciated if Conference would continue to show an interest in rural churches. (ID 26)

CLERGY

6A. Geography, Churches, and Associations (N = 49)

- I think of the presence of the church in the three state region. (ID 106)
- The Rocky Mountain Conference is the churches of Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah. (ID 003)
- The words “Rocky Mountain Conference” in one sense includes every church and church member in the RMC. (ID 028)
- The RMC is defined in part by the challenges imposed on us by geography – no small influence. (ID 042)
- Around 90 Churches in three states – Colorado, Wyoming, and Utah. Lots of ground to cover. (ID 123)
- The various churches that make up the Conference and the people in them. (ID 080)
- The communion of churches that make up the Conference. (ID 021)
- I think there is greater identity among Associations than among the Conference, and yet the Associations are sparse and held together loosely by a few individuals who care enough to make sure it happens. (ID 111)
- I would like to view the Associations as a vital part of the overall functioning of the Conference. (ID 081)
- I feel more connection with my Association. (ID 78c)
- The Rocky Mountain Conference is the whole of the six Associations and the local Churches...(ID 011)

6B. People (N = 37)

• Conference Staff (N = 23)

- The first thing that comes to mind is the Conference office and staff. (ID 062)
- Most recently, RMC is the staff that reaches back to our church with phone calls, info, advice. (ID 139)
- ...a very few staff members who occasionally travel long distances to meet with us, encourage and inspire us and give us new ideas about leadership, worship and service. (ID 036)
- The Conference office and staff are the organization which manages and assists the various churches and sub-organizations within the whole. (ID 028)
- ...the staff serve as helpers for the congregations. (ID 001)
- I also think of the staff who are very visible and accessible when we need them. (ID 108)
- It is the Board of Directors along with clergy and non-clergy staff. (ID 103)

• Laity and Clergy (N = 22)

- It is all the people, paid and volunteer, of the United Church of Christ in those states. (ID 003)
- People in the Rocky Mountain geographical area who are members of UCC churches. (ID 020)
- I see the faces and hear the voices of a wide variety of people. (ID 117)
- Mostly progressive individuals who are acting out a faithful witness in the context of their individual congregations. (ID 132)
- Now I especially think of the key lay people who have kept us afloat the last few years: David, Rob, Bill, etc. (ID 41c)
- ...the clergy of these churches as well as retired clergy and those serving in other ministries. (ID 050)
- It encompasses all the congregations and authorized ministers with standing in the Associations. (ID 030)
- It is all the people, paid and volunteer, of the United Church of Christ in those three states. (ID 003)
- I understand the Conference in terms of employed folk plus clergy and lay leaders who volunteer time on committees. (ID 078)
- Those folks who are my support in the larger church work and whose friendship and work I value deeply. (ID 095)

6C. Theology and Values (N = 14)

- What the UCC should stand for (progressive theology, inclusively, social justice) should be manifest by the Conference in our region. (ID 106)
- ...there is also a sense that this is our church community which shares some common values and concerns; i.e., social justice, pro-choice, just peace, eco justice, and others. (ID 133)
- I see the RMC as the facilitator of liberal, progressive ministry in this region. (ID 051)
- ...diverse congregations and a range of theological positions but primarily understood as a liberal denomination. (ID 054)
- ...standing for liberty, justice, and compassion. (ID 027)

- I see the Conference as the shared expression of ministry and mission.... (ID 017)
- I hear sounds of faithful people struggling to discern directions for our mission and ministry. (ID 117)

6D. Cohesive / Fragmented (N = 11)

- A diverse group, having all the blessings and burdens of diversity. (ID 126)
- Those congregations are the foundation of the Conference and what we do together, i.e. the “Conference”, needs to be connected to local churches. (ID 017)
- ...congregations and are loosely connected by a largely ineffective Conference structure. (ID 132)
- It has a passion and creativity of frontier culture—and also the dysfunction rugged individualism: nobody’s gonna be “told what to do,” which means the community suffers for lack of humility and a willingness to curb personal preferences of liberty or the greater good. (ID 136)
- I think of the many churches that struggle for a sense of connection and solidarity. ...[I] now serve in Utah, I do sense the mountain range creates a barrier between Colorado and Utah. It is a long way to go. (ID 111)
- The Conference provides synergy when it is working at its best. Together we can do far more than what the individual churches can do. The result can be greater than the sum of the parts. (ID 016)
- A loose body of independent churches with a laid back posture. It is a weak, disparate organization. There is no center to the RMC, so I do not see “what or “who” it is. Ideally, the RMC, in the Conference setting at least, is a partnership between Conference staff and strong local churches. There ought to be a common vision to which we could adhere and which could give some energy. There is no energy in the Conference at this point, from my perspective. (ID 010)
- I can only dream about what I’d like to see the Conference become; for example, a cohesive vehicle for the Associations and churches to work more closely on important projects that are truly relevant for the next few decades of world history. Cooperative alliance is necessary if we are going to overcome the negative image among the vast majority of the younger generation who mostly see churches as totally ineffective on the great issues that will define the future. (ID 081)

6E. Programs (N = 10)

- Most vividly, I think of the Conference as the gathering of delegates and visitors at the annual Conference meeting. That gathering is a specific expression of the sharing life and ministry of the churches and Associations which make up the Conference. (ID 104)
- By the programming and contacts with people at Annual Meeting, workshops, and staff who have worked with our church. (ID 133)
- Occasionally, I think of Conference-wide programming events like Education Alive and Spirit Alive. (ID 100)
- ...as the Conference blessed with the spiritual gifts of La Foret. (ID 054)
- La Foret and the camping programs and retreats are also included in the words RMC. (ID 024)

6F. Services And Support (N = 10)

- I perceive the leadership to whom I am responsible within the Congregational polity and from whom I receive guidance and support. For the past several years I think of it as an empty chair. (ID 032)
- [Rev. Tom Rehling] I also liked his willingness to share perceptions with me. I still have to go on line to get more acquainted with the program. I'm thankful it is here for me to use. (ID 040)
- I think of its support of churches in time of crisis. (ID 99)
- It is a democratic, autonomous instrumentality of the UCC that serves and acts on behalf of the churches for the RMC. (ID 033)
- The programs provided. (ID 116)
- One place along with National, to seek educational, worship, and evangelistic resources for church programming.
- The Conference provides leadership to local churches, Associations, and organizations who seek to minister in the world. The Conference aids and empowers clergy, local churches, Associations and Conference ministry. (ID 087)

6F. Connection To Larger Church Community (N = 9)

- The Conference is also the connection between local congregations and national expressions of the UCC. (ID 106)
- One of 39 Conferences of the UCC. (ID 103)
- It promotes the work of the wider church through denominational and ecumenical relationships. It joins with the national body of the UCC to provide service and mission to the world,...(ID 087)

Joys and Sorrows:

• **Joys**

- I went down to Denver to meet with Rev. Tom Rehling. He came to celebrate my installation service. It was awesome to have him participate. (ID 040)

• **Sorrows:**

- The Rocky Mountain Conference has little name recognition amongst the wider populations at the parish and communities they serve. The United Church of Christ" also suffers from confusing name recognition. When new members or visitors come to our church, they identify with the name "Congregational" or "Main Line Protestant Church" more than they do with either the Conference or denominational labels. (ID 112)
- For the past few years I think of an empty chair. (ID 032)
- It has been difficult for me to think of the Conference as an entity that has much voice, value, or influence. I am not sure if "Conference" is a useful organizational structure anymore, at least in this region. Is our intent to keep an organizational structure intact or to radically redefine the meaning of being the "United Church Of Christ" in this region? How does the Conference structure enable us to do what local churches cannot do? This is our chance to confront some hard realities. (ID 137)
- Because ties with our folds in specialized ministries have never been nurtured, it's hard sometimes to remember that they are part of the Conference too. (ID 039)

- In crisis, mired down, lack of leadership. (ID 008)

Summary Findings and Conclusions

6. When members hear or see the words, "Rocky Mountain Conference," how do they define the Rocky Mountain Conference? What or who do they think of as the Rocky Mountain Conference?

Similarities and Differences Between Laity and Clergy:

THEMES*	
LAITY (N = 69)	CLERGY (N = 72)
A. Geography and/or Churches (74%) - Specific Designations (15%)	A. Geography, Churches, and Associations (68%)
B. People (52%) - Laity and Clergy (29%) - Conference Staff (20%)	B. People (51%) - Conference Staff (32%) - Laity and Clergy (31%)
C. Connection to Larger Church Community (22%)	C. Theology and Values (19%)
D. Services and Support (20%) - Support (12%) - Coordination (10%)	D. Cohesive / Fragmented (15%)
E. Theology and Values (12%)	E. Programs (14%)
F. Programs (10%)	F. Services and Support (14%)
	G. Connection to Larger Church Community (13%)

*Percentages add to more than 100% because people submitted multiple responses.

Both laity and clergy define the Rocky Mountain Conference in multiple ways, with laity responses grouping into six main themes, and clergy responses into seven.

Both laity and clergy most frequently identify the RMC as the states and churches (74% and 68% respectively), with clergy also including Associations in their definitions. Fifteen percent of laity have special ways of defining the RMC. For example, they think of the RMC as all of the churches in Utah, as churches on the East side of the Rockies, as mostly rural congregations, or as Denver.

Next, both laity and clergy define the RMC as people (52% and 51% respectively). Thinking of the Rocky Mountain Conference primarily in terms of physical entities and people is not surprising given the definition provided by the RMC in its materials:

“What is the Rocky Mountain Conference UCC? It is the ecclesiastical organization of the 84 congregations, six associations, and 19,288 members of our denomination in Utah, Wyoming and Colorado.” [Source: 30th Annual Meeting Rocky Mountain Conference United Church of Christ, Annual Meeting Guidelines and Information.]

When describing the RMC as people, however, clergy tend to think inclusively of Conference staff (32%) and of laity and clergy (31%), whereas laity less frequently mention Conference staff (20%).

This difference probably is due to clergy having more frequent interactions with Conference staff than does laity.

Twenty-two percent of laity (compared to 13% of clergy) define the Conference as a linkage to the larger church community, and as a provider of services and support (20%) before thinking of the RMC as its theology and values (12%). Nineteen percent of clergy, on the other hand, define the RMC in terms of theology and values, emphasizing the progressive, liberal, social justice orientation of the denomination.

Clergy (15%), unlike laity, express their view of the RMC as a mix of cohesion and fragmentation, with comments describing distress over what they see as a struggle between solidarity and individualism.

Both laity (20%) and clergy (14%) mention that the RMC is to them the services and support provided by the RMC, as well as a variety of Conference programs (clergy 14%, laity 10%). Both convey the special place in their hearts for La Foret.

Conclusions: That the majority of both laity and clergy think of the Rocky Mountain Conference as churches, the states in which they are located, and the clergy, laity, and Conference staff, is in line with the RMC's definition of itself as physical structures and people.

Beyond thinking of the RMC as physical structures and people, both laity and clergy mention a variety of characteristics and functions they associate with the RMC. However, there is no clear identity or image of what the RMC is about in terms of its higher purpose or intention, a definition in which people might take pride and by which they might be inspired, and to which others might be drawn.

Imagine, for example, the following hypothetical definition offered here to evoke reaction: *The Rocky Mountain Conference United Church of Christ is a community of compassionate people united through Christ in beliefs and actions.*

When clergy think of the RMC UCC, some are frustrated over unresolved tension between unity and diversity in the Conference. We suspect this issue triggers dismay because the RMC UCC's values regarding issues of peace and justice and policies of inclusiveness are a source of joy and pride for clergy (see Question 5, "What makes members proud and/or joyful in being a part of the Rocky Mountain Conference United Church Of Christ?") However, both clergy and laity respond positively to what the Conference means to them when they think of La Foret.

7. If members could have anything from the Rocky Mountain Conference, without limitation of time or cost, what would they ask for?

For information about Questionnaire Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

LAITY

7A. Closer Connections (N = 29)

- **With Conference Staff (N = 23)**

- More representation, coming here; visits. (ID 38)
- Spend time with us (more than just one meeting). (ID 47)
- More direct contact; to be more visible to the members of our church. (ID 125)
- ...Our demonstration of faithfulness needs to be recognized through visits and thoughtfulness (ID 26)
- I am from a very small church. We have a wonderful, comfortable group but have not seen anyone from the Conference attend our services for several years. (ID 75)
- ...We rarely see anyone from the Conference office and find it difficult, as lay people, to feel comfortable in a relationship with people whom we have never met, or established any kind of relationship with. I would like Conference staff to conduct classes at our church, visit on a monthly basis, and make themselves available to interact with our congregation. (ID 82)
- ...Also, it would be nice if we had a specific member of the Conference staff (or a representative), who was our ongoing liaison; a person who would make regular visits to the congregation with updates and other information. This would strengthen and enhance our connection to the RMC. (ID 89)
- Communication and participation in the life of the churches they are supposed to serve, not only in a crisis situation. (ID 131)
- Suggested Strategy: Part of the work of the Conference would be to spend time in each local church listening to them to find out who they are, what they need, and what they can give to the Conference and to show that the Conference cares that they exist and that they are important to the life of the Conference and the United Church of Christ. This would be done by a team of individuals including the Conference Minister, or an Associate Conference Minister, one or more members of the Conference leadership and lay people/ministers who would spend time over meals and in informal discussions with the members of the local church. This would be best if done over a period of a couple of days with the members of the teams staying, if possible, in the homes of local church members. (ID 97)

- **With Each Other, National, Other Churches (N = 8)**

- Link us with the church in the nation and in the world. (ID 124)

- I would have more chances to connect our congregation to other churches in the Conference and to the UCC church worldwide. I think many of our members have only a vague idea about what the entire denomination is about. (ID 61)
- I would also ask that the Conference serve as an effective link between the local congregations and the national setting of the church. The Conference can do a better job of highlighting and interpreting the work of the national setting of the church to local congregations in our area. The Conference can also help the national setting make contacts and find avenues for ministry within our Conference. I see this as part of our covenant with each other as different manifestations of the United Church of Christ. We need to be working together to do more than we could do alone, and in ways that strengthen our bonds with UCC members and other Christians across the country.
- Initiative for twinning of local churches by Associations for fellowship, joint programming, and the affirmation of similarities and differences. [Also] exploration with ethnic congregations the shape of their covenantal relationship: specific need and participation.. [Also] A fresh look at how RMC and Iliff impact with view to some form of affiliation. (ID 129)
- Suggested Strategy: A bus to bring folk in and us out so we could become better acquainted with other UCC people. (ID 38)

7B. Resources/Support (N = 26)

• Support (N = 19)

- I would continue and strengthen support to local congregations as they make decisions about clergy leadership, program, etc. (ID 109)
- I would want skilled professional staff able to answer questions and help when difficult situations arise at the local level. (ID 107)
- Quality assistance in conflict matters; effective experience with church growth, new church starts and stewardship (ID 7)
- Resource for individual churches in time of troubles. Help us recruiting pastors at times of transition. (ID 135)
- More help to search committee – suggestions for interim clergy; help in getting affordable health insurance; actually support so small churches can afford to keep full time ministers. (You said dream!) (ID 38)
- Establish – support new churches; assist in a church obtaining a minister—search committee activities. (ID 124)
- Our congregation needs support for our continuing search for a pastor; we need from Conference an honorable mention wherever a group of pastors meet. We need Conference to remember us. We need to be remembered in our diligence and determination in keeping our doors of this rural UCC church open and the voice of the UCC present in our community. (ID 26)
- Many churches with pastoral vacancies are struggling to find ministers for their congregations. The Conference could perhaps provide more assistance in pastoral searches, locating and referring qualified candidates...I'd ask for assistance and guidance in helping the church to grow. (89)
- Better representing and support for the more conservative viewpoint of members and churches of our Conference...We need to do more to welcome more conservative viewpoints as well as the more liberal. The minority view must also be uplifted. (ID 79)

- **Financial and Other Resources (N = 10)**
 - Funds to help build a new fellowship hall, nursery and bathrooms. (ID 84)
 - Financial help (either loans or grants) for remodeling, building, equipment and supplies...I sometimes envy churches with wealth in their hierarchical structure, but would not trade our churches' freedom in governance for the bucks. (89)
 - Financial support for small congregations; more LaForet camperships for children and adults. (ID 86)
 - I would ask for financial support in the growth of established, but small UCC churches. I would like to see some of the monies spent on new church development made available to small-sized congregations who want to grow. (ID 44)
 - More funds available for children that otherwise could not participate in outings such as La Foret and NYE. (ID 88)
 - More financial (OCWM) support for the camping programs so that campers and families can participate more easily. Many families with multiple children can no longer send their youth to camp, either at all or to as many camps and spring and fall events as they would like. (ID 102)
 - Financial support for pastors. ...Resource support for congregations, be it hi tech for contemporary church services, Sunday school materials, mission resources, new church start resources, renewal resources (94)
 - Video library – current and well-publicized. (ID 15)
 - I would want resource materials for Christian Education programs (children, youth adult), for small groups and their leaders, and for church development. This would cover starting new churches, outreach in growing communities, and training lay leadership at the local level. (ID 107)

7C. Leadership (N = 18)

- **Within the Conference (N = 10) and Out In The Greater Community (N = 5)**
 - I would like for the Conference to have and project a very clear vision and plan for growth in the intermountain west, particularly Utah. (ID72)
 - More ecojustice involvement; continuing leadership in social justice issues. (ID 86)
 - ...An ambassador who could spend enough time in each church to create a definite Conference identity and promote conference and denominational programs and ideologies. Suggested Strategy: Possibly focusing on fewer Mission Partners so as to make more of an impact or difference for those agencies, which receive support. (ID 4)
 - I think we need a unifying, strong vision at a Conference level that can mobilize local congregations... I think we need a PASSION that folks can get excited about and promote – not a lot of little programs but rather one big united program to bring us together. We need a lot of noise and action to be able to differentiate ourselves. (ID 93)
 - Would like to see our Conference take a stronger stand on issues of ethics and morality! Not condone any action just because we have become so lax about things... (ID 19)
 - Our conference has a growing relationship with the church in Venezuela, but where does this fit in to the overall program of the Conference?...Suggested Strategy: Perhaps the Conference should replicate the new structure of the UCC where Justice and Witness Ministries are at the center of the life of the UCC... (ID135)

- RMC would be a leader in the region when speaking out about issues affecting or of great concern to the faith community. Providing moral leadership ecumenically in our region. Also, all UCC churches would have a positive [view] rather than a cynical view of the Conference as something that takes too much of OCWM and gives us little. (ID 135)
- Suggested Strategy: Interaction with lay leaders to get an understanding of needs and opportunities to grow. (ID 114)
- ...I wish we had a bigger “appearance” in the area. People don’t get drawn to UCC churches unless they happen to walk in. Then we can hook them! The Catholic Church, while not for me, seems to be so much of a presence! (ID 45)
- A CM who genuinely cares for individuals and churches—being present in times of crisis and need, listening and responding; a team leader who respects and values the skills, abilities and contributions of Conference staff, clergy and lay people by supporting and nurturing them; a leader who can facilitate the work of all Conference groups. A Conference Minister who speaks with a prophetic voice for social justice; who see his/her role as liaison between the national church and individual churches—interpreting the vision and mission of the Denomination. Who will speak to the greater community, publicly taking a stand for justice. Let’s be able to read “The United Church of Christ stands in support (or opposition) to...”in the Rocky Mountain News and Denver Post. (ID 97)
- I would ask for the Rocky Mountain Conference – through its staff, directors and committee structure to take a more active and public stand on issues of justice and peace. The Conference has simply not be visible enough in speaking out on the issues that have made the UCC in the national setting unique and vital. This requires timely and public statements from the Conference staff as well as a committee structure that is able to respond to crises and address systemic issues from a faith perspective. (ID 109)
- A powerful spokesperson for all of the struggling UCC churches and for the Christian faith generally. For years as a denomination we have had an identity problem. Today in our society we have a secular problem in that 80%of our society doesn’t really care or have time for belief, faith, spirit, religion...(ID 96)

7D. Communication (N = 17)

• Sharing Information (N = 9)

- “...’dog and pony shows’ on various missions of the church (e.g., OCWM; OGHS; returning missionaries, ministries of local churches such as First Plymouth) (ID 84)
- Communicate standards for churches to achieve or maintain; provide communication methods for churches to connect with each other in the conference—events, etc. (ID 124)
- A composite of statistical information on UCC churches in the Conference, such as: music directors, lay ministers, salaries of all staff, lists of different kinds of programs (such as Equipping Church Youth, Christian Ed, Risk Management. (ID 128)
- ...Better understanding of what is expected of us. (ID 140)
- ...More help getting our big “secret” (we love and accept you the way you are) known to the community in which we live and work. (ID 71)
- Leadership that keeps our region informed of what is happening at the national level...(ID 67)

- **Suggested Strategies: (N = 9)**

- I know it is hard for one office to serve this large an area but in this day of Internet – website and modern communication, it can be done. This saves money on administrative overhead that can be used for other purposes or in some cases saves money that isn't available. (ID 23)
- I would ask for a means of communication (email or whatever) so that our members and churches receive information about each other, pray for each other and not be competitive or isolated. (ID 110)
- TV advertising; a web-based repository of worship, fellowship, mission, and Christian education resources that congregations can contribute to and use for their own use. (ID 63)
- Some innovative ways (and means) to attract new members – advertising? New programs? TV? (ID 130)
- What is needed is an ultra-hi speed, in-your-face now PR program that will make a dent at least in the culture of today as well as into the future. (ID 96)
- A web-based communication system to help our people be in closer touch without the financial and time/distance problems that tend to keep us isolated from each other. (ID 9)
- An advertising campaign to bring the UCC message/philosophy to the public...In our area (Colorado Springs), we're starting to see some advertising by local churches. But the biggest influence is still coming from the very conservative Christian churches. For all of the folks including myself that do not embrace their very conservative attitudes and do not feel attracted to the mainline churches, but are searching and struggling with their spiritual identity, UCC can offer a unique alternative. (ID 93)
- Do not honestly know how the agenda for meetings is developed. Would like to be a bigger part of what is being discussed. More meetings so we could have a better chance to be heard or at least listened to. (ID 19)
- Communication with churches about peace and justice issues continues to be a problem. We dream of having every church active on these issues and knowing what each other is doing, what the conference is doing, and what the national church is doing and saying...We could use the names on this [national] network to build a new e-mail list...We could piggyback on the conference bulletin inserts; we could establish a new e-mail network; and we could add P & J events and issues to the monthly packet sent out to the churches from the conference office monthly. (ID 135)

7E. On-Going Development (N = 12)

- I would like to see a concentration on equipping leaders, both clergy and lay, to lead our congregations towards common goals. I would like to see more meaningful training programs offered in the areas of education and worship. (Tom's programs are not helpful; sorry, Tom). (ID 72)
- I would appreciate having lots of educational opportunities. (ID 68)
- ...workshops or UCC educational programs by staff or other members of the RMC. Many of our members do not have UCC backgrounds and have little appreciation for our UCC heritage. Suggested Strategy: We've talked about putting on a community-wide Amestad program. How about a RMC traveling Amestad program, or something of that sort? (ID 101)

- ...Perhaps lay and ministerial people alike could use guidance on decision making skills. (ID 18)
- ...Sustainable C.E. for the young. (ID 129)
- Outdoor Ministries for young adults—those who are no longer eligible for MADD camp. (ID 15)
- Opportunities for foreign mission work for youth/adults over spring break or summer. (ID 63)
- More programming for young adults in the UCC. (ID 43)
- More activities for young adults who have graduated from high school, maybe more retreats during the year. (ID 70)
- I would also strengthen support for clergy, particularly looking for ways to bring clergy in rural settings together for mutual support and professional development. (ID 109)
- Suggested Strategies: Educational opportunities in many settings, including: bible study groups within clusters - each pastor takes a favorite and offers a session or two at a central location, i.e., lay clusters; Internet chat rooms centered on various topics, perhaps led by national staff or ecumenical groups; dialog time at annual meetings – panel discussions or debate forums; lay focus groups at annual meeting – short, one-topic discussion led by Conference staff or Connection Partners, Inc., or others. (ID #127)

7F. Invigorating Local Churches (N = 10)

- Quarterly pep-talks from Tom Rehling! (ID 63)
- LOTS more help for us rural, small, struggling churches. New Church Starts are great (and expensive, even when they don't work), but what about keeping the rest of us alive??? We're working on it on our "own," and many of the other members feel that we are all ALONE – don't have a CLUE that the RMC lends any help at all! Let's FIX that! (ID 92)
- I would ask for help – relating to ideas to get people to come to church; I would ask for people to come to individual churches or close geographical areas, to bring ideas and "how to" for music, using different styles of music in workshop. (ID 35)
- Help us with budgets and how to get people to give to the church. (ID 47)
- Leadership support for struggling congregations; Volunteer pulpit coverage for pastors to have a Sunday off. (ID 86)
- Focused, experienced efforts at aiding/supporting existing church renewal. So many of our RMC congregations are dying, aging. (ID 120)

7G. Spiritual Renewal (N = 7)

- I would want the RMC/UCC to be a spiritual entity, not an organizational one, to be a part of the body of Christ in such a way as to enhance the experience of that membership in the Body at the congregational and personal levels. To achieve that, I would ask the RMC to provide more opportunities for spiritual growth and education, offering a wide range of classes, trainings, workshops and retreats for adult. Adult MADD camp is a start, but I believe it is also the tip of the iceberg. To support these programs, I would ask the RMC to create a retreat center – distinct from but not entirely dissimilar to La Foret, perhaps in the desert, but also perhaps more accessibly located in an urban area. A retreat center for adults, for spiritual retreats and for classes and

- educational opportunities. I would want to see it on the western side of the Rockies but that's not really necessary. Similar retreat centers in New Mexico and Arizona offer a stream of programs and opportunities for adults to explore their spirituality in a context other than the lush nature of the mountains around Colorado Springs. (ID 90)
- I would ask for a deep feeling about our faith, the ability to express it to each other and to others outside our church. (ID 110)
 - I would ask for a retreat/camp location in the Wyoming area. I realize this is selfish, however I think the Wyoming Association would become even more ... if some meetings and camps/retreats could be closer to home. (ID 52)
 - Organize mission trips that are intergenerational, bringing all churches together. These trips can be weekends as well as week-long opportunities. (ID 114)
 - I would like to see a full time paid youth Conference Minister. That seems to be the first position that is eliminated and we cannot diminish the value of our youth. (91)
 - All UCC churches would have a positive rather than a cynical view (i.e., as something that takes too much of OCWM and gives us little) of the Conference. [a positive view that] we're all involved with, one we all know about, one we hear about often in the press. (ID 135)
 - I would try to get the Conference to find ways to get our youth more involved and find new ways to get them interested in our churches. Helping the churches to provide resources of people or young ministers to lead these people in new ways of worshipping, new types of music for them and trying to get them interested in ways of going on mission trips in our own state or in other states in our country or maybe even to another country...we need to make church more exciting for our young people but yet keep our senior members interested too. I would like to see the Conference make the Bible and its good news more relevant to our people and our youth. (ID #60)

Joys and Sorrows:

- **Sorrows:**
 - I have asked for support from the Conference in the past and received nothing so there is nothing that I would think of to ask for now. (ID 13)

CLERGY

7A. Resources/support (N = 41)

- **Financial And Other Resources (N = 18)**
 - A \$2 million endowment fund where the interest and dividends are for staff salaries only. (ID 024)
 - A much higher percentage of OCWM to national church (ID 034)
 - Greater commitment to OCWM from all our churches. (ID 123)
 - More resources for laity on just about every level – stewardship, C.E., worship, leadership development – and close enough that folks don't have to travel for more than a half day. (ID 042)
 - Endowment for La Foret to keep camp costs down for children and guests. (ID 055)

- More support (financial, spiritual, emotional) for clergy – both parish and other settings. (ID 078)
- ... financial assistance in mission work, social justice issues, education for teachers, youth and children and relevant dynamic curriculum for small churches or churches needing assistance in these areas. ... More funding for La Foret. More skilled support for clergy struggling with emotional and church related problems. (ID 087)
- Resources around the following: Christian education, youth ministry, clergy spiritual development and renewal, clergy continuing education, worship and music development, misconduct prevention. (ID 118)
- Improved trouble-shooting with churches in conflict/crisis. More clergy training. (ID 017)
- A group of trained lay and clergy who could be called upon in times of crisis for either ministers or congregations – like an advocacy group, who have the skills to intervene effectively to crisis. Right now we have self appointed people who are not necessarily trained; ... I also think we could use a directory for clergy and lay people who can be called upon for specialized talents. For example, I have a Master’s Degree in Guidance and Counseling, with a specialty in children’s grief. (ID 005)
- ... I see the Conference’s necessary duties as placement and church conflict counseling. (ID 069)
- I and the churches I have served need to have more support and input before things become a crisis. (ID 126)

- **Other Programs (N = 17)**
 - An expanded Camp La Foret with a year around retreat center. (ID 034)
 - Children, youth and adult ministries at La Foret (and wilderness sites). Conference should expend significantly more money in support of summer camps and yearly retreats so that individual participants won’t have to pay so much. The people we want to reach are often the most marginalized. (ID 103)
 - Organized retreats, conferences for continuing education. (ID 046)
 - Also, staff for excellent programming in the areas of mission, stewardship, education, spirituality, and evangelism (church growth). (ID 066)
 - Staff support of Association church and ministry committees. (ID 103)
 - To offer a compassionate policy from La Foret – campers tend to feel like it does not “belong” to RMC and that it is meant for a Conference Center ... which needs to make money. (Our history of helping is lost.)
 - A vibrant and creative ministry for justice and peace, changing systems and not just individuals. ... Full financial support for clergy in crisis. Return of specialized ministries to college campuses, ski slopes, family farms, as per 1950’s and 60’s. (ID 057)
 - Facilitation of training more persons to support authorized ministers during fitness reviews and mentors for students in care. (see pp. 12f in United Church of Christ Manual on Ministry, section 8). (ID 036)

- **Pastor To Pastors (N =8)**
 - A pastoral presence. (Pastor to pastors) (ID 020)

- In the 3 Conferences I have served, including serving on staff, I have never had the sense that the Conference Minister really served as pastor to the pastors. That would be nice to have. (ID 069)
- A Conference Minister who would inspire and support the clergy and build fellowship among them. It would be great to have a Conference Minister that we as clergy could turn to for advice in tough situations or just for spiritual support as pastors. I feel as though we do not have a pastor. (ID 066)
- **Recruiting, Selection And Finding Positions (N = 8)**
 - I would ask ... for trained staff to facilitate placement needs of churches and clergy. (ID 011)
 - To aid in the calling of the best qualified pastoral leadership that will enable the churches to grow both spiritually, numerically and financially. The Conference will only be as effective as the pastoral and lay leadership in our local churches. (ID 033)
 - More assistance and attention in the search process. (ID 065)
 - Recruitment and placement of top-notch, committed, well educated, socially conscious, UCC clergy for our churches. (ID 103)

7B. Closer Connection (N = 24)

- **With Conference Staff (N = 13)**
 - More regular, ongoing contact between Conference staff and church pastors. I think strengthening this connection is one of the best ways to improve Conference effectiveness and has to entail more than simply having clergy on committees, etc. (ID 017)
 - I would love to see more of the Conference presence just to worship in local churches on Sunday AM. Just to see the Conference Minister come to know what local churches are doing especially in Wyoming. (ID 040)
 - I wish we could afford the technology to bring in members to committee and board meetings. Video and teleconferencing would be so helpful in cutting down frequent trips by persons. (ID 002)
 - Alternating of meeting sites for all Conference related meetings... to be alternated around the Conference [easier for all to participate in Conference] (ID 039)
- **With Each Other, National, Other Churches (N = 11)**
 - Opportunities to be together, worshipping, praying, growing together. (ID 076)
 - Also churches need to know one another across Association lines through more regional events for fellowship and education. (ID 050)
 - Effective community building among congregations, lay constituencies, and clergy. (ID 106)
 - A closer relationship between Conference and Associations. Our geography requires that Associations be the center of our life together. ...Clusters need to be not only clergy clusters, but in many places, they need to be church clusters, gathering for potlucks, programs, etc. (ID 100)
 - Something very creative, very drastic, and very different should be done to promote a cohesive bonding among the churches and among the clergy, or at least the cohesiveness should be promoted among clusters of churches. (ID081)

- Relationship and support based on Cor. 12 & 13. (ID 073)
- I would have more than one Annual Meeting of the people of the Conference. I would have more times for clergy education and retreats that were Conference wide events. (ID 003)
- An increased sense of community among churches and clergy. Since I have been in the RMC, 4 years, we have not had a single all clergy event which brought us together for worship, fellowship, and learning. I yearn for a 2-3 day event in which as clergy we grow to know one another. (ID 050)
- I also wish there were more opportunities for clergy of the Conference to gather for fellowship and education. (Clergy clusters are great, but I would like to be in closer touch with my brothers and sisters across the Conference). (ID 095)

7C. Structure or Positions (N = 19)

- Clear delineation of the respective responsibilities of the Conference and the Associations. (ID 017)
- I would ask for Conference-Association partnering in clergy supervision, growth requirements, and accountability. (ID 011)
- A full time Associate Conference Minister for education. (ID 016)
- There might be 3 staff people each of whom could be located in Utah, Western Colorado, and Denver area. They could work as a team. (ID 010)
- I would hope for regional offices throughout the Conference. I feel sorry for the staff (ministers) who must travel great distances to do their work. I think the work of Conference staff could much more effectively be done if they were regionally deployed. (ID 002)
- I would have an east-side Conference office and a west-side Conference office because the characteristics and needs of churches in Colorado are very different than churches in Western Wyoming and Utah. I would have more meetings and events of the Conference held on the west side, so driving time and weather were less restricting. (ID 003)
- More workshops in different locations. (ID 076)
- A stable Conference staff with enough time and resources to assist all our churches. (ID 117)
- We need to have a professionally appealing Conference office to attract a competent and committed Conference Minister. Our current office in Denver (while pleasant enough on the inside) is located in an area that will not attract high caliber candidates for the position of Conference Minister. (ID 112)
- Let's propose some radical solutions like instead of having a conference office, lets have a retreat center where those who attend receive instruction in spiritual direction and peace-making – lets integrate our spirituality with our prophetic witness. (ID 137)
- Full time Conference Minister for youth, camping retreats. Full time Conference Minister for adult education and programming. Full time conference minister for clergy and congregations. (ID 116)
- Paid FT position for coordinator of Conference Justice and Peace task force – along with centralized contact info for church committees that have taken or are taking J&P stances. (ID 057)

7D. Leadership (N = 17)

- A clear vision ... a more defined image of who we are as a UCC congregation. (ID 020)
- Visionary witness to peace and justice in the wider ecumenical setting. (ID 030)
- I want the Conference to have a well-prepared, experienced, inspired staff who see their job as supporting the churches and helping to create a bold and extensive voice in the region. I want programs to be well put together, processes to be near seamless. ... I want people with real, radical, attractive vision for the future. I want people who are going to stick around. (ID 006)
- Visionary leadership – A stirring vision for the Conference that is grounded in historic Christianity and responsive to 21st century realities and issues. This vision should include, capture the imaginations of those who are evangelical and those who are oriented to social action. (ID 122)
- Vision. Theological imagination. Prophetic witness. ... Energy, enthusiasm, and wisdom. (ID 106)
- A dynamic, energetic Conference Minister with administrative skills, preaching ability and a pastoral heart – one willing to work without complaint. (ID 132)
- A skilled, caring, responsible person to serve as permanent Conference Minister. A Conference Minister who genuinely likes the UCC. (ID 016)
- I would ask for better leadership at the Conference Office and no more cut-backs in staff. (ID 087)
- I would like to ask for a functional Conference Minister who is willing to deal with the hard issues of the Conference (not sweep the boundary violations under the carpet), is emotionally healthy, and understands how to do ministry out of strength rather than reactivity. This Conference has a history of dysfunction and alcoholism in the Conference Minister position such that the power and authority end up going to other people (usually the loudest voices with the most control needs) and makes for a highly dysfunctional system. We need a leader on top with vision, integrity, and who can't be manipulated by the sick places in the system. ... For all of us to function together on the cutting edge of ministry through writing, speaking, dialogue instead of wasting energy complaining and fighting. (ID 062)
- I would be good if the leadership of the Conference could be more actively encouraging and supporting the clergy to become more active in promoting the prophetic stands of our denomination on social justice and peace issues. There is a general feeling among too many clergy that if they do that, they will be “hung out to dry” all alone. (ID081)
- Ways to give local congregations more ownership in the covenantal relationship. (ID 054)
- To take a clear stand for ecumenical relations. (ID 087)
- Advocacy on public policy issues, including: public education funding, pro same-sex marriage, poverty prevention. (ID 118)

7E. Ongoing Development (N = 11)

- Leadership development for lay and ordained leaders. (ID 046)
- An Associate Conference Minister who helps develop conferences for clergy and laity for training people to teach in the church.
- Annual clergy gathering connected to Annual Meeting for continuing education and development. (ID 118)

- Training sessions for church officers. Stewardship training and planned giving workshops. Evangelism and church renewal workshops. (ID 133)
- A more formalized and dedicated effort to recognize and train laity in their ministry wherever and however that may be. (ID 037)
- More leadership training...(ID 087)

7F. Communication (N = 10)

- Better use of the internet, especially with regard to pastor/congregation prayer needs. ... Our website needs upgrading, regular mastering. (ID 042)
- Seasonal reporting to all the churches of: What’s happening to all – in each/all of the churches (and some way to get the news past the pastors and church boards to the members of all the churches). ...occasional mailing of the Rocky Mtn Conference News that is now sent only to those who get the National UCC News. (ID 048)
- This means better communication – via internet; the two pieces from the newspaper, and the bulletin inserts are good. Perhaps a weekly email? Topic – theme – to be shared among the clergy, laity. (ID 076)
- An online list-serve that would enable all our churches to speak to one another and share news and views. (ID 100)
- I wish we could “blitz” the media with the UCC message – I think there are many folks who are yearning for a UCC which allows the diversity. (ID 095)
- More openness/information for those on the fringes. (ID 080)
- Weekly communications about what’s happening in the Conference. (ID 132)
- A better communication of programs undertaken by the Conference – Global Partners, various mission partners, restorative justice, peace and justice – interpretation to whole church community through personal visits by staff or those involved. Better La Foret communication to churches. (ID 133)

7G. Invigorating Local Churches (N = 8)

- Help with local outreach ideas.... (ID 020)
- Greater emphasis on church renewal programs (as opposed to new church development which is also important (ID 017)
- I feel we need insights into how to invite and secure new members and new congregations. (ID 001)
- Strong stimulation to local churches in regard to evangelism and stewardship education. (ID 030)
- An intense, broad based process of discernment and renewal/reorientation. (ID 113)
- The first thing I’d ask the Conference to do is to get Christ centered and demonstrative about it. Faith and worship should drive the business, not parallel it, or worse yet, be an after thought. I’d ask the conference to stop buying wholesale into the “latest, greatest” theory or task and really begin to discern its ministry based on relationality, meeting congregants and congregations where they are, and help them to name their pain, and do the hard, hard work of choosing healing. (ID 136)
- I just wish we had the imagination about how to be the United Church of Christ. It seems that we are putting a lot of time and effort in denial, denial that our denomination is dying. Or at least that its organizational structures are dying. Let’s have something like “Faith/works” of the early nineties, a festival of arts and worship. We need a fresh

wind of spirit to blow through us. Let the dead bury the dead. Let's have a forum where all assumptions are on the table. ... Let's ask had questions like: Why do we need a conference office in this region? Do we even need a "conference minister"? Let's put more money and imagination into churches that work, let's put back into campus ministry, let's have a day of Mourning/day of celebration where we die to the old church structure in order to give birth to the new. What are we about for God's sake? Maintaining a bureaucracy that has lost purpose? Or transform people's lives? Let's not be afraid to die a good death so that God can do something new. (ID 137)

- A way to motivate people to participate more in the programs. (ID 076)
- More planning of new churches. (ID 123)
- Forget starting expensive, large churches. Start many new small churches, house churches, with lay leadership if necessary, in every Conference community. Revisit the evangelism that started churches in the 19th century. (ID 059)

Summary Findings and Conclusions

7. If members could have anything from the Rocky Mountain Conference, without limitation of time or cost, what would they ask for?

Similarities and Differences Between Laity and Clergy:

THEMES*	
LAITY (N = 69)	CLERGY (N = 72)
A. Closer Connections (42%) - With Conference Staff (33%) - With Each Other, National, Other Churches (12%)	A. Resources/Support (57%) - Financial and Other Resources (25%) - Other Programs (24%) - Pastor To Pastors (11%) - Recruiting, Selection, and Finding Positions (11%)
B. Resources/Support (38%) - Support (28%) - Financial and Other Resources (15%)	B. Closer Connection (33%) - With Conference Staff (18%) - With Each Other, National, Other Churches (15%)
C. Leadership (26%) - Within the Conference and Out in the Greater Community (22%)	C. Structure or Positions (26%)
D. Communication (25%) - Sharing Information (13%) - Suggested Strategies (13%)	D. Leadership (24%)
E. On-Going Development (17%)	E. On-Going Development (15%)
F. Invigorating Local Churches (15%)	F. Communication (14%)
G. Spiritual Renewal (10%)	G. Invigorating Local Churches (11%)

*Percentages add to more than 100% because people submitted multiple responses.

If members could have anything, without limitation, from the Rocky Mountain Conference, 42% of laity and 33% of clergy would ask for Conference to assist in creating closer connections, both with

Conference staff as well as with their peers, with people from other UCC churches, the national organization, and even with other congregations outside of the UCC denomination (Clergy 15%, Laity 12%).

Closer connection with Conference staff for laity means Conference staff having a regular, visible presence in the local church. Laity express a stronger desire for Conference staff presence than do clergy (laity 33% vs clergy 18%) but this may be because clergy have more contact with Conference staff than do laity.

While 33% of clergy also ask for closer connections, resources and support are at the top of the clergy Wish List (Clergy 57%, Laity 38%). Twenty-five percent of clergy wish for financial and other resources. Desired financial support includes greater contributions to OCWM, funding to lower camping costs for La Foret, and financial assistance for mission work and education programs. In addition to financial resources, clergy want skilled support to help them deal with emotional problems, conflicts, and misconduct, as well as prevent crises.

If there were no limitations, clergy (24%) also wish for a variety of program resources, including organized retreats and programs for gathering and learning, such as La Foret and Christian Educational programs; staff for programming in such areas as mission, stewardship, and evangelism; and staff support for Association church and ministry committees. Eleven percent would also ask for more assistance from the Conference with clergy recruiting and selection. In addition to these tangible resources, clergy (11%) express a need for spiritual support in the form of a pastor for pastors.

Laity, like clergy, also wish for resources and support (38%) in the form of assistance to deal with church conflicts, and help with clergy replacement searches. Laity too wish for financial and other resources (15%) including funds for building and remodeling, camperships to make La Foret events more affordable, aid for smaller churches, and money for program resource materials.

The third and fourth wishes most frequently mentioned respectively by laity (26%) and by clergy (24%) are for leadership from the RMC UCC. Both clergy and laity want Conference leadership to articulate a unifying vision of RMC UCC identity and ideology, both inside the UCC and publicly in order to differentiate the UCC from others in the faith community. Both want the UCC to be more visible in the region, to take clear stands and be an advocate for peace and social justice.

Clergy wish for leadership that both has a pastoral heart and deals with boundary violations, dysfunctional behavior, and other hard Conference issues. In addition, clergy want a stable leadership with good administrative skills and processes that work. Laity wish for the RMC to focus more on fewer programs and Mission Partners in order to bring people together in their efforts and to create greater impact.

Clergy (26%) but not laity, ask for structural changes that they believe will enhance the operations of the Conference. Some wish for greater clarity between the roles of the Conference and the Associations, and for greater partnership between the Conference and Associations. Several suggest ways to distribute the office or Conference staff throughout the geographic region to better meet the different needs of churches outside of Colorado, and for easier contact between Conference staff, churches and ministers in Associations located away from Denver. Some wish for more events in locations other than in Denver in order to make participation easier for churches

with long travel distances. Wishes also include the addition of Associate Conference Ministers (e.g., for Youth Education, for Clergy and Congregations) and other staff positions (e.g., Coordinator of Conference Justice and Peace Task Force).

Laity's fourth most frequent wish is for more communication from the Conference (laity 25%, clergy 14%). Laity wish for sharing of information (13%) about missions of the church (e.g., OCWM), ministries of local churches, about National, as well as communication about expectations of local churches by the Conference. Both clergy and laity offer suggestions for specific communication strategies within the Conference (e.g., web-based communication, web accessible information about worship and resources for Christian Education, adding information to monthly packet sent out to churches from the Conference, an on-line list serve, regular reporting to all churches of what's happening in other churches and in the Conference), as well as to the broader community (e.g., TV and other advertising campaigns, PR programs).

Wishes for on-going development are expressed by both clergy (15%) and laity (17%). Laity mention wanting more programs, outdoor ministries, and other opportunities for youth.

Fifteen percent of laity and 11% of clergy wish for Conference to help to invigorate churches by increasing participation and membership, and laity include getting people to give financially. Clergy also wish for an emphasis on church renewal through open Christ-centeredness, evangelism and healing work. In a related theme, laity (10%) wish for spiritual renewal by prioritizing spirituality through spiritual education and retreats, and by creatively gaining youth involvement.

Conclusions: When asked what they would request from the Conference, both laity and clergy respond with long lists, indicating that they have many unmet needs. People feel depleted because they are trying to do much with too little, and they want help from the Conference. They want the Conference leadership to infuse the Conference with the vitality it needs to manifest its higher purpose.

Members yearn to be in community. They want leadership that draws people together by: articulating a clear identity, focusing priorities for greatest impact, providing more local presence of the Conference throughout the region, and creating more opportunities for connection with their peers.

Both laity and clergy wish for more gatherings and events throughout the region that bring people together. In addition, laity want to know about activities occurring at all levels of the RMC, including committee projects, missions and ministries, and both clergy and laity want communication systems that provide easy access to Conference information, worship, educational and other resources.

Members desire the support and resources that will enable them to create programs and promote activities that reflect their shared values, both within the Conference and out in the larger community. They ask for missions and outreach ministries that will invigorate their local churches and spiritual lives. Laity and clergy ask for nurturing, committed leadership that will deal with hard problems honestly and compassionately. In addition to leadership help to prevent crises, clergy ask for pastoral guidance and spiritual support so they can be empathetic and fully present for the people in their congregations.

Members want leadership to differentiate the RMC UCC and draw new members by giving voice to the RMC UCC's liberal perspective, including the Conference stance on peace and social justice, to the greater community.

8. Was there a time when members wished that the Rocky Mountain Conference had been there for them?

For information about Questionnaire Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

LAITY

8A. Needed Help in Times of Crises (N = 31)

- Now is the time when the RMC needs to be ‘here’ for our congregation. With the recent resignation of our wonderful minister and major reduction in membership, different strategies will be needed for us to heal and to survive. We suffer greatly from the lack of a unifying, strong vision. To date, many in the congregation are unwilling and/or unable to face the reality that they are not self-sustaining and continue to operate at a deficit. Without the subsidies afforded in the past, we will need some creative help in meeting our challenges. The support and help from RMC is critical for this to happen. Not in the form of more subsidies – I do not see that as productive. Members need to accept the financial realities and make the necessary pledges to fund the needs they have determined for themselves. They need to determine what their priorities are. What’s most important – a beautiful building for worship? Spiritual growth? Outreach to the community? If the ‘need’ is a beautiful building, designed for 3 times the congregation size, then they ‘need’ to pledge to fund maintenance of the building. Many of the remaining congregants (including myself) are now ‘sitting on the fence’ waiting to see what direction our church goes in. I am hopeful that the RMC can help us face reality and to get our priorities in order so that we can survive and grow. (ID 93)
- Our church has gone through a 2-year struggle. Leadership from the Conference has been non-existent. Our church has always been a strong contributor both monetarily and with talent. It has been very disappointing to see how little support our church has received. (ID 114)
- We grappled, both individually and as a church, with a pastor who was becoming a divisive element in our congregation. We could have benefited from a conference presence acting as a mediator and helping us to resolve issues of church polity and responsibility. (ID 89)
- As a leader dealing with serious conflict and budgetary issues. (ID 7)
- Our church went through a very problematic stage in the last ten years where the minister and leadership were broadly splintered for a time. At that point I think we got very little meaningful help from the Conference. (ID 61)
- Yes. Our pastor of many years retired and the Conference Minister came to the church to explain the process and the help we could expect; that help really never materialized. We requested help with finding an interim pastor. The one or two recommendations we received did not fit our need, and in our view we were more or less ignored after that and our contact relationships was re-assigned to Tom Rehling. The relationship with Tom has worked out much better. (ID 4)
- Our minister was seriously ill for an extended period of time. ...I called the Conference office and asked for help. We got absolutely nothing from Conference...Our church

- survived as did our minister but not because of anything we received from the Conference. We survived because of the strength and commitment of our members. (ID 13)
- Yes: Whenever we have searched for a minister; when our congregation had questions about the integrity of the UCC and their position on certain issues; we've had problems with members – I wish they could have come and been more vocal and said what needed said so it did not put our minister in the position of having to do it. (It would have come better from a stranger.)...Wish you could help us start to work together again. (ID 19)
 - When our new church start designation ended and our financial struggles almost resulted in our closing the church; when we began to grow again and requested a grant for marketing; when we needed a student intern to work with our youth, when a UCC pastor friend from out of state was not able to get his profile circulated; when a UCC pastor friend in our Conference was not given support in reestablishing her ministry after an inactive period. (ID 86)
 - During search times; also in times of financial crisis. (ID 38)
 - I wished they had been more involved when we were looking for a pastor. I felt like we needed more guidance and help in this process. (ID 47)
 - When our church was looking to hire a minister and decided to hire the interim minister this was met with criticism by the Denver Conference and not recommended by the Rocky Mountain Conference. I wished the RMC had supported our decision 100%...However, Tom Rehling was very helpful to our church throughout this process. (ID 44)
 - There was a time when the RMC was unavailable to us. The previous staff seemed to be bothered by some important issues facing us as a rural church. It is understood that we UCC churches are autonomous but for Conference to refuse our request for help was offensive. (Please don't ever let staff become so rude as it was years before.)... (ID 26)
 - I've called the Conference recently and not gotten called back regarding a tax matter for our church. Getting a callback would be nice. (ID 45)
 - Possibly one thing that could be done is to have a response back to a letter or an application to the Conference. (ID 60)
 - This last summer we had a major problem resulting in the resignation of our pastor. For the most part the conference was very helpful, but I would have liked to see an even higher level of involvement from them. It sometimes feels like the geographic distance gets in the way of giving us the level of support that would be most helpful. (ID 72)
 - When we started our ONA process and hit our first wall of resistance. (ID 63)
 - Yes, several times. When we lost members due to the Gay Blessing. Not a word officially from Conference. I KNEW how supportive you were, but that did NOT filter down to the congregation except through those of us who reported it...and I wonder how many of the "rank and file" believed it!! Not to mention the members who left. Shouldn't the Conference have the means to contact those people at a higher level than the church and question their reasons??? (The church council attempts met a blank wall.) (ID 92)
 - In the creation of youth mission trips, locally and nationally. The model of youth works is great. Uniting on local issues. (ID 15)

8B. Conference Has Been There (N = 15)

- ...I didn't contact the Conference office then, but the pastor did a little later, and we attended a conference on church growth where we got some helpful suggestions. (ID 9)
- There hasn't been a time when I have felt the absence of the Conference. Honestly, the Conference has offered me several wonderful experiences and been very accommodating. (ID #52)
- There are times when the Conference has been involved in our church to help with our problems such as the difficulty we had with our last minister and his relationships with the people of the church. The Conference helped us set up a Pastoral Relations Council which we didn't have before. This was a good idea and is helpful now. (ID 60)
- LaForet has been a great help for families particularly. It certainly is a resource for couples, for seminars and retreats, as well as children programs. Our family has spent several times at La Foret and benefited greatly...that's one place the conference now "shines." (ID 67)
- There have been times in our local church when we have had conflict and problems. I feel the Conference was there for us and gave us the support and help we needed. (ID 79)
- You've been there for us, to offer technical assistance, guidance and support over the years. (ID 85)
- In all fairness, embodied by the Conference office staff, the RMC has been there for me when I felt it was needed. In 2003, my congregation faced a major crisis. A phone call to the Conference office was all it took to get the support we needed to proceed. In addition, during a pastoral search process, the Conference provided valuable support to my congregation by providing information, support and helping steer us away from candidates who would not have been beneficial and toward other candidates who were better choices. The RMC was there for me, and I can only say thank you. (ID 90)
- Our congregation was one of a handful of new church starts in the mid 70's and while initially there we were supported by RMC there became a period which lasted until 1991 where we felt disconnected from the RMC and received no support. Subsequently on three major events (Covenantal time with UCBHM, Ministerial support during search process, and during our renewal process) in the life of our church RMC was not only there but very supportive. (ID 94)
- Yes, and the Conference was there for us. Our church has gone through two difficult events in the past ten years. Both times, Conference staff and the church and ministry committees of our Association were there to help us. We are a stronger church because of it. (ID 119)

8C. I don't know/No (N = 14)

- No...While each of the two UCC churches I've attended have experienced many painful changes, I have always expected the churches to solve our own problems. (ID 18)
- I can't think of any. (ID 35, ID 68, 107)
- No (ID 49; 56, 71, 88, 98, 102, 121, 124, 134, 135)

8D. Caring/Inclusion (N = 9)

- Sometimes I've felt Conference Ministers have been less than candid when they've talked to us, and could hardly wait for the service or meeting to end so they could leave. (ID 38)
- ...Also giving verbal or encouraging words to the congregations would be valuable. (ID 60)
- The one thing I wish is that the Conference understands our small congregation and that we have had to handle our own church expenses and problems by ourselves. The Conference, I feel, seems to think that because we are small, we are very insignificant in their eyes. In order to pay our expenses, we have to give fund-raising dinners for the neighborhood on our own. (ID 75)
- I served on a recent search committee for our congregation, a time when one would expect to be in meaningful dialogue with Conference staff. We did not feel that Conference staff worked on having that kind of dialogue with us. A representative from the Conference did come to our committee when we started work, had obviously not even read our church profile, over-talked committee members and generally gave us the impression that he was the expert, we were unrealistic and not to be taken seriously. This ultimately led to the place where we felt that we could not rely on the Conference staff to have our best interests in mind at any step in the process. Lack of trust between the Conference representative and our committee became an obstacle to clear and loving communication and contributed to a poor outcome of our search process. (ID 82)
- When our minister had serious health problems and the church needed a Conference Minister who cared, and who came not only to support the minister, but to work with the church to facilitate determining its needs and direction. In other words, someone who could listen to all parties, provide requested resources, and follow through to see if further assistance was needed. It didn't happen! This kind of caring leadership would also enable a feeling of covenant. It probably would make it easier to find lay people interested in being delegates. (ID 97)
- For five years in a row youth workers tried to work with the Conference staff to integrate youth into the annual meeting. They said, "Yes." Their actions said, "No" again and again. (ID 120)

CLERGY

8A. No Response, Can't Think Of Any, Not Sure (N = 19)

8B. Conference Has Been There (N = 18)

- RMC has invested in me as a mission partner, staff have been aware and supportive, budget has been supportive—this is very appreciated (ID 057c)
- The Conference has almost always been there for me (ID 059c)
- ...I have been able to access the resources necessary for programs, albeit from a distance and more indirectly than desired. Only once have I been neglected from a pastoral standpoint. (ID 095c)
- When I sought placement, the Conference placement person was there. (ID 100c)

- Tom Rehling has been there for me. He puts a face on the Rocky Mountain Conference. (ID 137)
- Handling health insurance issues is critical! When the national agent kept denying for trivial reasons, RMC was there to ask UCC Pension Funds to “look again!” (ID 139)

8C. Needed Help In Times Of Crisis (N = 16)

- I have not expected help for me but I have several times wished Conference leadership was there: For churches when the pastoral leadership was so destructive that intervention was urgently needed. For example...Ridge Road, Wild Rose, Montbello etc. and close calls elsewhere. (ID 029)
- Would have liked at least a call, a time to talk with staff person as I was going in transition in my job. Also, at least a call, or a note, when my brother died.... (ID 010)
- There are times when the Conference Minister (or other Conference staff) could have saved the life of a church by being present, listening, and recommending what might be done without necessarily being requested to do so... (ID 048)
- RMC office did not give me a feeling of welcome or of understanding of my personal situation at a time of great stress and low morale. The spiritual witness and acceptance were withheld. To receive that I found the beginnings of a new inner strength at a retreat at La Foret. (ID 054)
- When my colleague in ministry was ill and then was disabled, both of us and our church needed support and guidance through this time. When a member of my immediate family was involved in a tragedy, this wasn't transmitted to other clergy so we received little support from them. (ID 050)
- Many times and in some instances the RMC was there for us, and in others , that was not so. When one needs assistance in knowing how to handle a problem (sometimes a survival issue) one seeks that from the RMC office and staff. There have been times where requests have landed on what seemed to be deaf ears. No help came and the church went down the tube. (ID 028)
- When I came out as a gay man, I had little support from the conference minister to help my congregation, staff, and me deal with the trauma of that experience. The result of uncontrolled anxiety left me no choice but to leave that congregation. I'm not sure Conference staff would have changed the outcome, but the sense of unresolved (that I do think might have been different given Conference staff presence) remains unsettling. (ID 002)
- A conflict situation arose between minister and associate. Mediation by Conference staff persons was minimal resulting in loss of 10 – 15 members. (This was some years ago). (ID 133)

8D. Caring and Inclusion (N = 11)

- Often I want people to call, unsolicited, and ask how things are going. I want to feel like the conference staff knows our congregation what makes us distinctive. (ID 006)
- I wish there were people we pastors could call to get ideas when there are little problems at the church—people who could be sounding boards. I feel I can call on the Conference if there is a big problem, but there is no one to call if there is a little problem. (ID 022)

- It would have been nice to have the Conference Minister welcome me here or at least reach out and be in touch on occasion. When we were going through our building program—a huge effort on this congregation’s part, no one called, just to ask how it was going. (ID 066)
- No specific instance, just a general sense of “disconnect”. Connections have at time been good, but these moments fade without structures to support them. (ID017)

8E. Help With Placement Or Search (N = 9)

- Our moderator contacted the Conference office seven times during a search for new ministers with no response. We gave up. It was very disappointing and left a bad taste regarding the Conference among our congregation. (ID 065)
- When seeking a parish (ID 024)
- Yes; after I had earned my PhD. And wished to find a pastoral placement (there was no teaching position nearby and I did not wish to commute across the country), I felt “closed out” here because of anti-intellectualism. I found a good church placement in another conference.... (ID 064)
- When I finished seminary and looked for my first call—the then Conference Minister had little /no interest in helping seminarians, particularly women. (ID 039)
- The greatest time when RMC seemed absent was and is during the search for new pastors... churches in Wyoming feel left out. And, check history—Most churches which have dropped out of the UCC from the RMC did because of pastor/search/fundamental interim issue. (ID 139)

8F. Conference Minister (N = 8)

- When I was in my first call, in a seriously dysfunctional church, there was no support whatsoever from the Conference office—when the Conference Minister (after 2 years) finally met with me, he was critical, judgmental, and completely unsupportive of our difficulties. (ID 039)
- Ken Leischner never showed up when he should have. He avoided Association, Church, and Ministry committee meetings and mine is the largest Association and we needed him. ... Previous Conference Ministers over several years did not act like this. (ID 016)
- Conference’s influence/effect was very negative, even destructive, during Kenn Leischner’s tenure. (ID 017)

Joys and Sorrows

• Sorrows

- Yes. The Conference did not approve our nonprofit becoming part of the national Health Ministries even though the National UCC approved it. The Mission Committee said it was not interested in new affiliates. This Association and Conference seem more interested in excluding, rather than including. (ID 021)
- When there are trainings (for clergy) or retreats of DOC/UCC – the UCC participation is lame. (ID 020)
- There is such a sense of separation among the churches because of falsely applying “rugged individualism” to a misunderstanding of Congregationalist polity, that there is no feeling of being able to be supported. ... The misunderstanding is that every church, with its clergy, is out there alone, faced with the overwhelming task of keeping that church going and ministering to its members, its local area, and the societal issues of this period of history.

What has become lost in the shuffle of individualism is any thought that covenantal relationships would be truly beneficial to a local congregation. (ID 081c)

Suggestions/wishes

- I would like to see the Conference help this congregation through the process of forming a vision. Our congregation desperately needs a vision. Moreover, I would like to see the Conference help our congregation through the healing process. There are a few people in the congregation, who are bitter and angry toward one another and it infects the whole congregation. (ID 053c)
- We need to connect our active clergy with one another, and the Conference needs to take leadership in organizing it. The conference needs to help with constitutional change in the local churches, strategic planning (not the Easum/Bandy stuff) and abuse prevention. (ID 118c)
- I wish the Conference would have done a better job of managing its finances during some years. I wish the Conference provided support for the church and ministry work of the Associations. I wish the Conference was more visible public presence on social justice and inclusively issues. (ID 106)

Summary Findings and Conclusions

8. Was there a time when members wished that the Rocky Mountain Conference had been there for them?

Similarities and Differences Between Laity and Clergy:

THEMES*	
LAITY (N = 69)	CLERGY (N = 72)
A. Needed Help in Times of Crisis (45%)	A. No Response, Can't Think Of Any, Not Sure (26%)
B. Conference Has Been There (22%)	B. Conference Has Been There (25%)
C. I Don't Know/ No (20%)	C. Needed Help In Times Of Crisis (22%)
D. Caring and Inclusion (13%)	D. Caring and Inclusion (15%)
	E. Help with Placement or Search (12%)
	F. Conference Minister (11%)

**Percentages add to more than 100% because people submitted multiple responses.*

The majority of clergy (26%) either did not respond to this question, or said that they could not think of a time they had wished the Conference had been there for them. Fewer than 10% of laity left this question unanswered, and 20% indicated that they cannot think of a time when they had wished the Conference had been there for them.

Twenty-five percent of clergy and 22% of laity (23.4% of all questionnaire respondents) state unequivocally that the Conference has been there when needed.

On the other hand, 45% of laity (22% of clergy) give examples of times they were disappointed by the Conference's lack of support. Comments suggest that the biggest frustrations involved lack of

help during times of transition (e.g., pastor searches), when needing to defuse or resolve severe conflicts, and during financial crises.

Laities tell of situations mostly involving others (e.g., resignation or retirement of ministers, conflicts between minister and leadership, loss of members during Gay Blessing). Clergy (22%) tell of similarly feeling let down by Conference during times of conflicts and crises within their church, but their examples also include many poignant personal stories—times of despair (for example over family deaths, long-term hospitalizations, tragedies occurring to those close to them, and when coming out as gay),—when they felt no one from the Conference was there for them.

Another time when people wish the Conference had been present was when clergy (15%) and laity (13%) needed caring and inclusion. Comments suggest that clergy long for Conference staff to call just to check in about how things are going, as well as someone to call to bounce ideas off of over little problems. Laities describe times when they wished for Conference Ministers who are honest and caring when communicating to congregations, deeply understanding of each church's needs, and who act in ways that are truly inclusive of all members, young and old.

Clergy also mention times when they wished they had received help with placement or job searches (12%), and a few describe being hurt or displeased by actions taken by the past Conference Minister (11%).

Conclusions: Approximately 23% of the 141 clergy and laity who answered the questionnaire say that the Conference provided support when it was needed. However, almost twice as many laity (45%) and almost the same percentage of clergy (22%) describe times of great need when they remember the Conference as not having helped their church. Prevalent examples include when clergy left, when conflicts flared, or when financial crises arose.

Clergy describe not only times they wished the Conference had been there to prevent or help with crises in their church, but also to provide assistance during times of personal pain and anguish. Their stories of times of personal sorrows as well as when needing help with searches and placements convey deep disappointment when seeking caring connection where they thought it would be, and not finding it.

Descriptions of times when people wished the Conference had been there for them mirror responses expressed elsewhere in the assessment (see Question 7, "If members could have anything from the Rocky Mountain Conference, without limitation of time or cost, what would they ask for?"). Here too we hear unmet needs of laity and clergy for connection to others and for resources and support to cope with events that appear to be particularly stressful within the Conference: when clergy leave and when conflicts erupt.

Clergy need to feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference, to know there is someone who cares, someone with whom they can be in touch when needing guidance in small matters as well as with large problems. They need an empathetic person to whom they can turn so they then can be empathetic to their congregations.

For the Conference to be a viable entity, both clergy and laity need to trust that the Conference will support them – at a minimum with caring and empathy, with ideas, with respectful conversation – in times of need. When laity and clergy remember times when they wished that the Rocky Mountain

Conference had been there for them, the painful feelings that came up at the time (e.g., despair, disappointment, mistrust, resentment) are triggered and come alive in the present.

In order to overcome the negative perceptions and heal emotional damage created in the past, the RMC will need to rebuild trust throughout the Conference by making compassion a priority and by providing leadership to align actions with beliefs.

9. What Events, Programs, Or Groups Help Members Feel Connected To The Rocky Mountain Conference Beyond Their Local Church?

For information about Questionnaire Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

LAITY

9A. Conference Events (N = 42)

- **Annual Meeting (N = 31)**

- Our connection to Conference is Annual Meeting. It took our participation in Conference for Conference to look at us. This connection gives us a feeling of becoming a part of the whole. We made ourselves known in the administration. (ID 26)
- ...The Annual Conference is also of value as it allows us to get a sense of National policy and direction, plus a chance to meet other peoples of our faith and share with them. The Annual Conference also gives us the opportunity to see and evaluate the literary publications in the religious field, both for adults and children. This should be continued and focused on even more. (ID 67)
- The Annual Conference helps the delegate feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference. I doubt that the entire congregation feels this connection though. (ID 44)
- As delegates, the Association and Conference meetings, but these do not translate back to other members of our congregation to give them a sense of the covenantal relationship. (ID 97)
- RMC Annual Meetings, including the social events and banquets as well as the plenary sessions, speakouts, and resolutions (ID 86)

- **Camps (N = 26)**

- I never knew anyone outside of Denver, in Utah, Wyoming or Montana, who belonged to the UCC until I was a councilor at MADD Camp. (ID 130)
- La Foret comes to mind immediately. It has been a wonderful resource for youth and their leaders, for retreats of church groups, and for planning meetings of different kinds. I am grateful to the La Foret Board and the Conference leadership for their work to keep the Center in good shape and available for UCC and other groups. (ID 107)
- The La Foret camping programs are very beneficial, particularly for the youth. Other than that, the Conference has not been visible in our congregation. (ID 72)
- La Foret Senior High Retreats. These events brought us closer together in our faith and helped us cope with the loss of one of our own, Twayne Stark. (ID 43)
- Several youth events have helped me feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference outside my local church. I have been to different events at La Foret, MADD camp, Confirmation Retreat, etc. I also attended the National Youth Event in 2000, which was my real eye opener to the wider church. (ID 52)

9B. Association Events/Meetings (N = 15)

- Belonging to the Wyoming Association connects us to the Rocky Mountain Conference...(ID 79)

- Metro Denver Association meetings, gatherings, Ecclesiastical Council – although these are Association events, the connection to the conference is strong. (ID 86)
- My only contact with the rest of the churches in the Conference has been through our Association’s Church and Ministry Committee...(ID 119)

9C. Communication (N = 13)

- I read from cover to cover the bi-monthly newspaper and look for pictures of people I might know in the RMC newsletter. (ID 15)
- Wrap around in the UCC News. (ID 135)
- I have not attended Association or Conference meetings, but I appreciate hearing the reports of issues presented and decisions made. I also appreciate receiving the newsletters (Conference and national) to keep up with what is happening outside our own congregation. (ID 107)
- ...The recent inclusion of the Conference news sheet in the weekly church bulletin, with articles from other churches and Conference Staff is a great idea for keeping local church members informed and in touch...(ID 105)
- The RMC insert to the UCC paper; the weekly “Reflection” for use in our Sunday Bulletin. (ID 94)
- Our representative, Linda Mansfield, does a great job in keeping us informed of RMC news. The RMC ‘Reflections’ insert in our weekly bulletin helps bring our attention to other congregations...(ID 93)

9D. Don’t Know/Nothing (N = 9)/No Response (N = 4) (Total N = 13)

- I can’t think of any. (ID 88)
- At the moment, there aren’t programs or groups that help me feel connected to the Conference. Some years I attended the Annual Meeting as a visitor and it is fairly positive, but last year the publicity did not communicate anything that appealed to me and I did not attend. (ID 109)
- I really don’t know because our church has never been closely involved with the Conference or the UCC. In my 18 years in Colorado and in my church, I’ve been a delegate at two Annual Meetings. (ID 141)

9E. Service (N = 12)

- Our minister’s involvement at the Conference level...our music director’s family involvement at Conference. (ID 13)
- I’ve served on the old World Board (pre 2000) and found common interests and concerns all across the country and world there. Here in the RMC, I’ve been promoting Mission on the Mission/Stewardship Committee...As people become interested and involved in mission thinking, their enthusiasm, spiritual enrichment and growth spreads outward in circles. ID 9)
- Church members who serve on Association or Conference Boards and committees help to keep us in touch with the activities and goals of the Church beyond our own congregation. (ID 89)
- Peace and Justice Task Force. (ID 135)

9F. Contact with Conference Staff (N = 9)

- The once or twice a Conference representative has visited...(ID 98)
- I feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference when the Conference Minister comes and visits our church and preaches to us or when an Associate Conference Minister comes to help with a problem or gives us some ideas about a youth mission project and visits us at our church...I feel that any personal visitation by a member of the Conference staff or the sending of a greeting is always important. (ID 60)
- Some members must feel connected when speakers/representatives come ‘way out to Utah to visit us. But I have to report that the following questions have been raised: What has the Conference done for us? Why should we tithe from the proceeds of the sale of the Parsonage to the Conference? The sale was done at the autonomous level to stay afloat. Where was the Conference when \$ was needed...? I know this sounds very negative, but I report it to present an accurate snapshot of the present trend...God Bless you all, all that you do, and I know that you are SO short-staffed! (ID 92)

9G. Classes and Workshops (N = 9)

- Spirit Alive, Education Alive type events (ID 85)
- Evangelism workshop (even though that is a Denver Association gathering, a Conference level gathering would be a great thing!). (ID 63)
- ...Worship Alive, Spirit Alive, C & M workshop led by Gene Kraus... (ID 84)

9H. Fellowship and Celebrations (N = 7)

- Events at other UCC churches in Utah that I’ve attended. (ID 101)
- Services for new minister installation help the attendees to feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference...(ID 44)
- Several from our church often attend various meetings at different churches, and appreciate the letters received regarding these functions. (ID 75)

Joys And Sorrows

• Sorrows:

- We have had delegates to the Annual meeting and we have had delegates to the synod. The national office from my perspective as a delegate twice was that it was a slow dying dinosaur; large, unwieldy and overall ineffective denominationally (ID 96).
- ...In the 50s, 60s and perhaps the 70s, it was as viable and alive as was the Christian community. From that point on energy was being expended putting out fires with little or no time or effort looking at the bigger picture of declining religion in our society. I don’t think healing is the problem, but I do believe that direction is clearly needed. It has to begin at the local church level, but it has to be developed and reinforced from the National through the Conference...One source that has begun to help this local church [is] a study and action plan of doing ministry from William Easum’s book and program, “Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers—Ministry Anytime, Anywhere by Anyone. (ID 96)
- I perceive that a stronger connection would be felt if the President of the Rocky Mountain Conference came from the area and not from back East. (ID 44)
- Conference meeting and events for the most part are held in large cities many miles from where we live, and are dominated by large congregations with very different views than most of our congregation. I think it will take lots of time and education to even get our people to attend an event. Although I feel a close kinship with UCC and the denomination

process, I don't think that a majority of our people do. There are so many social issues in today's society that urban areas express a different attitude about than rural areas do. This makes it difficult to mix the two. More grouping of like-size churches in regions of a Conference might help. But, the liberal vs. conservative views and lifestyles without the education process that teaches we can believe differently and still get along keep us apart. (ID 23)

CLERGY

9A. Conference Events (N = 47)

- **Annual Meetings And Other Events (N = 26)**
 - Conference wide mission trips. (ID 006)
 - All the youth programs are probably the strongest connection for me, both with other adults and with youth. (ID 111)
 - Issues – oriented events and groups – like the Peace Convocation of 2003. (ID 081)
 - The Annual Meeting is a great opportunity for growth and connection. I have appreciated the clergy/spouse/partner dinner prior to the annual meeting. (ID 010)
 - Annual meetings located throughout the tri-state region and the La Foret conference center as a gathering place for the membership. (ID 032)
 - The Conference meeting and various events at La Foret. (ID 050)
 - The Conference Annual Meeting helps me experience the faith, fellowship and diversity of the Conference as a whole... (ID 104)
 - A few of the Annual Meetings of the Conference that were not merely “rubbers stamp” operations but were organized to allow real input from delegates. (ID 081)
- **Camps (N = 19)**
 - La Foret is the main thing that keeps us connected to the conference. (ID 003)
 - ...Camp La Foret, various youth activities. (ID 028)
 - Outdoors retreats at La Foret. (ID 051)
 - La Foret retreat center – connecting age and interest groups throughout region. (ID 057)
 - I have an ardent love for La Foret, and connect with individuals throughout the Conference. (ID 136)
 - About the only time I feel “connected” to the RMC is at La Foret events. (ID 137)
 - Attending contemplative camp at La Foret. (ID 139)

9B. Classes and Workshops (N = 26)

- ...all church events like Worship Alive, Education Alive, Spirit Alive...(ID 011)
- Tom Rehling's program on effective church growth was good (I assisted in leadership at one of those). Events like Spirit Alive! that the Faith and Nurture Committee is sponsoring helps. (ID 066)
- ... those rare workshops for clergy and congregations. (ID 024)
- ... workshops and training, Worship Alive, Education Alive, Spirit Alive. (ID 051)
- The “Fish Philosophy” seminar (ID 053)
- The Annual Jan-Feb workshops for laity and pastors. (ID 126)
- The CE team which consistently is willing to visit and help. (ID 139)

- Stewardship and boundary training (ID133)

9C. Service (N = 21)

- I serve on the Board and its executive committee. I have enjoyed such involvement very much. It has been working with excellent leadership through a very distressing year that I have seen unparalleled commitment and faithfulness. While I would not want to repeat the past year, I remain grateful for those who helped to lead us during that difficult time. I believe I was able to contribute to the positive outcome we are now beginning to see. In that regard I am beginning to renew my faith in the voice of the UCC. (ID 002)
- ...serving on the Board of Directors and Conference committees have helped me feel connected. (ID 011)
- Mission committee, Board of Directors. (ID 034)
- ...those times when serving as a Conference officer or serving on a Conference committee. (ID 024)
- Committee on ministry. (ID 062)
- Participation in RMC leadership. (ID 095)
- Global partners program. (ID 032)
- Programs which help provide housing for low income families. Programs which help organize, educate, and put into practice restorative justice actions. (ID 048)
- I enjoy preaching, teaching, and doing workshops in churches all over the conference. I also enjoy doing workshops for the Conference at Conference meetings and in the Associations. (ID 062)
- My participation in the Peace and Justice Task Force of the Conference connects me to the prophetic and activist heritage of the UCC. (ID 104)

9D. Association Events And Meetings (N = 20)

- Wyoming Association. (ID 040)
- Northeast Association clergy cluster. (ID 122)
- The clergy cluster which meets in Wyoming – East side. (ID 139)
- The clergy cluster in our Association. (ID 050)
- The Association and its events are valuable to me. I appreciate the two official business meetings every year and the many other events (ecclesiastical councils, ordinations, and installations as well). (ID 064)
- EC's (ecclesiastical councils). (ID 078)
- Our Association meetings have been helpful – and we are having more this year than normal. (ID 111)

9E. Clergy Clusters (N = 16)

- Clergy cluster groups with various degrees of success. (ID 028)
- Participation in monthly meetings of an Association clergy cluster. ...in Association Committee and ecclesiastical councils.. (ID 030)
- Clergy Gatherings (ID 058)
- The clergy cluster that meets monthly helps me stay connected. (ID 111)
- Clergy Gatherings (though I usually am not able to attend because of distance). (ID126)

9F. Communication (N = 15)

- “Reflections” helps a lot, even though we don’t copy and distribute the selection every week. (ID 003)
- The UCC News. (ID 040)
- Getting the UCC news. (ID 066)
- The mailings have been helpful in worship and/or program. (ID 031)
- The United Church News, mailings from the RMC. (ID 033)
- The Conference web site and Emails directed to Conference officials. The Conference insert in the national newspaper is great also. (ID 051)
- Email, phone calls, packets (ID 076)
- Newsletters and monthly mailings, Email, telephone conversations. (ID 126)

9G. Ordinations and Installations (N = 12)

- Ordinations and installations help us connect, at least because those are the only events that bring many clergy together. (ID 010)
- Association events including ordination councils and services... (ID 028)
- I am an installation and ordination junkie (ID 080)

9H. Contact with Conference Staff (N = 11)

- Clairnel and Tom have both helped us feel connected through their phone calls, visits, and emails. (ID 003)
- Friendship with leaders. (ID 031)
- I have always found the Rocky Mountain Conference’s staff both courteous and helpful. ... In particular, I have found Rev. Tom Rehling to be both helpful and insightful. (ID 053)
- Conference staff visiting local churches. (ID 058)
- Staff presence at Association Meeting (ID 073)

Joys and Sorrows

- **Sorrows**
 - I wish there would be more community activism events at which an RMC delegation formed (ID 006)
 - Right now, none. We are geographically isolated. I hope that we will have ways to be connected (more than just annual meeting). (ID 022)
 - From my several years as a clergyperson, I would expect the Conference Office to be a home to visit regularly as I have done during my past. I have never been to the RMC Conference office have not felt welcomed. (ID 032)
 - Other spiritual activities – like Spirit Alive, Worship Alive, Leadership Alive – are always in the front range and often scheduled in time frames that make it difficult or impossible to attend. (ID 039)
 - Most [Annual] meetings are turned into nothing more than “rubber stamp” operations by the Conference leadership. (ID 081)
 - ... United Church News (wish every family in the Conference got it – its free!) Wish our local church felt more connected. We don’t even have get the denominational bulletin anymore, which had broadening mission messages on the back (OCWM education). (ID 123)

- Despite mixed feelings about the Conference’s effectiveness, I respect and love the people on Conference committees and the Conference staff. And I feel for folk caught up in real tough situations which I, as a “systems” person, recognize are so beyond their personal making. (ID 136)
- About the only time I feel connected to the RMC is at La Foret events. Other than that, it has little or no relevance to my life or to my ministry. And that’s okay. I don’t NEED for it to be otherwise. And I CERTAINLY don’t need to go to the Annual Meetings of the RMC anymore. Those have usually been pathetic and embarrassing. (ID 137)

Suggestions/Hopes

- Annual Meeting... Each meeting needs a real moment of generating spiritual enthusiasm and a sense of strength as a liberal denomination. Have an enthusiastic preacher to keynote the meeting. (ID 054)
- When I first became a seminarian and then clergy, we used to have two or three valuable clergy retreats, Conference-wide, every year. We would have outstanding speakers or interesting discussion programs that helped all Conference clergy intellectually and spiritually as well as socially. We all got to know and appreciate each other; and out of those acquaintanceships grew other events that we designed on our own. We all became more vital in our ministry because of that enrichment. (ID 064)
- It might be nice to have some education opportunities for clergy and laity at the meeting – something in the way of lectures from Iliff or CUE professors. Tom had a group that gathered for a while and shared contemporary worship ideas. It was helpful. (ID 069)
- Things I might add: Conference-wide clergy on-line lectionary discussions, more clergy time together at annual meeting, featuring individual churches at Annual Meeting with several churches having displays, skits, reports etc. at each meeting. (ID 100)

Summary Findings and Conclusions

What events, programs, or groups help members feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference beyond their local church?

Similarities and Differences Between Laity and Clergy

THEMES*	
LAITY (N = 69)	CLERGY (N = 72)
A. Conference Events (61%) - Annual Meeting (45%) - Camps (38%)	A. Conference Events (65%) - Annual Meetings and Other Events (36%) - Camps (26%)
B. Association Events/Meetings (22%)	B. Classes and Workshops (36%)
C. Communication (19%)	C. Service (29%)
D. Don't Know/Nothing/No Response (19%)	D. Association Events And Meetings (28%)
E. Service (17%)	E. Clergy Clusters (22%)
F. Contact with Conference Staff (13%)	F. Communication (21%)
G. Classes and Workshops (13%)	G. Ordinations and Installations (17%)
H. Fellowship and Celebrations (10%)	H. Contact with Conference Staff (15%)

*Percentages add to more than 100% because people submitted multiple responses.

Both laity and clergy report that their strongest connection to the Conference comes through participating in Conference-wide events (laity 61%, clergy, 65%), including the Annual Meeting (laity 45%) and camps (laity 38%, clergy 26%).

Many laity comments express satisfaction with Annual Meetings both because of their interactions with others there, and because Annual Meeting is where they learn about National events. However, some also comment that not many of the benefits get back to their congregations. For clergy, Conference events include not only Annual Meetings but also events such as Conference-wide mission trips, youth programs, and issues-focused events (36%). Both laity and clergy speak with joy of their connections and memories associated primarily with La Foret, although laity also mention their connection to Conference through MADD and through National youth camps.

Among laity, the next most frequently mentioned connection to the Conference is through general Association meetings (laity 22%, clergy 28%). Although clergy feel more connected to Conference through classes and workshops (laity 13%, clergy 36%), and through service (see below) than through Association meetings, clergy responses indicate that they gain connection to Conference through a greater variety of Association events than do laity, including clergy clusters, ecclesiastical councils, and ordinations.

The second strongest connection to Conference for clergy (laity 13%, clergy 36%) is through classes and workshops. Both groups mentioned the Alive series of workshops, however clergy also identify other workshops, including those on church growth, the Fish Philosophy seminar, stewardship and boundary training.

Service helps both clergy and laity feel more connected to Conference, but more for clergy (29%) than for laity (17%). For clergy, service appears to include not only their own work on Boards and committees but also the existence of programs—such as, Global Partners, programs providing housing for low income family, and restorative justice actions going on in the Conference. Laity mention feeling more connection to Conference both through their own service as well as from the service of others, such as their local minister.

Other vehicles for helping both laity and clergy feel connected with the Conference beyond their local church include Communication and Contact with Conference Staff. Communication responses (laity 19% and clergy 21%) mention primarily different inserts and publications such as in “Reflections,” the RMC Newsletter, and reporting back by representatives to the Conference. Clergy also mention calls, emails, and a packet from the Conference. Contact with Conference Staff (laity 13%, clergy 15%) consists for laity primarily of visits to churches. For clergy, contact includes more personal contacts and assistance from Conference staff. Clergy (22%) also value clergy clusters as a source of connection with the greater Conference.

Clergy (17%) enjoy greater connection by attending celebratory events such as ordinations and installations, and a few lay participants (10%) mention that they too experience greater connection by attending not only installations but also events at other UCC churches.

Nineteen percent of laity either did not answer this question, said that they did not know, or that there was nothing they could think of that helped them to feel more connected to the Conference beyond their local church.

Conclusions: Overwhelmingly, what helps members feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference beyond their local church is almost any event, program or group meeting because these are where people come together with others in the Conference. The few responses that did not involve opportunities for face-to-face interactions dealt with reading about what others are doing or feeling connected to Conference through the programs and service of others.

In this assessment, members of the RMC have said they feel joyful in being part of the Conference because they value, after the Theology and Values, the people/community, and the Conference events and programs. They have also indicated that if they could have anything from the Conference, without limitations of time or cost, they would ask for closer connections (laity 42%, clergy 33%). What helps people feel more connected to the Conference beyond their local church is their joyful experience of being in community – serving, praying, learning, and playing with people holding similar values.

VII. FOCUS GROUPS: DETAILED FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A focus group process was designed to give people an opportunity to provide input in person as well as on the questionnaire. Connection Partners, Inc. designed the focus group questions to confirm or challenge information gained through the questionnaire responses as well as to clarify and deepen our understanding by asking different questions than were asked on the questionnaire.

The initials presented in parentheses below refer to the focus group location or locations from which the response was generated as follows:

- CS = Colorado Springs
- GJ = Grand Junction
- G = Greeley
- SLC = Salt Lake City

Throughout Section VII., where responses from different focus groups are similar, they are combined and all location codes are presented. Similar responses coming from the most focus groups are listed first, followed by the next most frequently mentioned responses, with those made in only one focus group listed last.

For more information about Focus Group Design, Process, or Analysis, see relevant paragraphs in Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

What can we do as a Conference together to enhance and invigorate church life?

On the questionnaire, clergy and laity were asked what they would ask for from the Conference if they could have anything without limitation of time or cost. In the focus groups, clergy and laity are asked here to focus on what specifically would enhance and invigorate their church life. Additionally, the context is shifted from one of no limitations (as asked on the questionnaire), to one of enhancing and invigorating church life "...as a Conference together." Responses to the question are grouped as follows:

- **Communication**
 - Create means and have regular two-way communication between local churches and the Conference, an on-going dialogue (GJ, G)
 - Communicate the business of the Conference, directly and deliberately; communicate about what is happening in the greater Conference (CS, SLC)
 - Put information on the Conference website and let people know what's there (e.g., we can download music legally from the website) (G)
 - Communication with those who do not have computers (SLC)
 - Emphasize and make known the finances, for example of La Foret; talk about Conference resources – what we have, what we need (G)
- **Connection**
 - Proactive Conference leadership – initiate visits even when there is no crisis; more visits for personal connection. (GJ, G)
 - Connect the church with the greater Conference; More joint gatherings; larger church worship opportunities. (SLC, CS)

- More involvement; get more people involved; more laity-to-laity interactions; cross-pollination among congregations, whole congregations, youth involvement (SLC, G)
- Conference “show up:” answer telephone calls; more personal outreach and connection (GJ)
- We need to get together; we need to overcome being Lone Rangers and develop shared ownership (CS)
- When people travel to worship, home host to promote interactions (G)
- Create “sister churches” and combine seed money for innovative projects (G)
- Open churches for meetings of people from other churches (G)

- **Leadership**
 - Strong leadership from the Conference Minister; present a clearly articulated identity to the church community (G)
 - The Conference lead a process to identify what UCC stands for; move from a local perspective to a “corporate” perspective and process (GJ)
 - Move from a Conference that is Denver- and Front Range-centered to one that is entire Conference-centered, such as making participation more inclusive by moving meeting locations throughout the conference (GJ)
 - Creative leadership for smaller churches; base leadership on an expanded mindset and model of leadership that is appropriate for different size churches and different situations; for example: large urban, small rural churches (GJ)
 - Cross pollinate; share wisdom of leadership models from different churches (GJ)
 - Honor covenants by implementing and aligning practice with theory (GJ)
 - Create a structure that reflects spiritual values (CS)
 - Have clear planning and direction (CS)
 - Have the Conference be the voice of the liberal church and share the message with local churches so they don’t have to create their own message from scratch (CS)
 - Pay prompt attention to the business side of UCC (CS)
 - Attract diverse members and remind members of what is important about membership (SLC)

- **Spirituality**
 - Commitment to make life in the church a high priority; broader participation other than Sunday Service (SLC)
 - Focus on spirituality and faith development (CS)
 - Get Conference staff that is ministerial as well as administrative (CS)
 - Be a counselor to the flock of pastors, for example through yearly visits by council; proactively catch problems before they get out of hand; Have a pastor or chaplain for each Association (GJ)
 - Provide and share a variety of worship ideas, such as: liturgy, music, training events, meetings (G)
 - Workshops: Development of Spirituality (G)
 - Teach our youth; they are our future (G)

- **Support**

- Create a crisis team; provide crisis help from the Conference whereby churches go to other churches to help. (CS, G)
 - Help people see that they have responsibility to support the Conference as well as the Conference supporting the members (GJ)
 - Enhance the placement services (CS)
 - Conference leadership and staff become active participants in clergy clusters (GJ)
 - Conference level expertise for programs (G)
 - Opportunities for clergy to grow and to gain a sense of collegiality, for example coming together to hear great speakers (G)
 - Help church know how to grow, teach about useful resources for growth such as Percept (software owned by the Conference), Evangelism Institutes, Linktolead.com (provides resources such as access to demographics in the community so local churches can target their efforts) (G)
 - Acknowledge Peace and Justice work; recognize as legitimate and support with resources and attention. (G)
- **Programs**
 - Have programs for young adults, college age (CS)
 - Maintain camping programs (CS)
 - More Spirit Alive and Alive Series (CS)
 - Workshops; Share locally developed programs (CS)
 - Christian Education for Sunday School (G)
 - Take workshops to the people; video tape workshops as a way to get education to more people; create and offer workshops that are easy to travel to for an evening; not overnight, and not solely on the Internet (G)
 - Train lay people to go with the “road show” (G)
 - Train people in each Association to run workshops in Stewardship, provide resources with seed money from National. (G)

Summary Findings and Conclusions:

What can we do as a Conference together to enhance and invigorate church life?

On the questionnaire, clergy and laity were asked what they would ask for from the Conference if they could have anything without limitation of time or cost. In the focus groups, clergy and laity are asked here to focus on what specifically would enhance and invigorate their church life. Additionally, the context is shifted from one of no limitations (as asked on the questionnaire), to one of enhancing and invigorating church life “...as a Conference together.”

Responses generated to this question group into almost all of the same themes as what clergy and laity say on the questionnaire that they would ask for if they could have anything without limitation of time or cost.

Participants in all four of the focus groups agreed that their church lives would be enhanced and invigorated by

- **Connection**
- **Communication**
- **Leadership**
- **Spirituality**

Three of the focus groups include:

- **Support**

Two of the focus groups include:

- **Programs**

Laity and clergy seek a greater sense of community, including both social interactions and the cross-pollination of ideas and learning from each other. The majority of comments categorized under Connection as well as under Communication, Leadership, and Spirituality ask for ways to exchange ideas among member churches, and even from outside the Conference, about how others lead, how others enhance spiritual development, and to mutually benefit from program development of others.

As heard in questionnaire responses, laity and clergy believe that one way to enhance their church life is to develop strong communication loops. In focus groups, people say they want to know what is going on in the greater Conference, and honest communication about Conference finances and other resources. They want to maintain on-going dialogue between the local churches and the Conference, and to know what each needs from the other.

Focus group comments about Leadership convey a clear and strong desire for Conference leadership to articulate and live what the Conference UCC is about. Comments such as, “identify what the Conference stands for,” “. . .move from a local perspective to a ‘corporate’ perspective and process,” “have the Conference be the voice of the liberal church and share the message with local churches so they don’t have to create their own message from scratch,” “we need to get together; we need to overcome being Lone Rangers and develop shared ownership.” “be the voice of the liberal church,” and “remind members about what is important about membership” ask for a clear identity that draws people together.

Additionally, comments such as “clear planning and direction,” “honor covenants by implementing and aligning practice with theory,” and – (under Spirituality) – “be a counselor to the flock of pastors. . .have a pastor or chaplain for each Association,” and “get Conference staff that is ministerial as well as administrative” convey that clergy and laity believe their church lives would be enhanced by a Conference leadership and structure that are aligned and reflect the RMC UCC spiritual values.

Unlike questionnaire responses, focus group participants asked minimally for financial resources, emphasizing instead making people and programs more widely available. Doing more with less can be gleaned from comments such as: “provide crisis help from the Conference whereby churches go to other churches to help,” “Opportunities for clergy to grow and to gain a sense of collegiality, for example coming together to hear great speakers,” “. . .teach about useful resources for growth such as Percept. . .so local churches can target their efforts,” “train people in each Association to run

workshops...” “...share a variety of worship ideas...” and “...video tape workshops as a way to get education to more people; create and offer workshops that are easy to travel to for an evening...”

Conclusions: Clergy and laity need community, connection, and cohesion for their church lives to be enhanced and invigorated. They want leadership to articulate a clear, unifying identity reflecting shared spiritual values of the Conference. They desire opportunities for personal interactions; and communication processes and systems that enable them to be connected to each other and to give input into what is going on in the larger Conference.

For information about Focus Group Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

Given the realities of the current Conference resources, how would clergy and laity prioritize the top two needs of those identified by questionnaire respondents?

On the questionnaire, clergy and laity were asked what they would ask for from the Conference if they could have anything without limitations of time or cost. The responses were grouped into seven themes that reflect what clergy and laity say they need from the Conference (see the far left column below). The list of needs with brief explanations was presented to focus group participants who were then asked to work in small groups to discuss which needs were most important to them, and why.

Next, participants were each given two “votes” and asked to individually “vote” for their top two priorities based on current realities of the Conference’s available resources. We then averaged the rankings for each individual need across all focus groups by adding the three or four rankings for a particular need and dividing by the number of focus groups (i.e., three or four) in which participants “voted” for the item.

The ranked priorities for each of the four focus groups are shown in the four middle columns below. The average rankings for each need across the focus groups is shown from highest to lowest in the column to the far right in the table below, where possible rankings could range from 1 = highest (i.e., if all four groups had ranked the need as a 1) to 7 = lowest (i.e., if all four groups had ranked the need as a 7):

NEEDS IDENTIFIED BY QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS	RANKED PRIORITIES WITHIN EACH FOCUS GROUP (1 = HIGHEST; 7 = LOWEST)				RANKINGS AVERAGED ACROSS FOCUS GROUPS (2.1 = HIGHEST TO 6.5 = LOWEST)
	SALT LAKE CITY	GRAND JUNCTION	COLORADO SPRINGS	GREELEY	
Closer Connection	1	1	3.5	3.0	2.1
Spiritual Renewal	2.5	4	1.5	1.0	2.3
Leadership	0	2	1.5	4.5	2.7
Invigorating Local Churches	0	3	6.0	2.0	3.7
Communications	4	5.5	3.5	4.5	4.4
Resources/Support	2.5	5.5	6.0	6.5	5.1
On-going Education and Development	0	7	6.0	6.5	6.5

Summary Findings and Conclusions:

Given the realities of the current Conference resources, how would clergy and laity prioritize the top two needs of those identified by questionnaire respondents?

In response to the questionnaire, clergy and laity said what they would ask for from the Conference if they could have anything without limitations of time or cost. We grouped their responses into seven themes. The themes, shown below, represent unmet needs of laity and clergy.

Focus group participants discussed the identified needs and were then asked to decide their top two priorities based on current realities of the Conference's available resources. Results averaged across focus groups reveal that needs for closer connection, spiritual renewal, and leadership are the most important issues for Conference to address.

Prioritized Clergy and Laity Needs:	Rankings Averaged Across Focus Groups (Highest To Lowest)*
1. Closer Connection	2.1
2. Spiritual Renewal	2.3
3. Leadership	2.7
4. Invigorating Local Churches	3.7
5. Communications	4.4
6. Resources/Support	5.1
7. On-going Education and Development	6.5

*Possible rankings could range from 1 = highest (i.e., if all four groups had ranked the need as a 1) to 7 = lowest (i.e., if all four groups had ranked the need as a 7).

Conclusions: In response to multiple questions on this assessment, laity and clergy strongly express that they want the Conference to provide them with opportunities for closer connection and changes in leadership. Laity and clergy desire for spiritual renewal is expressed more gently in multiple ways.

Members love the theology and values of the Conference, and feel joyful from the spirituality as well as the open and affirming policies and stands on peace and social justice. However, the Conference identity appears to be divorced from spirituality. Physical entities (i.e., geography and churches) are much more likely to come to members' minds before theology and values, including spirituality, when members think of the Rocky Mountain Conference.

Across the assessment, participants express that they want the Conference to be a spiritual entity rather than an organizational entity. They want leadership to articulate an inspiring vision and identity. They ask for spiritual retreats and resources for spiritual programs, youth ministers to help

draw and engage younger members, for pastors who serve as spiritual guides and support for ministers, and for leadership to hold themselves and clergy accountable for alignment between their spiritual beliefs and their actions.

Laitly and clergy want a nurturing, spiritual Conference that fosters connections with one another.

Because approximately 25% of both laity and clergy said, in responses to the questionnaire, that they would ask for leadership if they could have anything from the Conference without limitation of time or cost, focus group participants were asked a series of three questions about leadership. The purpose of this set of questions is to clarify what the churches and members envision for Conference leadership:

- What observable changes in the Conference participants expect to occur if the Conference has “great” leadership
- What participants think the ideal Conference leadership structure is
- What leadership at different levels of the Conference could support the Conference in order to enable the Conference to better meet church and member needs.

Summary Findings and Conclusions are presented following the responses to the third question in this series.

For more information about Focus Group Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

If the RMC UCC develops a ‘great’ leader or leadership team, how will members recognize when the RMC UCC has this leadership?

This purpose of this first question is to identify what observable changes in the Conference participants expect to occur if the Conference has “great” leadership:

- **Throughout the Conference**
 - Major spiritual mentoring of ministers and lay people; everyone’s concerns would be met; leadership is pastoral, caring for clergy and others and therefore people express caring and feel cared for (CS, G)
 - We have more communication in all forms; a multi-model communication system (GJ, CS)
 - We would draw large participation and greater lay involvement; more attendance at meeting, more volunteering, more producing programs, more growth, more money (CS, G)
 - Churches are thriving, healthy, and spiritual (GJ)
 - Spiritual renewal has happened; we have a sense of Spirit with us when we are gathered; workshop is Spirit centered, and leadership leads processes to enhance (G)
 - Every person would feel loved and valued by the Conference, feel connected to the Conference and would feel heart-connection within the Conference (GJ)
 - Conference Minister gives leadership when people are hurting so people will pray and really support each other (G)
 - We would have open communication of the good and the bad, what worked and what didn’t work (CS)
 - We would hire youth ministers who energize local churches (CS)
 - Lively Annual Meetings (CS)
 - We would have “healthy” clergy who are energetic and initiate fresh ideas; the Conference would look like a healthy church (CS)

- More OCWM funds going to National (CS)
- **Extending Outside the Conference**
 - Clear outreach for clergy recruiting (CS)
 - More clergy from outside of the Conference want to come here (CS)
- **Criteria for Great Leadership: Characteristics, Behaviors, Attitudes**
 - Leaders live God, not just talk about God; love the church, the faith, the people, and God; passionate spirituality (SLC, GJ)
 - Leadership is ethical: not addicted to substances, sex, or power; has integrity with alignment in words and actions, means and ends (SLC, GJ)
 - Non-hierarchical teamwork; there is leadership teamwork – egos are set aside, no one is a “Star,” all are pulling the weight (SLC, GJ,)
 - Leaders encourage others to be great leaders; empower others; (SLC, GJ)
 - Leadership is present and confident, has administrative and organization skills, has conflict management skills to manage conflicts in churches and in the Conference office; conflicts are resolved and resolution is reflected in follow-up feedback and lower turn over (SLC, G)
 - Leaders are caring; demonstrate compassion, empathy; are respectful; are open, intentionally focused, and generous of spirit (SLC)
 - Listen; hold two-way conversations; dialogues, not monologs (SLC)
 - Leaders take initiative, prime the pump with new ideas rather than just asking for ideas (GJ)
 - Leadership remembers who I am (GJ)
 - Leadership has connections to National in order to serve the RMC and the local churches well (GJ)
 - Leadership has the ability to raise money (GJ)
 - Conference leadership has leadership experience in the local church (GJ)
 - Leadership is affirmed by the community in which they lead (SLC)
 - Establishes measurable goals and is accountable for meeting them (CS)
 - Has a depth of expertise, and comes prepared (SLC)
 - Leadership has vision and can motivate people to attain; leadership takes input from this assessment and develops a clearly articulated vision, and works throughout the Conference to gain buy-in (G)
 - Project vision; good communication skills (SLC)

Summary and Conclusions are presented following the responses to the third question in this series.

What would an ideal leader or leadership team look like for RMC?

The purpose of this question is to clarify what participants think the ideal Conference leadership structure is:

- **Diverse Team**
 - Variety of ages and gender and other demographics (GJ, CS)
 - Leadership is a team with a diversity of skills to address different problems, for example: finance, technology, able to facilitate visioning processes, legal knowledge,

- problem solving skills, able to discern what the problem is from the symptoms of the problem; multiple expertise (GJ, SLC)
 - Leadership has a balance of spiritual and administrative skills; vision, organization and administrative skills, pastoral (CS; G)
 - High team integrity (SLC)
 - Leader(s) are spiritual and visionary, and have a sense of humor (G)
 - Staff and lay ministers from throughout the conference serve on the leadership team as needed (e.g., attorney, finance people) to participate and engage in resolving problems) (GJ)
 - Resources are drawn and recruited from within the Conference (CS)
 - Image of the Leadership Team: A wheel with Leadership in the center, and spokes representing leadership strengths (e.g., finance skills, problem solving skills, etc.) to deal with different problems (represented by cracks in some spokes), and the spokes or strengths change to balance and support the wheel as needed (GJ)
 - Adapts skills needed to situations that arise (CS)
- **Cohesive Team**
 - No hierarchy; team may consist of ordained ministers, licensed people, and secretaries; peer, collegial, equality (GJ, SLC)
 - The team is a working unit, such as co-Conference Ministers dispersed across the geographical area (GJ)
 - All are strong individuals who can work as a team – all can lead when needed and each accepts the strengths of the others without feeling threatened (G)
 - Focus on the greater good, not on self-aggrandizement (G)
 - Good communication among the staff/team (G)
- **Team Actions**
 - Accessible and responsive; personal connection (G, SLC)
 - Empowers other leadership teams; draw out and engage and develop gifts in others (GJ, G)
 - Begin everything in prayer, perhaps study scripture together (GJ)
 - Lead by example (G)
 - Looks ahead (GJ)
 - Decide what needs to be done by staff (CS)
 - Looks at other churches (GJ)
 - Functions, in part, as a Response Team, e.g., as consultants (GJ)
 - Recruits retired clergy as resources, within pension guidelines (CS)
 - Frequent, regular contact – not crisis based (SLC)
 - Available for consultation and collaboration (SLC)

Summary Findings and Conclusions are presented following the responses to the third question in this series.

What contribution to leadership needs to come from individual churches (laity and clergy)? From Associations (boards and committees)? From the Conference (boards, committees, staff)?

The purpose of this question is to identify what leadership at different levels of the Conference could support the Conference in order to enable the Conference to better meet church and member needs.

Responses are grouped by frequency of mention across focus groups.

- **From individual churches (laity and clergy)**
 - Money (GJ; CS, G, SLC)
 - Giving financial support to Conference, to OCWM; tithing (CS, G, SLC)
 - Volunteer talent and time for specific purposes; committed lay and clergy volunteers for Conference boards, committees, programs; leaders for Association and Conference work (GJ, CS, G)
 - Ideas; share ideas to the Conference; include Conference leadership in communications (GJ, CS, G)
 - Prayers; prayers for discernment, staff (GJ, G)
 - Responsibly handling communication so it is two ways; disperse information received from other levels – with enthusiasm! (GJ, G)
 - Make room for report backs and feed backs in services, committee meetings (GJ, SLC)
 - Energy, enthusiasm; People ready to risk their time and money on new ideas (CS, GJ)
 - Taping, sharing expertise of members/staff with Conference; share what has been successful in their church (CS, G)
 - “I am part of it – my thoughts and ideas are important;” Conference isn’t “them” but “us” (GJ, G)
 - “Pastoral care” – let leadership know they’re cared for; support; commitment to the leadership (GJ)
 - Clergy become more aware of the importance of Conference, such as why it is important for people to serve on Conference committees, and that people benefit from growth (SLC)
 - Frequent communication (GJ)
 - Champions for Conference in local churches (CS)
 - Call on leadership as resources for growth (G)
 - Participate in events (CS)
 - Help with visioning (GJ)
 - Knowledge and understanding of what it means to be church (G)
 - Willingness to travel (GJ)
 - Spiritual Renewal. Healthy clergy and churches need conference less, and contribute rather than suck resources (CS)
 - Structural leadership; build separate corporations with Mission Partners (CS)

- **From Associations (boards and committees)**

- Active participation; encourage others to join committees, etc.; Recruit for boards and committees and model for other Associations (GJ, G, SLC)
- More visible involvement, such as youth gatherings; travel to churches; more meetings – “revivals” to strengthen Utah and Wyoming Associations (CS, G, SLC)
- Prayer (GJ, G)
- Spiritual renewal; clergy clusters ; Care and nurturing of clergy and churches (CS, SLC)
- Good Church and Ministry Committees (CS, G)
- Share information; interchurch communication (GJ, CS)
- Develop new leaders within new clergy; limit retired role; identify and develop new leadership; recommend people to move up to Conference Level; be a training ground for leaders (CS, G)
- Help with “special efforts” (e.g., OCWM shortfall, UCC Identity campaign); financial and spiritual support (GJ, CS)
- Be an avenue for training programs, e.g., Response Team training, Stewardship Workshop, Spirit Alive; Establish and maintain clergy standards, such as Boundary Training, Communication Skills (CS, G)
- Take a leadership role; become a buffer between the church and the Conference; Build unity as a family in Association; create a spirit of cooperation rather than of competition (G)
- Develop strategies to implement Conference goals (unique to Association or Board) (G)
- Make our needs known; don’t expect RMC to be mid-readers (GJ)
- Identify talents and energies available to the Conference; know the gifts and skills in the Association (GJ)
- Have flexible schedules; stagger meetings so they don’t all occur on the same date in order for people to participate (GJ)
- Geographical configurations for Associations, rather than by state (SLC)
- Mentoring could come through Associations, including retired clergy involvement. Would need to be formalized. (CS)
- Healthy Associations function without need of Conference Staff (CS)

- **From the Conference (boards, committees, staff)**

- Articulate the vision; set priorities; vision; overall plan/goals – what has to happen (CS, G)
- Ideas, visions, possibilities, programming initiatives; inspiration for teams/committees (GJ, CS)
- Understand gifts available as resources for work; Volunteer talents – let us know specific gifts and skills (G, GJ)
- Schedule meetings so people can participate; hold more gathering events in addition to the Annual Meeting (GJ, SLC)
- Support – not just money; boards and staff need to have presence (GJ, SLC)
- Communication information from National to local churches (CS, G)
- Prayer (GJ)

- The secretary is vital to good functioning of leadership. The secretary needs to be: knowledgeable, people-oriented, able to field questions, an effective gatekeeper for the Conference Minister, and to have a clear spiritual vision of the UCC (GJ)
- Spirit of the church in the staff (G)
- Financial support (G)
- Pay leadership good money (GJ)
- Ask for specific help for specific tasks, not just endless board meetings (GJ)
- Periodic clergy review (SLC)
- Celebrations (SLC)
- Coordinate camping programs and the Annual Meeting, and Conference-wide events (CS)
- Willingness to travel (GJ)
- Administrative tasks: records / communication; clearing house function, no committees, no boards (CS)
- Thinking outside the box (GJ)
- Help with placement and recruiting of clergy, empty churches, churches with problems and crises (CS)
- Speak out on issues of peace, justice; advocacy (CS)
- Orchestrate (direct) what works at all levels within the Conference; ownership of Conference work-team; organization, participation and carry-through (G)
- Pastoral care and support for clergy (CS)
- Response team training and management (CS)
- Youth minister – support local youth pastors, events, gatherings (CS)

Summary Findings and Conclusions:

Because approximately 25% of both laity and clergy said, in responses to the questionnaire, that they would ask for leadership if they could have anything from the Conference without limitation of time or cost, focus group participants were asked a series of three questions about leadership. The purpose of this set of questions is to clarify what the churches and members envision for Conference leadership:

- What observable changes in the Conference participants expect to occur if the Conference has “great” leadership
- What participants think the ideal Conference leadership structure is
- What leadership at different levels of the Conference could support the Conference in order to enable the Conference to better meet church and member needs.

If the RMC UCC develops a “great” leader or leadership team, how will members recognize when the RMC UCC has this leadership?

Participants believe that the recognizable impact of “great” leadership is that clergy and churches throughout the Conference will be healthy and flourish. Churches will grow and members will contribute financially and actively engage. Spiritual mentoring of ministers and laity will be the norm, as will caring and open communication. More clergy from outside the Conference will be drawn to the RMC.

In addition, focus group participants describe great Conference leadership as having many characteristics, including: a passionate spirituality, demonstrating compassion, empowering others, and having high integrity and ethics. Leadership skills include: establishes measurable goals and is accountable for meeting them, communicates a vision and motivates people to attain it, good listening skills, and conflict management skills. Experience includes: leadership experience in the local church, and connections to National in order to serve the RMC.

Conclusions: Clergy and laity have high hopes for what their envisioned leadership can accomplish. People in the Conference will need a clear understanding of what realistic short- and long-term impact can be expected from any leadership changes. It will be important to set achievable goals, focus activities, and define what observable, measurable changes are anticipated as a result of targeted efforts, and by when.

The list of identified leadership characteristics, skills, and experience can be refined and used to develop and to select leaders who will meet the needs of the Conference.

What would an ideal leader or leadership team look like for RMC?

Laity and clergy participating in the focus groups believe that ideal leadership for the Conference consists of a spiritually-based, non-hierarchical, cohesive, diverse team reflecting the demographic makeup of the Conference. The team is comprised of people from across the geographic area who possess a variety of skills and gifts needed for identifying and addressing different problems and issues. Some serve on the leadership team in more limited ways when needed (e.g., attorneys, finance experts).

Each member of the team is committed to the good of the Conference and leads by example. The team members are accessible and responsive, empower others, and look for positive examples of how other churches have successfully addressed issues similar to those in the Conference.

Conclusions: The ideal Conference leadership proposed by focus group participants recognizes that a team is likely to be needed to provide the range of skills and expertise required to address the issues and needs of the Conference.

What contribution to leadership needs to come from individual churches (laity and clergy)? From Associations (boards and committees)? From the Conference (boards, committees, staff)?

Most focus group participants expressed surprise at this question and revealed that they were not used to thinking about what leadership individual churches and Associations could provide in order to support the Conference. Instead, they had habitually looked to the Conference as the problem solver and provider.

All focus groups see opportunities for leadership coming from individual churches (laity and clergy) and Association boards and committees separate from leadership from the Conference. Their suggestions include:

Individual Churches: Participants recognize that laity and clergy from individual churches can give financial support, volunteer talent and time for boards, committees and programs, share ideas, take responsibility for dispersing information received from other levels from within the Conference as well as creating two-way communication, including time for report backs from committee meetings. In addition, people can share with the Conference what has been successful in their individual church, and offer prayers, support, caring and commitment to Conference leadership.

Associations: Participants suggest that Associations can become more visibly involved. Association members can travel to churches, create youth gatherings, recruit and encourage active participation on committees and boards, share information and foster interchurch communication, develop clergy to become Conference leaders, provide financial and spiritual support for “special efforts,” and offer more care and nurturing of clergy and churches.

Conference: Participants want the Conference to articulate a spiritual vision of the UCC, set goals and priorities, have a presence, offer ideas and initiatives, communicate information from National to local churches, and to know what gifts are available as resources.

Conclusions: Laity and clergy recognize many opportunities for leadership that are both spread throughout the Conference and that are mutually supportive rather than top down. This type of leadership structure promotes ownership of shared goals, spreads responsibility for achieving the goals throughout the Conference, and calls upon the Conference to articulate a spiritual vision and prioritize the goals so all members are clear about what is expected of them. In this way, each level of the Conference supports every level of the Conference, all working as part of the same team.

What would help you or your church to feel more included in Conference actions and decisions?

For information about Focus Group Analysis, see Part I. Section IV. Background and Methodology.

Clergy and laity were asked on the questionnaire to describe what helps them to feel connected to the Conference beyond their local church, as well as what makes them proud and/or joyful to be a part of the RMC UCC. Here they are asked specifically what would help them to feel more engaged in Conference actions and decisions.

- **Two-Way Communication**

- Communication of information especially from Conference to local churches and from local churches to Conference; Solicit and take input, individual feedback from church to Conference boards; Conduct surveys or membership polls, or provide other ways people can give input (CS, GJ, G, SLC)
- Have members on Conference boards and committees report back to individual churches; encouragement from Chairs of committees to report back (GJ, G, SLC)
- Use multiple methods to communicate, such as e-mail, website, person-to-person through committees, because all church mailings to ministers do not get to laity; as alternative to communication through pastors, have delegates report back directly to the church members; get all members' names and addresses on list for the free UCC newsletter; make better use of the website; keep up Conference printed communication in UCC News, Reflections, Monthly mailings (CS, G, SLC)
- Timely and clear communications from the Conference regarding what's happening; presented in various forms for easy dissemination (GJ, G)
- Feedback loop: timely follow up and/or feedback; feedback from committees (GJ, CS)
- Create a personal presence at churches – personal visits similar to “Mel Gibson on Today Show effect” (GJ, G)
- Report where OCWM money goes (CS)
- Publish Conference articles in local church newsletters (CS)
- Recruit and nurture a lay person champion for the Conference within local churches; go outside the conventional circle for someone to fill this unconventional role (CS)

- **Participation**

- Training for delegates on what's expected of them; Describe role for participation on Conference committees and include that report backs are routine (SLC, GJ)
- Active delegates to Conference (GJ)
- Strong participation on Conference Committees (SLC)
- Balance participation; invite different people not just the same people over and over (GJ)
- Shift responsibility from Conference to “corporations;” for example, set up “corporations” such as Peace and Justice so the Conference is only a clearing house (CS)

- **Uphold Our Covenants**
 - Hold churches and pastors accountable to the Covenants, for example OCWM, LaForet participation; Hold people accountable for understanding and meeting expectations (GJ, CS)
- **Spiritual Renewal**
 - Do everything from a spiritual framework (CS)
- **Other**
 - Have a satellite office in other areas, outside of Denver ()
 - Buy a Conference plane (G)

Summary Findings and Conclusions

What would help you or your church to feel more included in Conference actions and decisions?

Clergy and laity were asked on the questionnaire to describe what helps them to feel connected to the Conference beyond their local church, as well as what makes them proud and/or joyful to be a part of the RMC UCC. Here they are asked specifically what would help them to feel more engaged in Conference actions and decisions.

Clergy and laity participating in the focus group would feel more included in Conference actions and decisions by a two-way communication feedback loop process from the Conference to local churches and from local churches back to the Conference. Members want a communication process that allows churches to be heard, that allows clergy and laity to know what is going on in the Conference, including how funds are spent—particularly OCWM money—and what committees and boards are doing. This input mirrors responses to the related questions on the questionnaire.

Focus group participants suggest a number of different strategies as part of the Conference communication process, including: solicit and take input and feedback from the local church to Conference boards; conduct surveys or membership polls; have members on boards and committees report back to individual churches; and recruit and establish the role of a lay person as a Conference champion within local churches. These suggestions and the many others given point to ways to fully engage members in the Conference decisions and actions.

Three of the four focus groups say that greater participation in Conference activities is important. They recommend that an effort needs to be made to include not only more active participation but also to invite different people rather than the same people over and over. In addition, they believe it is important to train and to clarify expectations for delegates and those participating on Conference committees to report back to churches and Associations.

Participants in two of the focus groups, Grand Junction and Colorado Springs, say that upholding covenants and holding clergy and laity accountable to each other is essential if they are to feel more included in Conference actions and decisions.

For Colorado Springs participants, it is important that Conference reflect the spiritual framework or values of the RMC UCC in order to enhance their feeling connected to the decisions and actions of the Conference.

Conclusions: Feeling included in the Conference actions and decisions is the foundation for “ownership,”—that is, willingness by clergy and laity to abide by and support Conference leadership decisions and actions. Questionnaire and focus group responses convey that clergy and laity want to be more included in informing the decisions to be made. They want to be heard, and they want to be kept informed.

VIII. APPENDICES

- APPENDIX A.** Transition Task Force Moves In New Direction (Announcement of the upcoming assessment published in the RMC Reflections and included in the January 2004 Bulletin.)
- APPENDIX B.** Cover letter to parish clergy and assessment questionnaire.

APPENDIX A

Transition Task Force Moves In New Direction

The Board of Directors is aware that we are in a transitional moment in the life of the Rocky Mountain Conference. With input from the national staff of the UCC, the Board decided that taking a "business as usual" approach to finding a new conference minister was not appropriate in light of the Conference's long-term financial situation, and concerns that have been raised. The Board formed a Transitional Task Force, made up of a small group of Board members, to analyze the needs of the Rocky Mountain Conference.

The Transition Task Force, composed of six Association representatives to the Board, a youth representative, and a member of the Conference Personnel Committee, with the assistance of Acting Conference Minister Tom Rehling, decided to seek help to assess the issues we most urgently need to address to bring healing and direction to our Conference.

The Task Force met for a full day with Arlene Brownell and Tom Bache-Wiig of Connection Partners, Inc. Arlene and Tom serve as neutral third-party mediators, facilitators, and consultants.

They designed a process solicit the issues, perspectives and programs that are most important to people in our Conference. Over 500 people from around the Conference will be invited to participate. Confidentiality will be maintained with no responses linked back to individual participants.

Their process of gathering information will begin in January 2004, will involve a combination of questionnaires and focus groups, and will seek the views of the diverse perspectives within our Conference.

We believe that the work of Arlene Brownell and Tom Bache-Wiig will be of great assistance to us in this time, when we have a unique opportunity to shape the future of the United Church of Christ in our Rocky Mountain Conference. We pray that all of the churches and clergy of our Conference will participate fully, honestly and prayerfully in the transitional process of the next few months.

APPENDIX B

January 22, 2004

Dear RMC UCC Parish Minister:

We need your assistance and participation.

As you know, and as we explain on the enclosed questionnaires, we are in a transitional moment in the life of the Rocky Mountain Conference. With input from the national staff of the UCC, the Board of Directors resolved to use this time as an opportunity to assess the current state of affairs in the Rocky Mountain Conference, listen to one another, and consider our range of options for the future.

As a Transition Task Force and with the assistance of Acting Conference Minister Tom Rehling, we are working with Arlene Brownell and Tom Bache-Wiig, principals of Connection Partners, Inc., to assess the issues we most urgently need to address to bring healing and direction to our Conference. Arlene and Tom are neutral third-party mediators, facilitators, and consultants who have designed an assessment process to bring forth from Conference members, through both questionnaire and focus groups, the issues, perspectives and programs that are most important for our Conference to strengthen our collective life and ministry.

We are now beginning the first part of the assessment. Questionnaires are being distributed through Parish Clergy to lay members across churches in proportion to number of delegates to the RMC Annual Meeting. All completed questionnaires must be received by February 9th in order to be included in the assessment.

Enclosed you will find the questionnaires which we would like you to distribute immediately and no later than January 29th as follows:

- Keep one for yourself to complete
- Distribute the remaining questionnaires to laity so that we might hear from diverse range of voices in your congregation

We ask that you invite lay participants who vary not only in viewpoint but also differ in age (younger than 50 as well as 50 or older), gender (female as well as male), and length of membership (less than 5 years as well as 5 years' membership or more).

If you have questions about the assessment, please do not hesitate to contact either David Popham, Utah Association, 435-789-2575 kingsburychurch@hotmail.com; Linda Mansfield, Southeast Association, 719-574-5771, loucinda43@juno.com; or Arlene Brownell or Tom Bache-Wiig at Connection Partners, Inc., 303-449-2553, mail@connectionpartners.com.

Peace and Joy,

Transition Task Force Members

Robbie Carlson, Jerry Eslinger, Linda Mansfield, Sharyl Peterson, David Popham, Beth Robey-Hyde, Peter Sawtell, John Smith, Jean Wade, and Tom Rehling

Dear UCC Member:

We are in a transitional moment in the life of the Rocky Mountain Conference. With input from the national staff of the United Church of Christ, the Board of Directors resolved to use this time as an opportunity to assess the current state of affairs in the Rocky Mountain Conference, listen to one another, and consider our range of options for the future.

A Transition Task Force, including six Association representatives to the Board, a youth representative, and a member of the Conference Personnel Committee, with the assistance of Acting Conference Minister Tom Rehling, asked Connection Partners, Inc. to help us assess the issues we most urgently need to address in order to bring healing and direction to our Conference. We seek input that is representative of the diverse viewpoints and perspectives of the Rocky Mountain Conference Community in order to make decisions about leadership and structure that will serve the needs of, and draw together, the churches in the Rocky Mountain Conference. We invite your thoughtful and candid responses to this anonymous questionnaire. *Please note that completed questionnaires must be received by February 9, 2004.*

Questions or comments? Please contact either David Popham, Utah Association, 435-789-2575 kingsburychurch@hotmail.com, Linda Mansfield, Southeast Association, 719-574-5771, loucinda43@juno.com, or Arlene Brownell or Tom Bache-Wiig at Connection Partners, Inc., 303-449-2553, mail@connectionpartners.com.

Instructions: Please do not write your name on this questionnaire. All responses will be kept anonymous, and will be grouped. No responses will be linked either to individuals or to an individual church.

Please return your completed questionnaire according to the directions below and directly to Connection Partners, Inc. In order to meet the timeline that will allow for the assessment results to be presented at the June 2004 Annual Meeting, your responses must be received no later than February 9, 2004.

Would you be willing to electronically send us your answers to the questions? Doing so will help us read your responses more quickly and more accurately. All responses will be grouped and kept anonymous.

- **To return responses electronically:** Please number each of your responses with the same exact number of the question you are answering. Then return your completed electronic responses by February 9th directly to: survey@connectionpartners.com, with ucc survey in the e-mail subject line.
- **To return completed questionnaires by U.S. mail:** Please either type or print your responses. Then mail your completed questionnaire so it is received by February 9th to: Connection Partners, Inc., 445 Quail Circle, Boulder, CO 80304-1057.

Please limit your responses to each question to the space provided.

Begin the questionnaire on the next page →

Dear UCC Member:

Our intention is to hear from the diversity of people and geographic areas making up the Rocky Mountain Conference UCC. We will hold confidential all identifying information and will use your responses to questions 1 – 4 below to determine the diversity of input, and to group answers to questions 5 – 10. Please answer every question.

1.0 How many members in your church? Please check one:

Under 250 members Over 250 members

2.0 Which Association are you in? Please check one:

2a. Wyoming 2d. Southeastern
2b. Western 2e. Northeastern
2c. Utah 2f. Metropolitan Denver

3.0 Which of the following best describes your role? Please check one:

3a. Lay Person
3b. Parish Clergy
3c. Other Clergy (Retired, Clergy in other setting, etc.)

4.0 For Lay Persons Only . Are you: (Please check the options below that are most true for you):

4a. Under 50 years of age? 50 years of age or older?
4b. Male? Female?
4c. Member less than 5 years? Member 5 years or more?

5. What makes you proud and/or joyful in being a part of the Rocky Mountain Conference United Church of Christ?

6. When you hear or see the words, "Rocky Mountain Conference," how do you define the Rocky Mountain Conference? In other words, what or who do you think of as the Rocky Mountain Conference?

7. If you could have anything from the Rocky Mountain Conference, without limitations of time or cost, what would you ask for?

8. Was there a time when you wished the Rocky Mountain Conference was there for you? Tell us about it.

9. What events, programs, or groups help you feel connected to the Rocky Mountain Conference beyond your local church?

Thank you for taking time to answer our questions, and for helping us to best serve you and the RMC UCC. To be included in this assessment, your completed questionnaire must be received by February 9, 2004.