



# Rocky Mountain Conference

## United Church of Christ

*Inspiring, challenging, and empowering generous faith and justice communities across the West.*

Dear Sisters and Brothers of the Rocky Mountain Conference,

*I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. -- Isaiah 43:19*

For some time now here in the Rocky Mountain Conference, the words of the prophet have been resounding, helping us see and sense in many ways the “new thing” the Spirit is creating in our midst for the sake of Christ’s mission, within and beyond our region.

As we follow the Spirit’s leading, new ways of being the church together and fresh rivers of possibility present themselves. At our September 17, 2016 Board Meeting, the Rocky Mountain Conference Board of Directors unanimously agreed upon a “21<sup>st</sup> Century Leadership Model” to be put in place with our Conference staff beginning in early 2017. This letter outlines this shift and the Spirit’s guidance that has brought us to this moment.

At our 2011 Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, we embraced the importance of connection with one another as key to both local and wider church outreach and vitality; this in turn began an exciting cultural change in our Conference. We also heard calls from our western churches for more accessible Conference staff presence and support west of the Continental Divide.

Acknowledging the pace of change and the complexity of our times, the Board clearly sees that effective leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is no longer vested in one core “rock star” leader, but rather comes from a broad, connected leadership body that is empowered to act, and which is encouraged by core leaders “who are inclusive, reflective, and facilitate the ideas of others.” (Dr. Cliff Oswick, Professor of Organizational Behavior Theory).

We are also seeing that for real and radical connection to help inspire, challenge, and empower generous faith and justice communities across the West, our leadership model must be consistent with our Vision.

Our newly-forming leadership and staffing model is driven by a variety of influences—data gathered from three to five years at RMC Annual Meetings, Conference-wide Cluster Meetings, staff interviews, the UCC Strategic Vision, the RMC’s Vision Framework, along with current leadership research. We believe our model will serve us well in building a culture of collaboration, constructive interaction, and continuous learning, all of which we have been yearning, working, and praying for these last five years.



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Our model serves to move us away from the “command and control” culture so many of us are familiar with, away from isolated and separate efforts, and toward a culture where we share goals and results through collaboration and radical connection. What is especially exciting is that this new leadership plan expands and affirms the role and impact of the local church, both within each setting and across the Rocky Mountain Conference.

Now on to specifics. We have identified a staffing design of four positions that best align with our shared Vision. Working together as a core team, they will help us develop and sustain successful Conference-wide leadership for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

- **Conference Minister:** Our visionary leader is responsible for the spiritual tone and well-being of the Conference, cross-Conference collaboration on strategic direction aligned with Vision, stimulating new funding models, UCC Covenant & ecumenical liaison, and RMC fiduciary responsibilities. This position will carry a portion of the Search & Call and pastoral care workload, as well as oversight of all aspects of Conference staffing and programs. This position is full-time, called, based in Denver, and involves travel across the Conference.
- **Associate Conference Minister:** This position has a three-fold Conference-wide emphasis on 1) local church vitality, 2) lay and clergy leadership development, and 3) nurturing and extending Association effectiveness. Primary functions will also include Search & Call and pastoral care. This is a full-time, called position based west of the Front Range, with at least 50% travel throughout the Conference.
- **Director of Communications Ministries:** This position’s emphasis is on connecting leaders across distances in ways that enable thoughtful, committed action; helps local churches develop and broadcast their unique voices; facilitates media distribution and management; fosters technological expertise in churches; and has increased responsibility in data analysis, assessment, and reporting. The position is full-time but not called, and is Denver-based.
- **Executive Assistant:** This position’s emphasis is on Conference leadership support, administration of UCC covenant business and data maintenance, coordination of Search & Call, and camp registration. It will include enhanced responsibility for financial management and analysis, working with our bookkeeper and accountant, and coordinating Conference volunteers. This position is full-time but not called, and is based in Denver.

Recognizing that Conference resources will be called upon to provide support beyond the core areas outlined above, our model includes program associates. These individuals will assume responsibility for implementing specific programs and initiatives in support of local churches that are beyond the means of an individual church. The initial role is:



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- **Faith Nurture Program Associate:** This is a contracted position to provide cross-Conference faith nurture experiences. The focus in 2017 will be on providing programming parallel to what was provided in 2016, largely held at La Foret. The 2017 contract would be a part-time, not called position, and calculated at one-quarter time equivalent. Discussion of expansion beyond La Foret programming will be discussed within a “So That” Team in 2018 (See below).

The primary intent of these changes is to align our staffing resources with our Vision, as well as to establish a new collaborative leadership culture that reaches beyond our core staff. As such, our aim is to transition to this new model by early 2017, as quickly as realistically possible. Our transition plan includes these steps:

- Current **Conference Minister** and **Director of Communications Ministries** positions, served by Rev. Sue Artt and Cory Kibler, respectively, have been aligned with the Vision for the past two years. Uninterrupted evolutions of the existing positions are needed here; incumbents will remain in place.
- **Associate Conference Minister:** The Board of Directors has determined that a Search and Call process will commence this fall. Because of significant changes from the existing ACM position, this will begin with a national search. Rev. Tamara Boynton, our current acting ACM, has been encouraged to apply. The Search Committee—with representation from each Association—is being named by the Board of Directors by the end of September. The estimated start date for this position will be March 1, 2017.
- **Executive Assistant:** This position’s increase in scope will necessitate a shift from our current half-time position to full-time. Requirements for the new position will be posted and our selected candidate will commence duties by January 1, 2017. Lisa Callahan, our current staff, is being encouraged to apply.
- **Faith Nurture Program Associate:** This newly structured position will be posted and contracted to start by January 1, 2017.
- At their November meeting, the Board of Directors will tune our 2017 budget to accommodate these changes. Some funding is already in place and some will need to be gathered through other means. Expect to hear more about this in late November or early December.

In redesigning our staffing model to better reflect our needs and Vision, we turned to many data sources, including work done by many of you in the Conference as recently as the June 2016 Annual Meeting. We have identified areas that call for further exploration beyond the scope of our paid staff. These will be taken on in the near future by what we are calling “So That” teams. Topics include:



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1. New and ongoing options in Spiritual Nurture and Outdoor Ministry;
2. Refining Conference leadership expectations beyond Conference staff;
3. Equipping leaders to talk about money and funding;
4. Aligning Association functions with our Conference-wide Vision;
5. Nurturing and advancing Peace and Justice work across the Conference;
6. Sharing Best Practices across the Conference;
7. Launching and supporting a Leadership Institute to develop and deepen our culture of collaborative, constructive interaction, and our continuous learning;
8. Leveraging technology across the Conference;
9. Developing a Conference-wide Fitness Review process, and training a pool of qualified volunteers.

In the coming months, you will hear more about "So That" teams and be invited to be a part of this collaborative work as we continue to live into our Vision.

Your Board of Directors believes this new staffing model is the fruit of many years of attentive listening, careful assessment, and attuning our Conference direction to the significant cultural shifting present in our times. Being responsive to the needs of the churches and the parishioners in our Conference is of utmost importance; our sense of the Spirit's leading is that these strides will position us toward further living into our Vision and further living out the prophetic and revolutionary teachings of Jesus.

Presentations on these changes are being made at each of our Fall Association Meetings. Upcoming articles in the RoMoCo newsletter will explore our new leadership model more deeply. If you have questions or concerns, please talk with any Board member—their names are listed in our Conference Directory on our website.

We covet your prayers as we walk with Spirit to more fully carry forward Christ's mission in the Rocky Mountain Conference. And, we ask that you join us in embracing the future to which we are being called by a God who is always faithful and with us on the journey.

Faithfully,

Your Board of Directors: John Rostykus, Rev. Sue Artt, Rev. Gage Church, Matt Huntington, Courtney Dobbins, Martha Jones, Rev. Erin Gilmore, Rachel Oliver, Rev. Carol White, Rev. David Bahr, Rev. Nate Miller, Judy Baillie, Rev. Karen Winkel