

# SECTION E

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# NORTHWEST OHIO ASSOCIATION

## COVENANT

*Together in Christ's love, we collaborate to reconcile and restore all God's creation.*

Empowered by the Holy Spirit we are called to connect, equip, and support our faith communities to grow as faithful disciples and responsible stewards, following Jesus' call to extravagantly love all God's children and creation.

Answering God's call to build a just world for all, we commit in our shared life to:

- ✓ Live the love, unity, and compassion of Jesus;
- ✓ Collaborate to mutually share resources;
- ✓ Communicate with openness and transparency;
- ✓ Empower generous and responsible stewardship;
- ✓ Honor God's diverse gifts among us in all settings.

### KEY RESULT AREAS and GOALS

*"In what key areas of our Association's life must we achieve results in order for our role-and-mission to be accomplished?"*

- Proclamation:** To proclaim the Gospel, worshipping God in communion with Jesus Christ and each other; so that nourished and strengthened by the Word, we participate together in Christ's ministry - living the Gospel each day.
- Public Witness:** To demonstrate and facilitate a deliberate, informed, and continuing Christian presence in the world. To confront and engage the sin and evil of this world with the power of faith, hope and love.
- Discernment:** To cultivate communities that discern the will of God, embrace a renewed vision of obedience to Christ and provide all generations with the language, the knowledge, and the tools to nurture communities of faith.
- Stewardship:** To encourage communities to be thankful for and generous with the many gifts entrusted to us by God for God's mission. We accept God's sacred call for the faithful, wise, responsible and just use of these gifts.
- Caring:** To strengthen the Body of Christ by demonstrating care for leaders and congregations and by holding each other accountable to God and to the responsibility with which each has been charged. To follow the example of Christ through a ministry of presence and forgiveness in times of conflict, peace, sadness or joy.

## VISION

*“What we perceive that God is calling the Northwest Ohio Association to become.”*

We, the Northwest Ohio Association, are a faith-filled community of congregations, pastors, lay leaders, and believers of all ages. We are a community of communities within **the** United Church of Christ, who covenant with each other embodying God’s promises and hopes.

**We are a community of communities:** We proclaim and celebrate the Biblical story, through praise and worship. We inspire one another to act boldly, responsibly, and faithfully. Flowing from the same living water as our scriptural ancestors, we demonstrate God’s promises and compassion to others, as Jesus taught us through his own acts of mercy, healing, and justice. Though we are a people who may sometimes fall short of God’s mark, we are conscious of our inadequacies. We hold one another accountable for our actions, encourage each other to get back on the path, and forgive one another as God forgives us.

**We are a community of communities:** We are agents of transformation—beacons of hope in a secular society of turbulent waters. Together and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are forged, tempered, and made stronger by acts of justice and liberation. We actively seek to spread the Gospel, including to those at the boundaries, those who are hurting, the forgotten, the lost, and those shunned by society—we offer room at our tables of hospitality.

**We are a community of communities:** We give each other courage to confront the evil that assaults us and leads us astray from God’s love and God’s ways. We are shaped and reshaped for mission as we prayerfully discern God’s will. As a community that is inclusive and accessible to all, we nurture and encourage each other’s leadership in Christ’s church. Recognizing God’s love for all, we listen to each other, and seek to enable each other to be all that God intends.

**We are the Body of Christ:** a community of communities that freely shares of itself with others—a community that will shatter the complacency of this earth and bring God’s intended peace and justice to all.

## Church and Ministry Team

The Church and Ministry Team relates to the Northwest Ohio Association, the Heartland Conference and the wider setting of the church. We focus on relationships in the following ways: (1) this team works in collaboration with one another as each member brings unique perspectives and gifts (2) we engage those wishing to become authorized ministers, both lay and ordained. (3) we also work with the local church. Authorized ministers meet with us when they are new to the association or are transferring to another congregation. This can be a way of assuring those in a pastoral role that they are not alone. This helps these individuals to be better able to serve a local congregation because they have the association minister and the Church and Ministry Team to encourage them. These connections are meant to remind us that we are all in covenant with each other. None of the various bodies speak for one another, but we speak to one another to help make the body of Christ as strong as it can be.

There are two major areas that the Church and Ministry Team is charged with. When there are people considering becoming an authorized minister, the Church and Ministry Team helps them discern how their sense of call matches with the larger church's sense of servant ministry. This is a thorough process and as one former member of our team would say, "it takes as long as it takes." We walk alongside those who are Members in Discernment by offering encouragement, reflection and challenging areas that might require growth. This exhaustive process is meant to assure local congregations that those serving as authorized ministers are held to a high standard of preparation and the character necessary for faithful and fruitful ministry.

Another vital piece of our work is staying connected with our authorized ministers. This is done in a variety of ways. Pastoral leaders are asked to complete an annual review and we also encourage them to participate in Excellence in Ministry/Communities of Practice. Each October we recognize retired clergy at a luncheon.

Respectfully Submitted, The Rev. Joel Fetter, Chair  
Pastor at Peace Community United Church of Christ

### Pastoral Relations Working Group Church and Ministry Team

The Pastoral Relations sub-committee of Church and Ministry seeks to keep connection with the authorized ministers of the Association. Authorized ministers are required to complete a yearly written periodic review and attend a Periodic Support Training every two years to remain in good standing. Authorized Ministers who participate in a Community of Practice are exempt from the biennial Periodic Support Training. We also host a luncheon for our retired clergy every year.

The Periodic Support Trainings were held in March and in October. The March training was at St. John's UCC in Milan and was in-person only. The October training was at the Association Office and was offered as a hybrid event. The Retired Clergy Luncheon was held at Parkvue Place in Sandusky with about 60 attendees. Thank you to all who offer support of our Authorized Ministers.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Wendy Schindler-Chasney

Pastoral Relations Working Group: Rev. Wendy Schindler-Chasney (chair), Nanette Warnecke-Flood, Rev. Mark Bishop, Rev. David Plant

Credentialing Working Group  
Church and Ministry Team

The Credentialing Team meets to review issues related to the standing of Authorized Ministers in the Northwest Ohio Association. This includes ordained, commissioned, and licensed Pastors as well as those seeking the Privilege of Call, Dual Standing and Transfer of Standing.

The team will also be involved with those who seek an exemption from Boundary Training and Periodic Support Consultations. We will receive and read all the necessary correspondence from the applicant and support churches. We also interview applicants before they come before the whole Church and Ministry gathering.

**Granted status as a Licensed Minister in Northwest Ohio Association**

Elyse Cramer	McCutchenville, Trinity UCC
+Pat Danner	Bettsville, Zion UCC
Ron Jesse	Steuben, Steuben Congregational UCC
+Tom Kagy	Bloomville, Bloomville UCC
Amy Kinney	Fostoria, St. John's UCC
+Margaret Mills	Elmore, St. John's UCC
Osborn, Barb	Bettsville, Zion UCC & Bascom, Union UCC
+James Robinson	Shelby, First UCC
+Jay Scott	Upper Sandusky, Emanuel UCC
Adam Shanaman	Buckland, Buckland UCC
Ryan Shields	Elliston, Trinity UCC
Anthony (Brookhart) Spearhart	Wapakoneta, St. Paul UCC
+Granted Licensure for the duration of their call	

**Commissioned Minister**

Margaret Mills	Elmore, St. John's UCC
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**Ecclesiastical Endorsement with the UCC Professional Chaplains**

Rev. Dr. Robert Bottoms	Bellevue
Rev. Dr. Diane Christopherson	Toledo/Michigan

**Ecclesiastical Endorsement with the UCC Professional Chaplains-Supervisory Level ACPE**

Rev. Faith Proietti	Mansfield (Retired)
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Respectfully Submitted, Pastor John Paputza

Credentialing Working Group: Pastor John Paputza (chair), Vicki Ohl, Rev. Joel Fetter, Rev. Darla Metz

Discernment (Formerly In-Care) Working Group  
Church and Ministry Team

**Discernment Working Group:** David Weininger (chair), Rev. Diane Christopherson, Rev. Rhonda Hainer, Rev. Jenny Jackson, Terry Rettig.

A Member in Discernment (MiD) is a UCC member who has sensed a call to serve as an ordained minister in our denomination. An individual who senses this call must first be supported by their home church and apply to the Church and Ministry Committee to be admitted to the Discernment Process.

“The Discernment Process is a time of interactive and caring discernment of call.” (Discernment Manual - 2020 Revision). This is a formalized process with course requirements and protocols that must be completed by the MiD. The Discernment Working Group works with the MiD to provide support and encouragement during this process. Each MiD is assigned an advisor who provides support, advice, and guidance. In addition, the Discernment Working Group interviews each MiD annually. This review is primarily a conversation in which the MiD shares where they are on the path of discernment. In nearly every case, the Discernment Advisor attends these reviews.

The Discernment Working Group acts on behalf of the Church and Ministry Committee and ultimately on behalf of the whole of the UCC. Following successful completion of the required courses and protocols, the Discernment Working Group presents the MiD to the Church and Ministry Committee for approval of ordination pending a call to a congregation.

One project that has occupied our time this year is a review of course requirements that lead to ordination. The Association of Theological Schools, the body that accredits seminaries, provides guidelines for seminary curricula. The current guidelines include cultural issues that face our nation and, in particular, our congregations. Seminaries have responded to these guidelines by revising their curricula. The goal of our working group is to ensure that our course requirements for ordination address these changes. We are very early in the process and are in no way ready to recommend revisions. In addition, any revisions to the required course list will not impact MiDs currently in the Discernment Process.

There are currently seven Members in Discernment – see the table in the sequel. Two former MiDs , Don Clark and Ryan Shields, are no longer in the process.

I thank the local churches, pastors, and advisors that support our MiDs. Members of the Discernment Working Group continue to be impressed with the dedication and talents of these who have heeded God’s call to ministry. What a blessing they are to our Association.

With gratitude,  
Dave Weininger

## Members in Discernment

<u>Name</u>	<u>Advisor</u>	<u>Home Church</u>	<u>Seminary/School</u>
Elyse (Everhart) Cramer Elyse was received as a member in discernment November 2018	Darla Metz	St. John UCC, Tiffin/McC Trinity	Winebrenner Theological Findlay
Liesl Higgins Liesl was received as a member in discernment November 29, 2022	Rev. Margaret Mills	St. Paul's UCC, Bellevue	Bethany Theological Richmond, IN
Amy Kinney Amy was received as a member in discernment October 2017 (Alternate Path)	Kathryn Helleman	St. John's UCC, Fostoria/ Union UCC, Bascom	Winebrenner Theological Findlay
Kristen Leverton Kristen was received as a member in discernment January 2019	Andrea Mericle	Point Place UCC, Toledo	Chicago Theological Chicago, IL
James Robinson James was received as a member in discernment April 2015 and serves as Pastor at First UCC, Shelby	Rev. Ken Daniel	First UCC, Shelby	
Adam Shanaman Adam was received as a member in discernment November 1, 2022	Rev. Jeremy Mann	St. Paul's UCC, Bellevue	Chicago Theological Chicago IL
Anthony Spearhart Anthony was received as a member in discernment November 10, 2020 (Alternate Path)	Rev. Mark Bishop	St. Paul UCC, Wapakoneta	Pathways Theological Education Program

Discernment Working Group: David Weininger (chair), Rev. Jennifer Jackson, Rev. Rhonda Hainer, Terry Rettig, Rev. Diane Christopherson

## Faith Formation Ministry Team

The Faith Formation Ministry Team continues to define and review the role and mission of the team. Faith Formation goes beyond traditional Sunday School and should be lifelong learning.

We have shared news and creative ideas from our local churches. The Team has heard reports from the Heartland Conference Faith Formation Team, The Upper Room Academy and Back Bay Mission, as well as exploring the Godly Play program. We continue to seek discussion topics for our meetings.

Several members of the team were involved with the Heartland Conference Faith Formation Meeting held in March. The location for the meeting was in Cleveland with participation from other satellite locations and was successful. We hope to work with the Heartland Conference Faith Formation Team over the next year.

We have kept the theme 'Connect' for 2024 and continue to seek ways we can better connect with members, pastors, churches, and the Conference Team. Ideas include providing resources for churches such as Bible student reviews, communicating what churches are doing and working to identify Faith Formation needs. We have met every other month over Zoom.

Respectfully submitted,  
Stacey Hocker, Team Chair

Team members: Stacey Hocker (chair), Pastor Margaret Mills, Rev. Jeanette Tangeman, Rev. Mary Meadows, Pastor Amy Kinney, Rev. Mark Bishop, Pastor Elyse Cramer, Rev. Janice Bechtel, Tammy Vajen, Anthony Brookhart

## Stewardship and Generosity Ministry Team

The current members of the Stewardship and Generosity Team had their first meeting on May 17, 2023. As new team members were welcomed, we wanted to establish a focus for the team.

Our Focus is:

“to promote, generate, and keep fresh innovative ideas on what stewardship and generosity really are. In this aspect, ‘time, talent, and treasurer’ are key.” “We also want to generate enthusiasm and responsibility when considering Stewardship and Generosity.”

We continue to provide write-ups on the Special Offering to help explain their purpose, encourage participation, and show how we are making a difference in the world. These are published in THE VINE.

One of the items we have discussed is how to get the word out. Most all the work we have done is published THE VINE, and Many Thanks to Joan for the work she does with it. In there you find our missives on the current/upcoming Special Offerings, a place to Share Your Story and something your church has done to foster Stewardship and Generosity. We also have a link to the five videos that were prepared with Don Hill. In addition, you will find links to various resources provided by the Heartland Conference as well as the National office. There is a lot of good information there.

With the material available, we have thought of looking at the distribution of it and if it is being used. Taking a high-level observation of the numbers, there may be an opportunity to increase the readership. Given that, we as a team will be looking at our individual congregations and attempt to be sure that all members of the consistories/official boards be included in THE VINE’S distribution. The premise being that this can be used to foster additional discussion on Stewardship and Generosity among the congregations. In addition, where possible provide a link to THE VINE on the church’s website. We are also looking at someone from the team to go and speak to churches, perhaps using resources already created like Don Hill’s videos.

We have discussed that there are several creative ways of bringing about conversations and action on Stewardship and Generosity. The team will be assembling a list of these ideas. We are still developing this and hope to have something available soon.

While we continue our work, we pray for discernment. We would also ask for your prayer as we continue our work.

Blessings...

Mike Fonner, Team Chair

Team members: Mike Fonner (chair), Fran Brodman, Donna Dorsch, Bob Rettig, Ruth Novak, Ron Geiser, Rev. Doug Williamson, Pastor James Robinson, Rev. Audra Ferguson, Rev. Vern Swett



# Witness and Proclamation Ministry Team

Witness and Proclamation Ministry Team (WPMT)  
Northwest Ohio Association (NWOA)  
Annual Report 2024

## Meetings

Have been meeting regularly every other month since May 2023 (September and November 2023, January and March 2024)

## Organization

Elected organizers at that first meeting:

Chair - Fred Coulter  
Vice Chair - Hafidha Saadiqah  
Secretary - Karsten Snitker  
Linking Person to the Cabinet - Dawn Balduf

At Large committee members:

Andrea Mericle, Scott Johnson, John Mummert and Paul Sittason-Stark  
Unfortunately for the team, Andrea, Hafida, and Paul resigned for personal reasons. They have been missed the past few meetings.

## Articles for the Vine

Each member agreed to write a WPMT related article for the Vine each month. You can read these excellent articles highlighting social justice and mission issues in the Vine's weekly newsletter.

## Mission Statement

Discussed and voted upon an edited version of the mission statement: "We are the prophetic voice of NWOA to speak to issues that require just peace and intentional prayer as well as action and education. We seek to build awareness of justice and peace in our association for reaching the larger church and the world. We are responsible for growing new and established ecumenical and interfaith connections through intentional work. We will seek to bring awareness to the diversity of religious and spiritual understandings and traditions."

## NWOA Annual Meeting

Proposed workshops for the NWOA Annual Meeting  
LGBTQIA2+ Awareness and Issues - Nicki Lawrence  
Back Bay Mission - James Pennington  
Prayer and Meditation - Fred Coulter

Respectfully submitted,  
Fred Coulter, Chair

Team members: Rev. Fred Coulter (chair), Rev. Dawn Balduf, Rev. Scott Johnson, Rev. John Mummert, Rev. Karsten Snitker

## **El Salvador Coordinating Team**

### **Iglesia Luterana Salvadorena - Our Global Partner**

Friends: The El Salvador Coordinating Team is still in existence but has not gathered since the CoVid Pandemic hit two years ago. In the meantime, this is an update on what is happening in El Salvador. The country is much safer for the local citizens because of the arrest of thousands of gang members by orders of Mr. Bukele, the president of El Salvador. Several new jails were built and anyone suspected of belonging to a gang was arrested and put in jail. This is good for the citizens, but many non-gang members have been arrested and were also put in jail. The people were those who were opposed to the government's policies and were also arrested. The president suspended the supreme court and changed the election policy of presidents only serving for on five-year term. Mr. Bukele is now in his second term and may continue for a long time into the future. He has turned the government into an autocratic form of rule. The democratic form of government was established by the U.N. after their civil ward ended in 1992. It has survived until Mr. Bukele was elected president five years ago.

According to an article in the February 16 edition of THE WEEK magazine, "Mr. Bukele has been credited with crushing the two major gangs of El Salvador after filling the streets with soldiers and ordered mass arrests. This was documented in widely distributed photos of thousands of shirtless, tattooed suspects. He jailed more than 70,000 people, including 7,000 who had no gang connection and were later released." There are still some opposition leaders, non-gang members, who are still in jail.

Rev. Dan Busch and I visited El Salvador last October and found that the Lutheran Church is heading for a change in its leadership. Bishop Gomez is retiring as Bishop of the Church. He has served as bishop for over 38 years. A new bishop will be elected soon. He or she will be installed January 1, 2025. There are four candidates for the bishop's position.

We are still looking for a person or persons who can serve as El Salvador Coordinators. Thank you for your support and we pray this partnership will continue. Contact John and Joyce Gilberg at 419-629-2947 or 419-230-8177.

Peace,

John and Joyce Gilberg

## Community of Practice Program

And let us consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds. . .

- Hebrews 10:24 NIV

**“Communities of Practice”** is the new name for the program formerly known as “Excellence in Ministry.” It was adopted to be in keeping with the way the program is now known throughout the United Church of Christ. Community of Practice groups offer ministers opportunities to learn from one another, receive mutual support from colleagues, and grow in their vocations. Groups, generally meet, in person or by Zoom, for at least two hours each month from September through May.

**Forty-six members and leaders** currently participate in Northwest Ohio Association Community of Practice groups. Rev. Busch’s strong support helps to continue the high percentage of pastors involved in the program. Each year groups go through some realignment as ministers join the program, move, or retire. Because of these changes, the number of active groups went from eight to seven this year with participants of the eighth group joining others.

**Facilitators** provide leadership for each group. All facilitators meet quarterly for training, program administration, and mutual support. Facilitators for 2023-24 are Wendy Schindler Chasney, Ken Daniel, Joel Fetter, Ed Heilman, Darla Metz, Margaret Mills, David Orr, and Becky Erb Strang. Ed Heilman ended his work as facilitator when groups were consolidated. Because of other responsibilities, Ken Daniel will conclude his co-leadership of the group for newer pastors at the end of May. Darla Metz will continue as the group’s co-facilitator and will be joined by Tom Kagy. Both Ed and Ken have served as Community of Practice facilitators since the program was introduced in the association. We are thankful for their long service and grateful for the continuing work of all of the group leaders.

**Congregations** are asked to include participation in a Community of Practice group in their call agreements for new pastors and to encourage those currently serving to join a group. Setting aside funds for the annual participation fee is a concrete demonstration of a church’s commitment to the personal and professional health of their pastor.

**Applications** are available from the Northwest Ohio Association office and may be submitted at any time.

Rev. David Orr  
COP Facilitator Coordinator

## Lay School Board

*The aim of the Lay School of Religion Program has been to maintain quality instruction, to create an atmosphere for Christian fellowship and dialogue, and to encourage growth in faith and understanding so as to enhance the local church's efforts to develop deeper and stronger faith communities for nurture, witness, mission and leadership. All persons are welcome to enroll in the Lay School of Religion Program for personal enrichment.*

The Lay School offers classes in the spring and fall of each year, typically on Tuesday evenings twice a month for six to eight sessions. Anyone may enroll in classes for personal enrichment. However, to graduate from the program, students must complete all ten offered classes plus approved workshops in the areas of Stewardship and Evangelism. Here is the current schedule, subject to change. Instructors TBA.

Spring 2024	Liturgy & Worship
Fall 2024	Theology, Christian Ethics & Morals
Spring 2025	Old Testament I
Fall 2025	Old Testament II
Spring 2026	New Testament I
Fall 2026	New Testament II
Spring 2027	Pastoral Care
Fall 2027	UCC History & Polity
Spring 2028	Faith Formation
Fall 2028	Preaching

In Fall 2022 the class was Preaching taught by Rev. Carl Robinson, and the current class is Liturgy & Worship being taught by Rev. Dr. Fred Coulter.

As we continue to clarify the mission and vision of the Lay School of Religion, discussion has turned to clarifying the content of classes. A small committee has been assembled to begin reviewing all classes to ensure there is consistency in course description and objectives. This will also help to determine whether classes from other associations might be acceptable equivalencies.

Our Spring Liturgy & Worship class is strong with 12 enrolled. We pray that churches will continue encouraging the growth & development of lay leadership within the church.

Respectfully submitted,

Pastor Amy Kinney, Team Chair

Board Members: Pastor Amy Kinney (chair), Pastor Terri Wies-Haithcock, Regena Mummert, Rev. Diane Christopherson, Rev. Darla Metz, Rev. Mark Bishop, Rev. Bob Bottoms (Lay School Dean), Rev. Daniel Busch (Association Minister)