

# SECTION E

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# NORTHWEST OHIO ASSOCIATION

(Incorporated 1963)

Offices: 416 Wentz Street, Tiffin, Ohio

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Heartland Conference – United Church of Christ

## CABINET

*“KEEPER OF THE VISION”*

<p>*Moderator</p> <p>*Vice-Moderator</p> <p>*Secretary</p> <p>*Treasurer</p> <p>*Past Moderator</p> <p>*Association Minister (ex officio)</p> <p>3 at-large members</p> <p>4 members representing each Team</p> <p>1 member from each Cabinet appointed committee</p> <p><i>(Officers and at-large members are elected at Annual Meetings)</i></p> <p><i>*Executive Committee</i></p>
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## TEAMS/COMMITTEE

*(elected at Association Annual Meetings)*

<b>CHURCH AND MINISTRY TEAM</b>	<b>FAITH FORMATION TEAM</b>	<b>WITNESS AND PROCLAMATION TEAM</b>	<b>STEWARDSHIP AND GENEROSITY TEAM</b>	<b>NOMINATING COMMITTEE</b>
<p>12 members</p> <p>1 member on Cabinet</p> <p>C&amp;M appoints two Committees:</p> <p>*Conflict Response Team</p> <p>*Misconduct Response Team</p>	<p>9 members</p> <p>1 member on Cabinet</p>	<p>9 members</p> <p>1 member on Cabinet</p>	<p>9 members</p> <p>1 member on Cabinet</p>	<p>At least 9 members.</p>

## STANDING COMMITTEES

*(appointed by Cabinet)*

*(Cabinet can appoint temporary committees as needed.)*

<b>Human Resource Committee</b>	<b>Finance and Budget Committee</b>	<b>Lay School Board</b>	<b>Community of Practice Leadership</b>	<b>El Salvador Committee</b>	<b>Annual Meeting Planning Committee</b>
		<p>*Organizes Lay School</p>			

# 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 is composed of 13 members. Approximately half of the members are ordained ministers and half are laity. Members serve three-year terms. As specified by the Constitution of the NWOA, the Church and Ministry Team “shall act on behalf of the Association as an ecclesiastical council.” The Team fulfills its responsibilities in several ways: (1) the Team reviews issues related to the standing of authorized ministers, (2) maintains connections with and supports the authorized ministers of the NWOA, and (3) provides guidance and support of those UCC members who have sensed a call to serve as ordained ministers.

Much of the work of the Team is done by its three working groups – the Credentialing Working Group, the Pastoral Relations Working Group, and the Discernment Working Group. More complete information about the responsibilities and activities of these working groups may be found in the following pages.

The Church and Ministry Team has regularly scheduled monthly meetings. Members of the Working Groups meet in addition to these monthly meetings. As would be expected, much of Church and Ministry Team’s meeting agendas deal with business brought forth by the Working Groups.

Rev. Joel Fetter, a former chair of the Church and Ministry Team, once described the work of the Team as one of maintaining connections among the various bodies of the NWOA and that 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.” Rev. Fetter’s words accurately and profoundly describe the spirit with which Church and Ministry Team members approach their work.

Respectfully submitted, David Weininger, Chair  
Trinity United Church of Christ, McCutchenville

### 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 participate in a monthly Community of Practice Group or attend a Periodic Support Training every 2 years to remain in good standing. This fall we took a pause on the yearly written Pastoral Assessment. We hosted the yearly Retired Ministers Luncheon at Trinity UCC this past October.

The Periodic Support Trainings were held in March and in October. They were led by Rev. Mark Bishop and were held at the Association Office in a hybrid format.  
Thank you to all who offer support of our Authorized Ministers.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rev. Wendy Schindler-Chasney  
Pastoral Relations Chair of NWOA Church and Ministry Team.

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 and those seeking the Privilege of Call, Dual Standing, and Transfer of Standing

The team is also 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 will also interview applicants before they come before the whole Church and Ministry Team.

The team also will schedule times and dates for each year's Boundary Training.

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

Elyse Cramer	McCutchenville, Trinity 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
Barb Osborn	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
John Paputza	Castalia, Congregational 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 Working Group  
Church and Ministry Committee**

**Discernment Working Group:** David Weininger (chair), Rev. Diane Christopherson, Rev. Rhonda Hainer, Terry Rettig, and Bob Rine.

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 the Discernment Working Group started last year was a review of course requirements that lead to ordination. Our working group completed a revision of those requirements which were subsequently approved by the Church and Ministry Committee. The new requirements follow the guidelines of the Association of Theological Schools – the organization that accredits seminaries. We are now in the process of revising the Discernment Manual to reflect those changes.

There are currently ten Members in Discernment – see the table in the sequel. 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

Name	Advisor	Home Church	Seminary/School
Elyse Cramer	Darla Metz	St. John's UCC, Tiffin	Winebrenner Theological
Amy Kinney	Kathryn Helleman	St. John's UCC, Fostoria	Winebrenner Theological
Jennifer Frische	Becky Strang	St. Paul UCC, Wapakoneta	In process
Liesl Higgins	Margaret Mills	St. Paul's UCC, Bellevue	Bethany Theological
Kristen Leverton	Andrea Mericle	Park Place UCC, Toledo (in process)	Chicago Theological
Noah McCarn	Karsten Snitker	Zion UCC, Fireside	Eden Theological
Beth McKibben-Nee	Darla Metz	Trinity UCC, Tiffin	Methodist Theological School in Ohio
James Robinson	Ken Daniel	First UCC, Shelby	Pathways Theological
Adam Shanaman	Jeremy Mann	St. Paul's UCC, Bellevue	Chicago Theological
Anthony Spearheart	Mark Bishop	St. Paul UCC, Wapakoneta	Pathways Theological

### Faith Formation Ministry Team

The Faith Formation Team took a hiatus for much of this year, due to injuries and illnesses among members. The team has resumed meeting and is working to connect with other groups involved in faith formation, including the Faith Formation Network of the Heartland Conference and the Faith Formation Team in SONKA. Our hope is to learn more about how to communicate the resources that are available to churches, whether locally through the NWOA, or through connections in the Conference and denomination.

Mary Meadows  
Interim Chair



## Stewardship and Generosity Ministry 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 treasure’ 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.

We have published a list of examples of what our various churches do to promote Stewardship and Generosity in new or different ways. This should be available in the Vine soon. We hope to make this a living document which can be added to. If you have a new or different idea, please let us know and we will get it published.

We are still working on organizing the team to go and speak to churches on Stewardship and perhaps developing a Pulpit Exchange Sunday. We are also looking at the various media opportunities that are available to us such as TikTok, YouTube and Facebook. Another idea we are looking at is developing an animation to paint the Church story in a new way to spark interest in younger people.

We still have a lot of work to do and while we continue our work, we pray for discernment. We would also ask for your prayer as we continue our work.

Blessings...

## Witness and Proclamation Ministry Team

April 2024 –April 2025

We are living in some unprecedented times, where there are no longer guarantees of a sense of welcome, a sense inclusiveness, a feeling of support in our communities, especially if you a marginalized member of society. No longer can we depend on government services, as well as other non-profit agencies to provide these individuals with needed services and support that will help them navigate our sometimes complex world, as well as feel supported and loved by others. There is a growing need for churches to possibly take the lead in their community's and fill the void that is gradually developing. In short, churches need to make sure that they insuring that those who are marginalized by our society, or different find a safe place to worship, and somewhere where their additional needs may be met without judgement and fear.

Guided by the ministry of Jesus Christ, who continually preached and showed that "ALL" are welcome and loved, the Witness and Proclamation Team (WPT) has been meeting this past year to gather information on how to lead the Northwest Association in becoming a WISE Association. WISE stands for Welcoming, Inclusive, Supportive, Inclusive, Engaged. Information was gathered from the Heartland Conference as well as the United Church of Christ National Office in helping the WPT determine how to proceed with facilitating the Association in its goal to become a WISE Association.

After much discussion and deliberation, the WPT submitted information to the NWOA Cabinet in January 2025 requesting its support for the efforts of the WPT in leading and facilitating our Christian growth into a WISE Association. The Cabinet provided unanimous support to proceed with efforts to create a WISE Association.

The WPT will submit a resolution at the Annual Meeting in April asking the Association membership to become a WISE Association.

The implementation of this resolution, if passed, will become the mission and work of the WPT over the coming year(s.) It will be WPT's goal to develop strong working relationships with churches across the Association that would also like to become a WISE church, as well as support existing WISE congregations.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Mark Vaughn  
Witness and Proclamation Team Chairperson

## **El Salvador Coordinating Team**

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

The Lutheran Church of El Salvador is going through a transition with the election of a new bishop. Bishop Guadalupe Cortez is the newly elected Bishop of the Lutheran Church of El Salvador and was installed as bishop on January 12, 2025. She is following Bishop Medardo Gomez who had been the bishop for over 35 years and is retired. He was the bishop during their civil war and was very much involved in their country's peace process and served the church well all those 35 years. He received his doctorate at Trinity Seminary in Columbus, Ohio

El Salvador is now very safe to travel to at this time because their president, Mr. Bukele has declared Marshal Law and has jailed over 70,000 gang members that were rounded up by the police and military soldiers in the past two years. They had built a brand-new prison for this purpose. Some of the gang members escaped to other Central America countries and others left for the USA. Their court system is not working, and many innocent people were arrested., and these people are having problems getting released. They did nothing wrong. The Lutheran Church in El Salvador has a woman minister who has been in prison for over three years and can't get a hearing so she can be released. She is one hundred percent innocent of doing anything wrong. President Bukele has suspended most of the courts so she can't even get a hearing. This is the last report that we have had.

Citizens are becoming alarmed because some freedoms are disappearing in El Salvador. An example is that their constitution has been changed by the president. Only time will tell. We are praying that our friends from the Lutheran Church will continue to be safe.

Joyce and I are not leading any more trips to El Salvador and have done this for twenty years. New leadership is needed to take over this worthwhile project; please contact me for details. We met many wonderful people through these trips. Many new friends in El Salvador have been made. Over 200 youth and adults traveled with us to this beautiful and historic country. We are both 89 years old and think it's time to pass this endeavor on. These memories we will never forget.

Our NWOA partnership with the Lutheran Church of El Salvador is continuing but new leadership is important to keep it alive.

Peace!

John & Joyce Gilberg  
El Salvador Coordinating Team.

## Community of Practice Program

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

- Galatians 6:2

**Ministry poses special challenges.** Pastors do not enjoy daily contact with colleagues. Supervision is provided by volunteer boards rather than experienced professionals. Opportunities for training and professional development may be hard to find and personal support unavailable. Stagnation, isolation, loneliness, and discouragement are common among people in ministry.

**Community of Practice groups**, offered by the Northwest Ohio Association, address these issues by providing ministers with opportunities to learn from one another, receive mutual support from colleagues, and grow in their vocations. One pastor recently wrote:

*I recommend Communities of Practice to every minister. They help us to connect and not feel so isolated with the day to day and broader issues which crop up in churches and ministry.*

**Seven groups** currently include 42 members and leaders. Among these are a group for those newer to ministry, a group that meets exclusively by Zoom, groups that meet in person, and some hybrid groups. A high percentage of the Association's active ministers, along with a few retirees, are involved in the program. Groups, generally meet, in person or by Zoom, for at least two hours each month from September through May.

**Trained facilitators** serve each group. For 2024-25, facilitators are, Wendy Schindler Chasney, Joel Fetter, Tom Kagy, Darla Metz, Margaret Mills, David Orr, and Becky Erb Strang. We are fortunate to have this experienced, dedicated, and caring team.

**Congregations** can show their commitment to the personal and professional well-being of their pastors by encouraging them to participate in a Community of Practice group and by setting aside funds for the annual fee. The Association advises churches to include membership in a Community of Practice group in their call agreements for new pastors. Applications are available from the Association office and may be submitted at any time.

Rev. David Orr  
COP Facilitator Coordinator

# Lay School Board

## 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.

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

This year has proven to be fruitful for the Lay School of Religion, particularly in refining the mission and vision, which led to discussions aimed at clarifying class content. A small committee was formed to evaluate nearly all classes, ensuring alignment in course objectives. During our January 2025 meeting, all course objectives were reviewed and approved, except for those pertaining to "Theology, Christian Ethics & Morals." Moving forward in 2025, the Lay School Board has resolved to focus on the course descriptions to enhance clarity and continuity.

Class enrollment has been strong and we pray that churches will continue encouraging growth and development of lay leadership.

Respectfully submitted, Pastor Amy Kinney, Team Chair

Board Members: Pastor Amy Kinney (Team Chair) Pastor Terri Wies-Haithcock, Regena Mummert, , Rev Darla Metz, Rev. Bob Bottoms (Lay School Dean), Tammy Vajen, Rev. Daniel Busch (Association Minister)