

FROM the MODERATOR, for the APRIL 2008 ANCHOR

On February 13th, the UCC Task Force presented to the Church Council the Task Force's Report on the results of its survey of the Congregation. The Task Force presented the same Report to the Congregation at information sessions on February 27 and March 9. At the March 5 Church Council meeting, the Council thanked the Task Force for its year-long effort, and, much to the satisfaction of the Task Force members, disbanded the Task Force effective March 9, its work having been completed.

The Report of the survey results is 26 pages long and includes every comment made by the 152 members who responded to the questionnaire (the identity of the respondents is not known by the Task Force except in a few cases where the respondents signed their names, and no names are disclosed in the report). The report includes graphs and percentages as to how the respondents answered certain key questions. A PDF color copy of the report was emailed to each member of the congregation for whom we have an email address, and copies are available in the church office and library for members to read. If you would like an emailed copy but did not receive one, please call the church office and give Leni your email address. She will make sure you get a copy. If you do not have email and cannot get to Church to read a copy, call Leni and she will mail you a black-and-white copy. The black and white copies have all the same information and are much less expensive for us to reproduce.

At the February 13, February 27 and March 9 sessions, I presented to the Church Council and the Congregation my suggestions as to action I think the Council should consider in response to the information reflected in the UCC Task Force Report. My nine suggestions are outlined below.

These suggestions are my attempt to keep our members together as one community, encompassing our many diverse views and taking into consideration the concerns shown by the answers to the Survey. These suggestions come from the Moderator as the person whom the Church bylaws state "shall prepare an agenda for meetings of the Church Council." These recommendations do not come from the UCC Task Force. The Task Force was charged only with research, education and taking the sense of the Congregation; it was not asked for, and it has not made, any recommendations. As of the date this is being written, the Council has not yet had a chance to discuss my suggestions. The Council needs your input on these suggestions. A list of Council members is included below; their phone numbers are in the Church directory. If any matter described below requires a congregational vote, ample notice and detailed information will be provided. This is just a brief outline of the suggestions; each of the presentations referred to above took about an hour, and then there was a question and comment period that lasted for another hour.

I believe we need to try very hard to retain and celebrate all of our members, whatever their points of view may be about the matters that have concerned our congregation over the past several years, if we are to continue as the same warm and caring church we have been for so many years, and if we are to support the programs and facilities we have in place at this time. My purpose is to preserve MCC as a unique community – it is not my function to promote or protect the UCC or any alternative denomination or organization. To preserve the unique and caring community that is MCC, I think we need to recognize the many different points of view we have among us. To borrow a comment made by the CEO of Pfizer in a recent speech, "One size does not fit all and cannot fit all for the world we live in." I believe some changes are needed and I think some compromises will have to be made by all of us. I think all our members should have a voice and a choice about issues that are important to them. Here are my nine proposals to do that:

1. Work to revise the Fitness Review Process at the New London Association and Connecticut Conference levels. I have certain ideas as to how to do that, but the details would be developed by a small committee created by the Church Council. Suggestions from members of the Congregation would be duly considered. This would not require any changes to the MCC Bylaws, and no Congregational vote would be needed to do this.

2. Permit members to opt for Independent status while keeping MCC in the UCC. In essence, I am suggesting that we would have two classes of membership: UCC members and Independent members. Review of other churches indicates that this ought to be possible. This would keep MCC in the UCC for those who want that, but provide an alternative for those who do not want to be part of the UCC. This would require changes to the MCC Bylaws and that would require a Congregational meeting and vote.

3. Allow members to direct where the 14% of their pledge dollars that is allocated to missions would go: either 14% to UCC causes, or 14% to Non-UCC causes, or 7% to each. This would not require any changes to the MCC Bylaws, but it would require action by the Council prior to the next pledge campaign, and would probably be part of the budget approved at the Annual Budget Meeting in January 09. It might be appropriate for the Congregation to vote on this

in advance of the pledge campaign, so that members could feel confident about how their pledges would be treated before the January 09 Budget Meeting. The allocation for those who want to support both UCC and local charities might continue to be 8% and 6% instead of 7% and 7%; this is a detail that could be addressed when the issue is decided.

4. Pay missions only out of collected pledges, according to how the pledges have been directed. This would not require any changes to the MCC Bylaws, but it would require some changes in how MCC handles its finances. Those changes would have to be approved by the Treasurers, Trustees and Council. The Treasurer has expressed reservations about certain technical accounting issues related to this.

5. Hold a Congregational Meeting on whether MCC should continue with the UCC “God Is Still Speaking” program. The issues could be discussed and the matter could be decided by our members, and then we would live with the decision, whatever it is. This would not require or result in any change in the Bylaws – it is simply a proposal to let the Congregation decide whether we are in or out of the GISS program. Significant discussion would have to take place, because the GISS program involves much more than the television ads that we have seen.

6. Require Delegates to vote according to the sense of the Congregation, not according to their individual consciences, when they vote at meetings of the Conference and the NLA. This would require a Congregational meeting each time there is an issue for the delegates to vote on, to instruct the delegates how to vote. This is not likely to be necessary more than once or twice each year. The Bylaws are now silent on this issue, so there might also be a change in the Bylaws to institutionalize this, or, alternatively, the bylaws could remain silent and the issue could be addressed at the time of each MCC Congregational meeting where MCC reviewed proposals that were to come before the Conference or the NLA.

7. Obtain member feedback through occasional “pew surveys.” These would be once or twice-a-month, short, one or two-question surveys that could be collected with the offering, to allow members to provide ideas and feedback to the Church Council, Boards and Committees. This would not require any change in the Bylaws or any vote by the Congregation.

8. Provide for programs and discussion of 21st Century issues outside of worship services. Our Church can provide information and insight on issues that we all have to deal with in the 21st century, whether we want to or not. This would not require any change in the Bylaws or any vote by the Congregation. It would simply use the existing Church structure to offer programs that the appropriate Boards or Committees decide our members would find interesting and helpful. The Survey showed that some members want this and some do not. Those who are not interested would obviously not have to be involved and would not be inconvenienced.

9. Create a Lay Life Committee to provide “fun” activities. The activities might include bus trips, church picnics, movie or game nights, walks, bike rides, or any other wholesome group activity that our members might like. This Committee would look for and arrange activities where we could associate with each other, get to know each other better and have fun without controversy. This would not require any change in the Bylaws or vote by the Congregation. The Council could appoint such a committee, and if it was successful, it could later be included in the Bylaws.

As you think about these suggestions and the issues that give rise to them, please consider the diverse points of view expressed by the survey respondents, and the desirability of keeping our congregation together. Please ask yourself a question that was not asked by the Survey: “Do you want MCC to prosper, and if you do, what are you prepared to do to help make that happen?” Please look at the issues not so much from the point of view of what you would like if every member of MCC had the same world-view that you do, but, instead, try to look at what MCC members with other points of view would like in order to stay involved, and see if there are compromises that you can make to help us get there.

Please provide your views and any other suggestions you may have to someone on the Church Council. If you have questions or would like a more detailed description of the suggestions, please call Hugh McGee, 536-3905. The Members of the MCC Church Council are:

Pastor: Reverend Barbara Libby; Moderator: Hugh McGee; Treasurer: Frank Davis; Clerk: Stacey Herrman; Board of Deacons Co-Chairs: Jody Capen and Alan Greener; Board of Trustees Chair: Kathleen O’Beirne; Adult Christian Education Committee Chair: Mary Stewart Barber; Children’s Christian Education Committee Chair: Sue Skogerboe; Christian Mission Committee Chair: Liz Webb; Music Committee Chair: Jack Leary; Women’s Fellowship President: Barbara Read; Youth Ministry Committee Chair: James McGee.