

Cover Intro

The Joint Witness Agreement (see Joint Witness Agreement document) was developed by members of Westminster and St. John's to provide a structure and outline some basic processes for the coming together of these two faith communities. As the two communities have made their way and as Potentials Consulting has engaged in the process, we have learned a great deal more about what may be needed, what confusion has emerged even with the Joint Agreement, and what possibilities are available for an even more constructive process going forward.

We invite you to review this document as evidence of the best intentions on the part of all parties. Now that Potentials Consulting has conducted significant research about Partnership Place, the Recommendations document, which builds on the good work established in the agreement and seeks to address several issues that have emerged since its signing.

Both the Presbytery and the UCC Conference are aware and actively involved as partners in this process. A new foundational document that will shape your organization for years to come will likely be developed in 2025, once several issues that have emerged are addressed (see the FAQs document).

Please know that we continue to hold these communities, this process, and the abundant hope for your future in our hearts and prayers.

JOINT WITNESS AGREEMENT

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A JOINT WITNESS OF ST JOHN’S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST AND WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PURPOSE/NAME

This document refers to the Joint Witness arrangement to describe the initial affiliation between Westminster Presbyterian Church and St John’s United Church of Christ.

PREAMBLE

The purpose of the Joint Witness will be to carry out the Great Ends of the Church:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

(Book of Order, Presbyterian Church (USA), F-1.0304)

It is the intention of both congregations to engage in Joint Witness for a minimum of five years.

WORSHIP

There will be one worship service each Sunday, and additional services on special occasions as desired. Worship leadership will be shared by the pastors of Westminster and St. John's. Lay worship leaders will also be included, taking care that over the course of time participants are drawn from both constituent congregations. Pastors will take turns preaching on a schedule that they will determine together. The order of worship will be determined by the pastors in consultation with the worship committee. Worship will include at a minimum prayer, reading of scripture, a sermon, congregational song, and an opportunity for people to respond with their gifts. Communion will be shared at least monthly, and Baptism will be scheduled when necessary. Music selections will be chosen in the manner to which the person preaching is accustomed.

PASTOR

St. John's and Westminster will each create a job description and employ a part-time pastor. These pastors will share in preaching and worship leadership. Each will provide pastoral care to their own congregation, and they will cover vacations and emergencies for one another in this regard. They will serve as ex officio members of the Joint Witness Board. They will be responsible for ecclesiastical functions of their own church. They may, at their discretion or if requested attend meetings of the various Joint Witness committees as ex-officio members as needed, and perform other functions as time permits. The two pastors will function as co-pastors with respect to the Joint Witness arrangement.

MISSION AND MINISTRY

St. John's United Church of Christ and Westminster Presbyterian Church feel called to form a partnership that will enable us to fulfill God's purpose for us: sharing the good news of the Gospel, being God's voice, hands, and feet in the world today, being God's light that shines through the darkness, and loving, living, & sharing with, and caring for our neighbors. St. John's and Westminster have always had a strong passion for and commitment to mission. Through this partnership, it is our vision to combine and transform our mission focus into something that is more relational.

Initially we would continue with the extensive local mission efforts in which both churches are engaged. For example, for the past 12 years, WPC, along with 4 partner churches, has been instrumental in the leadership, organization, and administration of the Jackson Personal Care Ministry, a weekly pantry that provides personal hygiene and household care products for our neighbors in need. Westminster also supports the Jackson Interfaith Shelter, the Jackson County Youth Home, the DSS Foster Care Program, and the Presbyterian Giving Catalog with financial donations, personal gifts, individual personal service, and prayer.

St John's ministries include, but are not limited to, offering showers in the church building for persons who are unhoused and housing insecure, a monthly community food pantry, a monthly program to provide children's clothing and supplies, monthly community dinners, and monthly dances for the developmentally disabled.

The extent of current activities bears witness to the commitment and experience both congregations bring to mission and ministry.

As the Joint Mission Committee begins to function, they would evaluate each of these missions according to need and effectiveness.

The values that inform our future ministry together include, but are not limited to, sustainability, relationships, faithfulness, personal growth and development, relevance, and inclusion. Our goal is to develop a strategic plan for ministry and mission based on a comprehensive needs assessment that will reflect God's love for all people and the vision of God's Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

St. John's and Westminster have been encouraged to "Dream Big" about our mutual future mission focus (Aspirational Ministry). Inspired by scripture and the Spirit, we have considered several exciting possibilities:

1. Related to Current Mission: There are already many people who come to or call St. John's seeking assistance. We could build on what is already provided by hiring a part-time social worker to serve on staff, assisting with resources, needs, and support. We could develop programs that teach life skills in addition to meeting immediate needs. We could develop a relational ministry in which the churches partner with neighbors to identify their skills and passions to use them in a sustainable way.
2. Big New Ideas: Depending on what the needs assessment finds, and with commitment to a big idea, we could house a refugee family and assist them with becoming settled in all aspects of life in the community, eventually transitioning them to independence and repeating the process with another family. Or, we might develop and run a mobile laundry or shower service, run a child care center, or create a community center (a vision which has previously surfaced in both churches).
3. We could develop a marketing plan to make the church more visible and attractive, to promote church and community services and activities: signage, website, update the building exterior and grounds.

These ambitious missions would require similar infrastructure and funding to become successful. Many of these mission aspirations would require the employment of professional management/leadership to assist the congregation in the development, operation, monitoring, marketing, and planning for growth of the mission.

Despite which "Aspirational Ministry" is decided upon, it will take time, discernment, planning, compromise & co-operation, adequate financial resources, patience, and perhaps professional consultation to ensure success. IT IS OUR INTENTION TO ENGAGE, ALONG WITH ST JOHN'S, A CONSULTANT, WHO WILL ASSIST THE TWO CONGREGATIONS IN DEFINING A FUTURE THAT HAS IMPACT, AND IS SUSTAINABLE. It is better to do one thing well than disperse resources in

multiple ways which reduce long term benefits.

As in all things, we pray for God's guidance in each step of this new mission focus.

SUSTAINABILITY AND GROWTH

Westminster Presbyterian Church and St John's United Church of Christ will form a committee to carry out an intentional plan to encourage growth, membership, sustainability, and evangelism. At every step, the committee will spend significant effort to ensure consensus between the congregations.

As a first step, the parties will develop a clear, compelling message, or mission statement, that sums up the beliefs of the two churches, and obtain consensus for it from the two congregations. The message should be brief, easy to remember, and easy to say.

Once planning is complete, the committee will develop a budget that may cover such items as signage for the church, measures to create a welcoming atmosphere inside and outside the church, and a robust, joint website. The plan may also call for a paid consultant to help the parties create a suitable, concrete strategy that identifies strengths, weaknesses, and areas with the most potential to foster growth.

MEMBERSHIP

St. John's United Church of Christ and Westminster Presbyterian church will each maintain a roster of their respective members. Those who express interest in becoming a member of the worshipping community will choose which congregation with which they desire to affiliate, and will do so according to the procedures of that congregation. If people don't have a preference, we will alternate the congregation which they join.

BUDGET, PROPERTY, ASSETS

The finances of the two congregations will remain separate.

St John's will retain sole ownership of its building and property.

Westminster will retain sole ownership of its property, and if/when the WPC property is sold, the proceeds will be held in a Westminster account.

Westminster will pay St John's an equal, 50% share of the expenses benefitting both churches. In 2025 and following, a budget will be created and the specific expenses to be shared will be determined for approval by the Session of WPC and by the Council and congregation of St. John's.

The churches will share loose offering income equally.

Additional specific detail is spelled out in the cost-sharing agreement, attached.

DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION

The two churches will retain their denominational identity while they join together as one worshipping community, committed to loving and serving God and their community.

The Joint Agreement will preserve the governance structure of both parties.

The Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church USA and Westminster's bylaws and policies will govern Westminster Presbyterian Church.

The Constitution and Bylaws of St John's United Church of Christ will govern its church.

Differences in polity are few; those differences will be addressed in this document as appropriate.

BENEVOLENCES

The parties pledge their financial support and participation in the life and mission of the PCUSA and the United Church of Christ.

Westminster Presbyterian church will continue to remit per capita and General Mission Giving to the PCUSA, as well as giving at the local level.

St. John's will continue to remit dues to the United Church of Christ and support its mission giving, as well as giving at the local level.

The parties will intentionally seek member support for both denominational and local benevolences.

AMENDMENTS

Any member may offer an amendment to the Joint Agreement to the Joint Board for a vote.

If approved by the Joint Board, the amendment will be considered by the Session and the Council, and then by the respective congregations.

RELOCATION

If the parties are considering relocation, they shall confer with the Conference and the Presbytery before any steps are taken leading to such action. The approval of the Conference and the Presbytery shall be received before any such action is taken.

DISSOLUTION

A resolution indicating the desire of either of the congregations to terminate the Joint Witness Agreement must be adopted at a legally called and conducted special meetings of the congregation seeking dissolution, by a two-thirds vote of the members of the congregation. Such a meeting may be held no sooner than 90 days after written notice of the meeting is received by the Presbytery and the Conference. If the resolution is adopted by a two-thirds vote of the members of the congregation, the relationship between the congregations will be terminated. Upon termination, each church may repossess any personal property contributed to this arrangement. Any prepaid expenses shall be prorated to the date of termination and settled accordingly.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE JOINT WITNESS ARRANGEMENT

THE CONGREGATION OF THE JOINT WITNESS ARRANGEMENT

The congregation of the Joint Witness arrangement will be made up of members of Westminster Presbyterian Church and St John's United Church of Christ.

Specified functions, such as budget approval, are the purview of the Session, the Council, and/or the individual congregations of the two churches, per denominational rules. The congregation made up of the members of the two churches will vote on such matters, i.e. matters reserved to the Session, Council, and/or congregations, only after those matters have been approved by the appropriate denominational governing body.

All members of the joint congregation may vote on matters put before the joint congregation.

The joint congregation will meet at least twice a year, for an annual meeting and an organizational meeting.

A special joint congregational meeting may be called by either of the pastors, the session or the council, or on the written request of 10 members of the congregation.

The moderator of the Joint Board will be the moderator of joint congregational meetings.

The secretary of the Joint Board will take the minutes of joint congregational meetings and file them per procedures.

There will be notice of a joint congregational meeting on two consecutive Sundays before the day of the meeting, during worship or in the weekly worship bulletin. There shall be notice to every member through electronic means 48 hours before the time of the meeting.

A quorum of a joint congregational meeting consists of 10 members of each church for any duly called meeting. Members attending by electronic means may count toward the quorum, but must be able to hear and speak during the meeting.

JOINT WITNESS BOARD

The Joint Witness Board will be responsible for the day to day administration of the Joint Witness arrangement, in collaboration with the pastor(s). The Joint Board will play a key role in integrating the two congregations while respecting the denominational requirements of each church.

The Joint Board may consider and vote on recommendations to be made to the Westminster Session and congregation, and to the St John's UCC Council and congregation, for final decision making in accord with denominational rules.

The Joint Board will meet at least four times a year.

Duties

- Take intentional measures to promote cooperation and open communication between the two congregations
- Oversee the joint committees of the church
- Create regulations and policies, as needed, to govern various areas of the Joint arrangement.
- Create policies for the Joint Witness arrangement that fulfill the requirements of the two denominations and cover other topics as identified.
- Regularly, at least annually, review the workings of the combined church and its governing structure
- Call joint congregational meetings
- Maintain a membership roll for all members, drawing on statistics maintained by the Council and the Session
- Recommend amendments to the Joint Witness Agreement to the Westminster Session and to the St. John's Council and congregation for approval.

Makeup

- The Joint Board will consist of nine members, four from each congregation, and the ninth member will rotate every two years to maintain balance.
- The pastors are ex-officio members.
- The officers of the Joint Board will be a moderator, a secretary, and two treasurers, one from each congregation.
- Five Joint Board members who are not officers will represent five committees to the board as listed below.
- The officers and the five committee chairs will be identified prior to the vote for Joint Board members, i.e. they will agree to their specific role, and will be voted into office by the congregation from which they originate.
- The moderator position will rotate every two years between the two congregations.
- The moderator will be a lay member of the congregation.
- The term for a member of the Joint Board is two years, with the ability to serve for two additional years. The terms will be staggered. The terms of the initial members will be adjusted to allow for staggered terms.
- It is the intention of the Joint Board to respect the polity of both churches, and to fully represent the needs and aspirations of St John's United Church of Christ and Westminster Presbyterian Church.

JOINT COMMITTEES

The following committees will report to the Joint Board:

- Administration: finance, staffing, building and grounds
- Mission: programs, benevolences, marketing, evangelism, vision for growth
- Worship: pastoral leadership, worship planning/order, music, AV technology
- Nurture: Christian Ed., member care, fellowship
- Communications: Congregational, i.e. internal, communications

JOINT COMMITTEE RESPONSIBILITIES AND MAKEUP

- Committees will provide a mission statement for their work, with a brief statement of responsibilities and priorities, and file the statement with the board.
- Committees will prepare an annual report of their activities.
- At least four members will serve on each committee, with representation from both churches. Every committee will include a member of the Joint Board
- Pastors are ex officio members of all committees. Their attendance is optional.
- Many (or most) committees will become joint committees and report to the Joint Witness Board. Certain committees will continue to report to the Session or Council based on needs.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF ST JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

THE CONGREGATION OF ST JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Bylaws 1.2 The Congregation shall hold at least two meetings per year, the annual meeting in January and the October meeting for elections.

Bylaws 1.2 Materials for regular and special meetings shall be available to members the Sunday a week before the meeting.

Bylaws 1.2 Special meetings may be called by the pastor and the church council, or at the written request of 10 members of the congregation presented to the church council.

Bylaws 1.2 An emergency meeting may be called by the president or the pastor.

Bylaws 1.3 Regular and special meetings will be announced during worship or in the weekly worship bulletin on two consecutive Sundays before the day of the meeting. In addition, there shall be notification to every member through electronic means 48 hours before the meeting.

Bylaws 1.4 A quorum consists of all members present for any duly called meeting, including members participating by electronic means

Responsibilities of a congregational meeting include:

- Amend the Joint Witness Agreement
- Dissolve the Joint Witness arrangement
- Bylaws 1.5 Buy and sell property, budget approval, building projects, the call and rejection of a pastor, policies of the congregation, changes in the constitution and bylaws

CHURCH COUNCIL OF ST JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

The Church Council shall consist of the pastor, five officers and four committee chairs, elected by the St. John's congregation

The Church Council shall meet monthly except for July and August. Special meetings are subject to the call of the Council President, or the Pastor, or at the request of any three council members.

The Church shall be guided by the senior pastor and governed between congregational meetings by the following filled positions: president, vice president, council secretary, financial secretary, church treasurer, buildings and grounds lead, social justice lead, outreach lead, ministry lead.

The lead pastor shall serve as a member of the church council.

The duties of the Church Council include:

- Direct the affairs of the church in compliance with its stated mission and in coordination with the lead pastor
- Call special congregational meetings
- Establish church policy and publish it in the church newsletter
- Oversee a pastoral transition plan, including appointment of a search committee with Elder Team input
- Present a pastor nominee to the Congregation
- Recommend to the Congregation amendments to the Joint Witness Agreement
- Recommend to the Congregation the dissolution of the Joint Witness arrangement
- Appoint Personnel, Nominating, Finance, Building and Grounds, Outreach and Social Action, and Church and Ministry committee members.

MEMBERSHIP IN ST JOHN'S UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

St John's Constitution: We accept all who wish to participate in the life of the church at St John's UCC. Anyone may participate in St John's worship services and other activities. All members

shall be voting members.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

THE CONGREGATION OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WPC Bylaws Article III -- Governance

Section 4 -- Congregation

The congregation shall meet annually in June, and may meet at such other times as called for by the Session or the Presbytery. The Session must call a special meeting if petitioned in writing by one-fourth of the active membership. Special meetings other than the annual meeting shall be given public notice at two successive Sundays prior to the meeting. The meeting may be held immediately after the notice given on the second Sunday. Such notice shall clearly state the purpose, time, and place of such meeting. No other items of business may be considered at special meetings other than the item(s) published. Such business must be business properly reserved for the congregation as determined by the Book of Order. All and only active members shall be entitled to vote at congregational meetings. Voting by proxy is not permitted. Meetings shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of Robert's Rules of Order and shall be guided by the Book of Order and Book of Confessions. In accordance with the laws of the State of Michigan, both ecclesiastical and corporate business may be conducted at the same meeting of the congregation.

In the event that it is unsafe, unwise, or not possible for a congregational meeting to be held in person, the congregation may meet by electronic meeting technology. Reasonable notice of the electronic meeting must be provided, and those attending via technology must have the ability to discuss and vote on business items. The quorum for such a meeting shall be 10 percent of the Active Members.

Section 5 — Moderator: The installed pastor shall preside at all meetings of the congregation. If it is impractical for the pastor to preside, he or she shall invite another teaching elder (minister) who is a member of the presbytery, or a person authorized by the presbytery to serve as moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or the installed pastor is unable to moderate and/or to name another moderator, the presbytery shall make provision for a moderator. Since the pastor is not a member of the congregation, the Moderator shall invite a member of the Session to preside when corporate business is to be transacted.

Section 6 — Clerk: The clerk of the session, or someone designated by the Moderator, shall be the recording secretary of congregational meetings.

Section 7 — Elder elections: Elders will be elected at the Annual Meeting, and will be ordained or installed to office as soon as is practical following their election.

Section 8 — Quorum: A quorum for a congregational meeting shall be 10% of the Active Members.

The powers and role of the congregation of Westminster Presbyterian Church derive from the PCUSA Book of Order, G-1.0504

- Elect elders, deacons and trustees
- Call pastor, copastor, associate pastor
- Change the relationship with a pastor/approve terms of call
- Request, consent to or decline dissolution of the congregation
- Buy, mortgage or sell real property
- Request the Presbytery of Lake Michigan to grant an exemption as permitted in the PCUSA Constitution
- Approve a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amend or dissolve the joint congregational witness (G-5.05)
- Receive a disciplinary decision against a member of a congregation as required by D-9.0102

THE SESSION OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WPC Bylaws Article III -- Governance

Section 1 — The Session.

The Session shall consist of elders elected from the entire congregation, together with the moderator. The session is responsible to fulfill the constitutional requirements of the Book of Order G-3.01 and G-3.02, and other responsibilities assigned by these by-laws.

The Session is governed by the Book of Order of the PCUSA. Pertinent sections include G-3.02, G-0203, G-3.0204, G-3.0205, G-2.08

Duties of the Westminster Session in the Joint Witness arrangement include, but are not limited to:

- Maintain denominational relationship
- Approve a budget
- Oversee the management of WPC property and assets; bring related items to the congregation, as required
- Oversee WPC benevolences at local and denominational level
- Approve and put forth to the WPC congregation the members of a Pastor Nominating Committee and a nomination for a WPC pastor
- Provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard
- Authorize the Lord's Supper at least quarterly
- Authorize baptisms as appropriate
- Maintain membership rolls and registers (baptisms, pastor installation) of Presbyterian members
- Examine elders and deacons in preparation for ordination

- Approve a plan for the creation of a joint congregational witness, or amend or dissolve the joint congregational witness

WPC Bylaws Article III -- Governance

Section 2 — Terms of office: The session shall be comprised of 6 to 9 ruling elders divided as closely as possible into three equal classes, one class being elected each year at the annual meeting for a three-year term. No ruling elder shall serve on the session for consecutive terms, either full or partial, aggregating more than six years; but shall be eligible for re-election to a new term after one year has passed. Elders elected at the annual meeting shall take office on the first of the following month. Elders elected at other times shall take office immediately.

Section 3 — Vacancies: Vacancies on the session may be filled at a special meeting of the congregation or at the annual meeting as determined by the session.

DIRECTORS OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WPC Bylaws Article III Governance

Section 9 — Directors: The corporation shall elect three Directors from among the elders serving on Session, divided into three classes with one elected every year for a three-year term. Should there be the need to fill a vacant position; the Session will call a special meeting of the corporation to do so.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WPC Bylaws Article III, Nominating Committee

Section 10 — Nominating Committee: A nominating committee representative of the congregation shall be elected by the congregation. This committee shall consist of at least three active members of the congregation, and shall include at least one ruling elder who is currently serving on the Session. This committee shall bring to the annual meeting nominations for each office to be filled of at least one eligible person and not more than two eligible persons for each office to be filled.

COMMITTEES OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

WPC Bylaws Article IV — Committees

Section 1 — Committee formation: The session may create committees as needed to do the work of the church. All committees report to the session.

AMENDMENTS

WPC Bylaws Article V — Amendments

Section 1 — Amendments: These bylaws may be amended subject to the Articles of Incorporation, the laws of the State of Michigan, and the Book of Order of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) by two-thirds majority of voters present at a duly called meeting of the Congregation. Proposed amendments must be submitted in printed form at the same time as the call to the meeting at which the changes are to be voted upon.

MEMBERSHIP IN WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Membership in Westminster Presbyterian Church is governed by the Book of Order of the PCUSA, G-1.0303 and following. See Book of Order for a fuller description

Persons may enter into active membership by

- public profession of faith, following examination by the session and baptism if necessary
- letter of transfer from another Christian Church
- reaffirmation of faith

Presbyterian members fall into three categories

- Baptized members who have not made a profession of faith. They are not entitled to a vote.
- Active members who have been baptized and received into membership. Active members may be elected to ordered ministry (i.e. a position requiring ordination), and vote at a congregational meeting
- Affiliate members who do not have the right to vote and who cannot enter into ordered ministry

DISSOLUTION OF WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

A request to dissolve Westminster Presbyterian Church would be made to the Presbytery who would oversee the process.

CONCLUSION

It is our intention that the provisions of this agreement will enable Westminster Presbyterian Church and St. John’s United Church of Christ to work together as Joint Witnesses to the love and work of Christ, as we share together in loving God and neighbor and serving the greater Jackson community in Jesus’ name.

APPROVALS SIGNOFFS

This agreement was approved by Westminster Presbyterian Church, Jackson, MI, on

_____ (date) as certified by _____ (WPC Clerk)

This agreement was approved by St John’s United Church of Christ, Jackson, MI, on

_____ (date) as certified by _____ (SJUCC Secretary)

_____ (date) as certified by _____ (SJUCC _____)

This agreement was approved by the Presbytery of Lake Michigan on

_____ (date) as certified by _____ (PLM _____)

Narrative Timeline

The Joint Witness Agreement was agreed to on September 8, 2024. It created a starting point for the Partnership Place initiative and was essential for getting things in motion. It provided the Presbytery some notice of plans at the start and was understood to be an expression of intention that would be fluid as the needs of the congregations became clear.

As our consultants have told us, there are some areas in which we “put the cart before the horse”, all with the best of intentions. As we have entered into our self-study and learned about some of the differences between the two congregations – in polity, culture and vocabulary – we have realized there is additional work to be done. The recommendations made to us by Potentials Consulting are both attached.

Finally, we present the first of an ongoing initiative to keep all interested parties up to date on what is happening, questions that are being asked, possibilities explored, and decisions made. The FAQ s will be released twice a month and we invite you to participate! Send your questions to: jointwitnessproject@gmail.com.

We want to thank the Thought Partners, all of whom can also serve as a resource to you in this process: Bette Watkins, Allen Shroeder, Bob Speiss, Michele Wilson, Kathy Johns and Gary Reasoner. Thank you, Thought Partners!

Recommendations:

We are beyond pleased to work with you through this process. It is especially exciting that this union is being fully embraced by the parishioners, *not* initiated, promoted, and motivated by the pastors!

As we have noted, your congregations have been so passionate about what the joint ministries could accomplish, and so sure about the desirability of this collaboration, that you put the cart before the horse regarding operations vs. cultural concerns. This has caused some speed bumps. We recommend that the process slow a bit while you 1) study polity, 2) sort out the essentials from the traditional, 3) forge a unified approach to worship patterns, polity, missional focus, and governance.

Immediate

- 1) We recommend that you move to a single pastoral leadership model, calling Pastor Judy to a full-time position by last Sunday in November.
 - a. Establish a representative body to craft an order of worship that allows both for predictability and for flexibility. In today's worship world, the best service is one where people of all learning types can feel and appreciate the message.
 - b. Consider expanding your on-line interactions, so that people attending remotely feel even more included.
 - c. Vary the musical offerings to accommodate both live and recorded music with attention given to the best ways to include online attendees.
 - d. Create ad hoc, task specific working groups to create 1) a shared understanding of the function of worship (see above), and an order that is fluid and supports that understanding; 2) a mission statement that reflects the missional spirit of Partnership Place, and establish foci for outreach that supports this statement; 3) a comprehensive plan for sorting, storing and managing property; 4) polity & governance. Here we can help with some templates for you to consider, should you wish to continue to work with us. Please keep in mind that the most important thing here is that it works for you. Either denomination will support that as a primary goal. See below.

- 2) Establishing operational/governance and by-law standards: OB
 - a. We recommend that you do some homework, working closely with support from the Presbytery and the Conference to research each other's polity. We note that each denomination has an annual responsibility for reporting, for instance, though what they report is quite different.
 - b. Establish a representative body to study the findings and develop a draft of a shared approach to managing operational decisions and governance issues

- c. We recommend that you present the findings *and* your conclusions from all the ad hoc teams mentioned above to a gathering of the whole body
 - d. We encourage discussion and ratification of each working team’s conclusions. A consensus model is encouraged.
- 3) Move to a “unicameral” leadership model rather than a Joint Witness Committee with the Council and Session as separate bodies that comprise the Unicameral.
- a. We recommend Session and Council meet together with the following format:
 - i. All joint business of the church would take place at the beginning of the meeting;
 - ii. Denomination-specific business, if needed, would take place next; then,
 - iii. The joint body would reconvene to celebrate communion together.

Intermediate

- 4) Presbytery and Conference support
- a. The COM/Presbytery can help coordinate Session meetings and to provide pulpit supply if, when and as needed.
 - b. The Rev. Lawrence Richardson of the Michigan Conference will continue to provide support as needed
 - c. The Presbytery and the Conference will liaise with the consultants if, when and as necessary
 - d. Begin a search for an intern: we recommend that you begin to develop a “job description” or profile, selling the opportunity you might provide to a student who might wish to intern with you. The current/ Senior/ Settled Pastor would mentor and support this individual and there would be a Shepherding Team formed within to provide guidance and support for a student to explore their pastoral identity.

Longer term

- 5) We encourage you to connect with other entities/service agencies in Jackson
- a. For instance, as we drove down Lansing on Sunday, we noted that there is a building loaded with social service agencies that might partner with you, on your end of town, providing shuttle service or alternative presence as needed, increasing the reach of all.
- 6) When partnerships have been identified and a self–study done, we would like to encourage an arrangement with Partners for Sacred Places, to solidify these partnerships.

- 7) Because the Partnership Place building is so spacious, we encourage you to explore becoming a hub for the arts as well: concerts, art exhibits, etc.

Where we can help:

- 1) To date we have been working with 2 Thought Partners from each congregation and the Pastors. It is time to expand the thought and decision reach. We would ask two additional Thought Partners be brought on board: one from Session and one from Council. Please let us know if you want to discuss this further or if we can support you in the process.
- 2) The development and distribution of “rolling” FAQs, meaning new questions and responses can be added as you make this journey together. There will be a need for ongoing attention to cultural conundrums.
- 3) Helping to craft announcements for social media/ media attention and local outreach for both clients and volunteers, linked to your FAQs.
- 4) Infusing vitality insights and initiatives into current practices. (a twofer!)

What it will take:

Option #1) Online Coaching with Pastor Judy once a month (\$200/month) & online coaching with Pastor Judy and a leadership body [joint meeting of Session and Council] and/or Thought Partners once a month (\$300/month).

Option #2) Meeting online with a joint leadership body (see above) once a month for an extended session (\$500/month)

We understand that so far, most of this work has been supported through the Genesis Grant, offered by the Michigan Conference. Please note: It is our understanding that the Presbytery also has funds that may be available to support this initiative.

For the FAQs

There are always questions! And if you have a question someone, if not “several many” someones (as Claire’s niece would say) will have that question. Please direct questions to one of the Thought Partners. They are: Kathy Johns, Gary Reasoner, Bob Speiss, Michele Wilson, Bette Watkins and Allen Schroeder. You may also submit questions directly to:

What we will do with the questions: We will answer them in the FAQs which we hope to get out no less than twice a month. FAQs are Frequently Asked Questions. These documents are intended to provide all of those interested with the same answer at the same time to the questions asked. This is intended to prevent misunderstandings of all sorts. They will be distributed to all stakeholders, stored on the website, and archived for future reference.

Not included in the current FAQs, and important to address are the things that have happened so far that are different than we thought they might be.

For example, people have asked questions about the transitions of Jake and Jon. During the course of the work with Potentials (Claire and Trace), it became clear that while the goal of having two part-time pastors was intended to make the workload easier to carry, it was in practice causing confusion and, in some ways, increasing the work. In other churches where such a process has been undertaken, the community has decided to move forward with one pastor to provide clarity of leadership. The Potentials recommendations makes this more explicit. The Westminster Session, who in the case of an interim pastor serves as the hiring and personnel committee, voted to accept Potentials’ recommendation, and Pastor Jake chose to leave shortly after the decision was made.

As for Jon’s transition, the Session and Council felt it was best to move in a new direction.

The Joint Witness Agreement took a lot of time and effort to develop! Why is it not our blueprint for this work?

As a plan, the Joint Witness Agreement provided a thoughtful and well-crafted document and gave us an agreement so that we could begin our joint ministry at Partnership Place. However, there were things we could not have foreseen, and opportunities it precluded.

The recommendations made by Potentials Consulting to begin “at the beginning” by forming working groups around particular essentials in understanding is something we missed in the Joint Witness Agreement and might change how we want to move forward together. There is a saying that when humans say, “I have a plan,” God laughs. By forming working groups to investigate and understand each other's polity *first*, we will have a common, mutual understanding to look towards preparing for a nimble and collaborative future.

Partnership Place

Frequently Asked Questions

The following questions and responses are offered for prayerful consideration as the congregations of St. John's UCC and Westminster Presbyterian proceed in their journey toward becoming Partnership Place. Additional questions and responses will be added to this list as they emerge among and between the two groups.

1. What will happen to WPC? Will it be absorbed into SJUCC? Will it still be Presbyterian?
 - The expectation at this time is the Westminster will continue as a congregation. It will still have Session members, still be recognized as a part of the Presbytery, and still follow the Book of Order. The Presbyterian Church (USA) and United Church of Christ are denominations "in full communion," meaning we can exchange pastors, celebrate the sacraments together, and share in worship, education, and mission. In many ways, Partnership Place will be a living embodiment of this commitment, drawing on the best of both traditions.
2. Will we be seeking another interim pastor? Will we be seeking a part-time Presbyterian pastor in the future, as we had originally planned?
 - That will be up to the larger community, though there are not many options, i.e., there are very few "professional ~~interim~~ or transitional pastors" in your part of the country. A vital part of the ongoing journey together will require a thoughtful, engaged personnel committee that does not simply reflect on the quality of leadership but also and especially on the needs of the community and the capacity of the pastor to meet those needs.
3. How similar are the PC (USA) and UCC in worship practices?
 - Both churches honor the ideal of "freedom in form and function" of worship. Because we both have ties to similar theological traditions, worship will ideally reflect the best of both communities.
4. How can we be sure that some of the worship services/parts of worship services that are important to me/us are still included in our church year?
 - Potentials has recommended a joint worship committee, perhaps even inviting that group to generate liturgy with the pastor and musician. While some weeks may have a stronger "flavor" of one tradition or the other, the commitment to co-creating a shared experience will be vital. This will be especially important around significant days (Christmas Eve, Easter, etc.).

5. The narrative of Potentials recommendations is not very clear under Immediate: 1. a - d and 2. a. - d. It seems like there is repetition regarding the "representative bodies" and their tasks. Could this be simplified in an outline format?
 - Response: Yes. Potentials encourages the governing body to use this as guidance in developing documents for the next stage of this journey. Potentials recommends that an immediate starting place be understanding each other's polity. The Thought Partners, ACM for the UCC and COM Chair of the Presbytery will address the how of this.
6. You recommend in the opening paragraph "sorting out the essentials from the traditional". Please clarify what you are referring to.
 - Response: Tradition refers to patterned practices and/or behaviors that are familiar and comfortable, though not necessarily tied to the core identity of a community. The "essentials" are those things which make you you. Both congregations will see changes to their traditions, and there will be essential aspects of their identities that will remain a part of the new Partnership Place.
7. Initially, we were led to believe that the addition of as well as the needs of a combined congregation would be an unmanageable demand on a part-time pastor, and said pastor did not want to commit to full-time. What factors led to a change in that pastor's decision? If in the future this change proves to be too demanding, how will that affect pastoral leadership?
 - Response: First, this journey has been a season of discernment for all involved. As a part of the community, Judy has come to sense a call to serve in a more full-time capacity. She recognizes some challenges with her commute from Indiana, and she hopes to develop a team-approach with other leaders from the community. One of the reasons Potentials recommended an intern for Partnership Place was to provide some of this support. There are no guarantees for how long this will serve the congregation well or how long it will be manageable for Judy. It is the best next step in this process.
8. The issue of membership of new members at PP has never been resolved. What recommendations would Potentials have for that situation?
 - Because we recognize each other as denominations in "full communion," members may be on the rolls of both denominations if they joined the combined community. It all depends on the terms of agreement when the partnership is formally completed. One consideration may be fees due to denominational judicatories based on membership numbers. Many unions set a ratio at the time of union which is used as a formula for how much goes to each denomination. For example, if 75% of members are from St. John's and 25% are from Westminster, that percentage would be used annually to determine how much is judicatories.

- We have also both seen and served churches where people who wished to formally join chose one tradition/denomination or another. Since there will still be a Session and a Council and independent aspects of governance, this is another model for you to explore.