

Proposal: Region 15 Cluster and Network Support DRAFT

Origin: aUCC

Background

At the heart of our Church's continued commitment to the vitality of local communities of faith following our shift to the Three Council model was an expressed intent to nurture the creation of *clusters and networks*. These clusters and networks would connect communities of faith and individuals as "communities of common interest, mission, and support" and were expected to be "organically formed" (Remit 1: Three Council Model, 2016).

In Fall 2017, General Council Executive provided our Church more detailed definitions for clusters and networks, and more clarity about their provenance and place in our common life. In brief:

- Clusters: local clusters of communities of faith that would provide community and support for communities of faith and their leaders, and focus on worship, mission, learning, collegiality, and strategic planning
- Networks: linking people working on specific issues (e.g., supportive housing, intercultural ministry, youth ministry) or for project work (e.g., event planning) that function through the whole church, depending on the issue
- Both are to be encouraged, supported, and resourced (as requested and as is possible) by Church councils or local bodies, but their meaning and responsibility are not to be defined by Church councils or local bodies. (GCE: Clarity on Clusters and Networks, Nov 2017)

In Fall 2018, the Cluster Task Group of Maritime Conference Executive made its final report outlining expectations for the creation of clusters and networks in our regions. In brief:

- Establishing clusters and networks is to be "initiated and carried out by local communities of faith". While the Regional Minister and Regional Staff may be supportive resources to this work, their duties do not include establishing clusters and networks.
- Noting that "many are interested in clusters and networks but need some help to transition into these new forms of being connected," the Task Group registered its hope that "there might be assistance... for those who desire to move into supportive clusters and networks, yet need help in doing so." (MarCon: Cluster Task Group, Sept 2018)

Finally, our Region 15 Governance Handbook includes "developing opportunities for clusters and networks" in the duties of our four Divisions and their Committees, insofar as these are "necessary for the functioning of the Committee/Division". (Region 15: Governance Handbook v2, 2021)

Notwithstanding all the above, we are concerned that few if any clusters and networks have arisen organically in Region 15, and that this is limiting our health and capacity for faithful mission and service at the local level. While we recognize that this represents our failure at the local level to engage the cluster and network process as the expansive opportunity it provides, we also recognize that the energy to remedy this failure doesn't seem to exist.

Therefore

We believe that the Spirit is urgently calling us to respond to this issue by:

1. Establishing paid leadership for Cluster Animation in Region 15
2. Requesting that this animation begin with the establishment of some basic regional clusters to help us reconnect.

We ask that Region 15 create a Task Group to

1. Prepare a job description for a part-time and term-limited Cluster Animation position, which would include establishment of basic regional clusters.
2. Secure a grant or other funding for this position.
3. Hire to fill this position.

Staffing/Financial Implications

1. We hope that this version of a 'pastoral relations process' might be able to unfold largely via a *volunteer* Task Group, but we recognize that Regional Staff would also have to be involved.
2. This Cluster Animation position might be funded by one of our national grant programs, but it may also require regional funding.