**General Synod Frequency, Form, and Function Sub-Committee**

March 22, 2022

***Proposal for General Synod Frequency***

Constitution: ARTICLE X. THE GENERAL SYNOD (lines 343-348)

***The General Synod is the gathering of a faith community representative of the wider church to listen for and discern the call of God to the United Church of Christ. The General Synod***

***deliberates, discerns, and identifies the mission of the wider church of the United Church of Christ in God’s world and receives and offers suggestions, invitations, challenges, and assistance in covenant with Local Churches, Conferences, and other settings as they engage in mission together.***

The GS Frequency, Form and Function subcommittee discussed numerous proposals for General Synod moving into the future. This proposal is our agreed-upon best case scenario. We have held the following in mind while we worked.

**Resources:** We are limited bythe financial and human resources required to hold Synod for both national and conference settings. Our suggestion of frequency and length of Synod speaks to these concerns. Financial realities are a consideration at the national setting and especially at Conference settings. However, our deepest concern is for the human resources necessary for the planning and execution of Synod.

**Time:** Our proposal takes into account multiple time zones in the denomination.

**Stewardship:** Creation care is a priority for the wider church. A new format would have significantly less impact on the environment, especially carbon footprint.

**Community:** The opportunity to gather as a community was a consistent reason given by various constituencies for the purpose of Synod. Significantly, the Constitution names Syond as “*A gathering of a faith community...*” Thus, we discerned the importance of providing in-person gatherings.

**Technology:** The technology for hybrid and virtual meetings is developing quickly. Our proposal considers that by the year 2028, the technology may be very different than it is now. The changes in technology might make certain aspects of virtual or hybrid meetings possible that we cannot fathom now.

**Voting:** We agreed that by 2028 there will be – most likely – technology in place to allow for simultaneous, legal voting during a hybrid event. This would be necessary.

**Resolutions**: As we considered the function of Synod, we discussed the purpose and number of resolutions. This was necessary given our suggestion of a shortened event structure. We were also guided by the wording in the Constitution, “*The General Synod deliberates, discerns, and identifies the mission of the wider church…*” We encourage the following for reflection.

* Discerning the mission of the wider church may come through forms other than resolutions. Resolutions provide statements of our commitments and may reflect aspects of our shared mission. However, they are limited as a means of identifying the mission to the wider church. Perhaps we would consider the mission to the wider church first through intentional, internal discussion and then propose resolutions that speak to this mission.
* Limit accepted resolutions to topics within our own agency for action. (e.g., ministry with veterans (we have capacity to create programs directly) versus Space junk (we may care, but we have no capacity to act directly). Agency in this case means including a commitment to the resolution by a conference or association that includes an implementation plan, resource planning (including funding), and assessment plan to determine efficacy.
* Require demonstrated engagement with UCC Synod history to seek similar/related resolutions in the past to avoid redundancy. This might result in an action to reaffirm previous commitments we have made rather than creating a new resolution. (Note: This requires the commitment to creating a comprehensive searchable archive of previous resolutions)
* Consider some resolution topics as appropriate for special informational events at Synod (or other times via webinar) to measure depth and breadth of interest across the church on the topic and to develop an action plan.
* Carefully consider the intention of each resolution. We hope for actionable, realistic resolutions that speak to the mission and ministry of the denomination and that speak to the Constitution’s affirmation that actions of Synod offer “…suggestions, invitations, challenges, and assistance in covenant with Local Churches, Conferences, and other settings as they engage in mission together.”

**Proposal for General Synod**

(From the GS Form, Function and Frequency sub-committee)

**Frequency:** **Triennial Meeting** (First one in **2028**)

**Form:** One week hybrid (allowing both in-person and virtual attendance)

**Time:** Time zone planning for Synod in Hybrid format will be a challenge every time we plan for Synod. For the Synod in 2028 we recommend that all events be scheduled to allow access for participants US time zones from the Eastern to Hawaii. Time framework would be revisited by the UCCB for all subsequent Synods in Hybrid format depending on geographical location.

**Function**: Mission clarity and integrity, fellowship, business (resolutions, elections), worship, keynote, affirmation of new officers

**Possible Schedule for Synod 2028**

**Monday – Wednesday**: Committee Meetings for resolutions and workshops, via Zoom or another platform

**Thursday**: Travel Day (possible optional in-person event in evening, e.g., concert)

**Friday**: 1:00 – 9:00 PM EST Business of the Day [hybrid format for plenaries]

* Opening Worship
* Plenary 1
* Plenary 2
* Keynote Presentation

**Saturday:** 1:00 – 9:00 PM EST Business of the Day [hybrid format for plenaries]

* Opening devotion
* Plenary 3
* Theological Play (reflection sessions, service project, etc.)
* Plenary 4
* Evening Events

**Sunday**: 1:00 – 4:00 EST Business of the Day [hybrid format for plenary]

* Plenary 5: Closing Business, installation of officers, etc.
* Closing Worship

Travel might occur on Sunday evening or Monday.

**NOTE**: Any morning or evening events on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday would be in-person only and not related to Synod decision-making business (e.g., Alumni/ae gatherings, Historical Council event, Special interest presentations, etc.). These would take place at times determined by the geographical location of the Synod.

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**NEXT STEPS:**

The subcommittee recommends that the UCCB form a committee of the Board prior to the 2028 Synod to assess the event and make recommendations to the UCCB about future *format* of subsequent Synods (in-person, hybrid, etc.). The current sub-committee cannot make a recommendation beyond 2028 since we do not know how technology will evolve or how the resources of Conferences and the National Setting may change in the intervening years. It is possible that a hybrid event might alternate with a fully virtual event. However, that would be for the UCCB to decide after 2028.

The Frequency, Form and Function Subcommittee recommends that the Executive Committee and Governance Committee consider how this proposal could be formally formatted and presented to the UCCB by its October meeting. The proposal would then be adapted for a proposed Bylaws amendment to be voted on in Indianapolis in 2023. This would include how a change to a 3-year cycle would affect terms in office and the like.

Board Chair Cameron Barr will send the proposal to the Governance Committee via Executive Committee. The Governance Committee may then request to meet with the GS Form, Frequency and Function sub-committee for more information.

The subcommittee highly recommends holding “listening sessions” with UCCB members prior to the October UCCB meeting.