

# **Southwest Conference United Church of Christ Profile**





## Greetings from the Southwest Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Our Conference spans a large area – Arizona, New Mexico and El Paso, Texas – that is diverse in geography and rich in cultures. The Southwest Conference has a long tradition, that continues to the present, of being in the forefront of social justice issues facing our region and nation. We are unabashed experimenters.

The last decade has been a time of great change in the Conference. We restructured our governance, purchased a mission-oriented space to house our offices, and extended our reach as social justice partners with other, like-minded organizations. We balanced our budget and are fiscally sound. Marriage Equality has arrived in Arizona and New Mexico (but not yet in El Paso). Our conference is Open and Affirming and Immigrant Welcoming.

The Conference and local churches believe passionately that the Conference should be a full participant in the community around us. Together, we are involved in the sanctuary movement, marriage equality, prisoner rights, homeless issues, environmental issues, and we participate and work with many interfaith organizations. The Conference strongly supports our existing churches and traditions and enthusiastically embraces our new and post-modern churches. We are forward-looking and progressive.

Society and the Church are in the midst of profound change. We think it is a good thing. Our strong foundation allows us to greet the future with optimism. We pray for a Designated Conference Minister to join us, and lead us, on the road to a not fully-known future where the prophetic message of the UCC endures to continue transforming lives.

Please read the Conference website at <http://www.uccswc.org>. It has much more detail than we attempt to provide here. Please send your application and profile to Edith Guffey by July 6, 2015.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. George A. Ault  
Conference Moderator

We are  
unabashed  
experimenters.

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## About the Southwest Conference



Whatever your impression is of the Southwest, it probably is incomplete. We live in a region of stunning geographic and social diversity. The southwest region spans multiple ecosystems. We have forested mountains, plateaus, grasslands and a wide variety of deserts. We have more water than you imagine, but it is a precious resource.

As a conference, we have one of the largest geographic footprints yet few churches. Of our 50 local churches, 23 are in Central Arizona; 11 in Southern Arizona, 4 in Northern Arizona; 7 in Northern New Mexico; 5 in Southern New Mexico/El Paso. Long drives through awe-inspiring landscapes are a pleasure, but also a requirement for the Conference Minister.

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Our communities are culturally rich. Native Americans, Latinos/as and people of European descent, African Americans and Asian Pacific Islanders all share the Southwest, sometimes and in some places with great mutual appreciation, and at other times and places with great intolerance. That puts the Southwest Conference at the vanguard of emerging social justice movements in the United States. Our churches live up to the UCC's tradition of social justice activism.

## Our History



Arizona and New Mexico had long been home to Native Americans when Spanish settlers arrived in the 17th and 18th centuries as part of New Spain. Later, the United States took the region in the settlement of the U.S.-Mexican War near the middle of the 19th century, bringing settlers of other European and African American descent. Asians, particularly Chinese and Japanese, were early settlers in Arizona too. Congregational missionaries arrived in the Southwest in the 1890s to train leaders to work with the existing Native and Spanish-speaking populations. First Congregational Church (Prescott, AZ) and First Congregational Church in Albuquerque opened within one week of each other in 1880.

“Since we will be experimental, nothing we do will be considered wrong except if it doesn’t work; and if it doesn’t work, we’ll stop it.”

The Southwest Conference was part of the Southern California Conference until 1965. As we explained to General Synod in 1965 “Since we will be experimental, nothing we do will be considered wrong except if it doesn’t work; and if it doesn’t work, we’ll stop it.” We learn from our challenges. Our gift to the UCC is experimentation. That was true then and now.

The Southwest Conference consistently has focused on supporting local churches and developing new ones. In recent years, the Conference has offered financial and other support to revitalizing older churches and birthing new ones.

## Our Churches



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The Southwest Conference has 47 covenant churches and three in formation with nearly 7,500 members spread over a wide geographic area in Arizona, New Mexico, and El Paso. Our diversity surpasses our numbers and reflects our geography. We have urban, suburban and rural churches. Our churches are increasingly multi-cultural, including people of Latina/o, Marshallese, Samoan, and other backgrounds. Three churches in formation are growing and show real promise. Half our churches have fewer than 100 members. Most of our churches were formed after the UCC merger and strongly identify with the UCC.

The Southwest Conference is officially Open and Affirming, as are 30 of our churches, including two in retirement communities. At 64%, the SWC has one of the highest, if not THE highest, percentage of ONA churches. The Conference also is officially immigrant welcoming, as are many of our churches. The Conference also has emerged as a point of ministry and voice to the wider community on behalf of our local churches.

Although few in number compared to larger conferences, our churches exhibit the best of UCC polity – diverse in worship, diverse in membership, diverse in theology, but all committed to living out “Whoever you are, and wherever you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here.”

## Our Mission

**ARIZONA REPUBLIC**  
azcentral.com  
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2014

# LAWFULLY WED

**NOW LEGAL:** State ends challenge to gay marriage, begins issuing licenses  
**WEDDING BLITZ:** Couples, some who waited decades, rush to exchange vows

**THE RULING:** AG Horne declines challenge 9th Circuit

**ALAN BEARD/RAV**  
The Republic / azcentral.com  
Arizona on Friday joined the historic tide legalizing same-sex marriage. Same-sex couples that have swept the nation, expanding gay rights to all 50 states, never thought they would see it in their lifetime. They were right. In a day or two, literally up at dawn, Arizona became the state to among the first to get marriage licenses. And they did it by taking a few hastily reciting their vows on courthouse steps. They had waited long enough. They had waited long enough.

**See GAY MARRIAGE, Page A3**

**Samples sent to CDC to see if deadly enterovirus has now reached Arizona**

**KEN ALLYOKER**  
The Republic / azcentral.com

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**See GAY MARRIAGE, Page A3**

**ALSO:**  
USA TODAY  
INSPIRE  
Mental Health

**IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS.**  
Tickets start at \$20 at schwabcenter.com  
Visit Our Non-Profit  
Charles SCHWAB  
CUP

The Conference has been deeply involved in the struggle for just treatment of migrants.

We are “Extravagantly welcoming and affirming followers of Christ called to embody God’s unconditional justice and love.” As a Conference, we believe we are called to speak truth to power, fight injustice, and stand beside those whom our society marginalizes. The Conference and our local churches are deeply engaged in our respective communities.

The Conference was at the forefront of bringing marriage equality to our region. In Arizona, our Conference Office provided free space to Why Marriage Matters AZ, the coalition leading the struggle for equality. When marriage equality arrived in Arizona, the celebration for the entire state took place at the Southwest Conference of the UCC, and our current Conference Minister was featured on the front page of papers performing the first same-sex legal marriage in Arizona.

The Conference has been deeply involved in the struggle for just treatment of migrants. Several of our churches, and the Conference itself, offer sanctuary to people facing deportation. Many churches participate in a variety of border-related

activities, providing food and shelter to those in need. Some churches have formally become “immigrant welcoming,” and others are in the process of doing so.

The Conference is dedicated to strengthening our local churches and nurturing new churches. We provide funding, training and curriculum on revitalization and start ups. We also run the Lay Academy, which provides in-depth training to individuals on a variety of complex social and theological topics.

## Our Facility



As part of our restructuring several years ago, the Conference discerned we needed to move from standard corporate offices to a mission-oriented venue in an urban neighborhood. We wanted everything we do, including occupying space, to be ministry. The Conference sold land it had acquired many years earlier and now owns free and clear a large building in the heart of Central Phoenix, in the midst of the most culturally and economically diverse neighborhood. Ironically, our home began its life as a Baptist Church over 80 years ago, was abandoned, became a halfway house, was abandoned again, was purchased and renovated into a million dollar home, was purchased by architects, and ultimately sold at a short sale to us.

In just its first two years, the building has exceeded our expectations. The Regional Office of the Disciples of Christ rent office space from the Conference, and the building generates other rental income. With plenty of offices, a full, professional kitchen and two large meeting rooms, the building has given birth to three new churches that used the space as an incubator. Other faiths and denominations use our space too: An alternative, Methodist urban ministry, a Buddhist mediation group, and a synagogue. Social justice organizations hold meetings at the Conference Office. We have a shower for those using alternate forms of transportation. We have a theater-size movie screen for showing movies and presentations.

The building amenities and central location have enabled the Conference to become a hub of social justice networking in metropolitan Phoenix. Today, instead of being asked “what is the UCC?”, we are asked “isn’t that the building where everyone meets?”

Our main office is in Phoenix, but about half our churches are not. The Conference invested in video conferencing equipment, with satellite locations in Northern and Southern Arizona, and Northern and Southern New Mexico, which allow our conferences and local churches to meet together without the time and expense of necessarily traveling to Phoenix.

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# Our Governance



Several years ago at its Annual Meeting, the Southwest Conference voted to completely restructure its governance. Our goal was to maximize input of all local churches and create flexibility for day-to-day governance. Our Conference Minister fully participates in all Boards, Committees and Teams. This new structure has worked well for us.

**Mission Planning Board.** Each church sends a delegate to the Mission Planning Board, which meets twice yearly. Conference Officers and National delegates also are members. The Mission Planning Board has the responsibility to discern the shared mission of the SWC, and to test whether or not our resources are being fully utilized and wisely stewarded for the sake of that mission. Its members augment the communication network between the Conference and local churches.



**Executive Board.** The Executive Board is elected at the Annual Meeting and meets six times each year. The Executive Board manages the business of the Conference. It is comprised of the officers and five at large members. It is a separate and independent body from the Mission Planning Board, but it takes strong direction from them to ensure that the assets it manages are utilized for the purpose of our shared mission and long-range goals.

**Committees and Ministry Teams.** The Conference has only a few standing committees: Committee on Church and Ministry; Nominating Committee; and Personnel Committee. As part of the restructuring, the Conference created a team approach to most ministries, allowing all who feel called to work on ministry teams to participate. We have many active ministry teams including Youth and Outdoor Ministry, Justice and Witness Ministry, Church Growth & Renewal, and Widening the Welcome, to name a few.



**Officers and Staff.** The Annual Meeting of the Conference elects a moderator and moderator-elect, treasurer and secretary, all of whom serve as officers. The Conference has two part-time, dedicated staff, in addition to the Conference Minister. The Conference currently also has a part-time Church Growth and Leadership Coordinator, a part-time Immigrant Care Coordinator, and a Lay Academy Coordinator.

**Associations.** The Southwest Conference does not have any formal Associations, but we are deliberate in recognizing our geographical regions. The Conference acts in the role of an Association.

## Our Finances

The Southwest Conference is on a sound financial footing. As we faced shrinking revenues seven years ago, our restructuring and office acquisition enabled the Conference to achieve financial stability.

	2013	2014	2015 Budget
Income			
OCWM/Per Capita	\$329,731.00	\$329,061.00	\$320,299.00
Other	\$81,807.00	\$89,630.00	\$102,500.00
TOTAL	\$411,538.00	\$418,691.00	\$422,799.00
Expenses			
Committees for Conference Ministries	\$3,762.00	\$6,656.00	\$6,500.00
Conference Life and Ministries	\$34,117.00	\$38,371.00	\$48,200.00
Church & Ministry Operations Programs	\$3,936.00	\$3,059.00	\$3,500.00
National & Regional Expense	\$7,541.00	\$6,895.00	\$6,500.00
Mission	\$75,402.00	\$74,687.00	\$73,600.00
Administration & Communication	\$34,111.00	\$37,299.00	\$34,250.00
Building & Equipment Operation	\$25,214.00	\$31,531.00	\$34,000.00
Called Ministerial Compensation & Benefits	\$113,233.00	\$112,040.00	\$112,523.00
Office Staff Compensation & Benefits	\$112,807.00	\$105,192.00	\$103,549.00
Depreciation		\$2,961.00	
Conference Expenses	\$410,123.00	\$418,691.00	\$422,622.00
Net Income/(Loss)	\$1,415.00	\$-	\$177.00

The Southwest Conference has 10 reserve accounts with approximately \$600,000 in assets as well as an additional \$230,000 in United Church Foundation accounts. Some of the reserve accounts are restricted.

## Job Description

Our Bylaws (Article VII) define the key responsibilities of the Conference Minister as follows:



- The Conference Minister shall be an ordained minister in full standing with the United Church of Christ and shall be the Chief Executive Officer of the Conference in accordance with the policies established by the EB.
- It shall be the Conference Minister's duty to be informed in regard to every phase of the work undertaken by the Conference.
- It shall be the Conference Minister's special duty to organize, direct, and coordinate all the work of the conference so that each phase of the work may be done with the greatest efficiency, economy, and Christian concern.
- The Conference Minister shall represent the Conference before the churches and in all ecumenical and inter-faith gatherings, unless the Conference specifically provides otherwise.
- The Conference Minister shall be a Pastor to all the ministers and churches, and shall be available to assist in pastoral placement.
- The Conference Minister shall be an advisory and ex-officio member of all Boards, Committees, and Ministries of the Conference with voice but not vote. The Conference Minister shall make a report to each meeting of the Boards and be accountable to the Boards.

# Job Description

The calling of Conference Minister requires skill and responsibilities in three key areas: (1) leadership; (2) ministry; and (3) administration.

## Leadership

- Visionary and inspiring planning and execution;
- Leading with mature and vibrant faith and communicating this to the Conference and our communities at large;
- Collegial and consensus building.

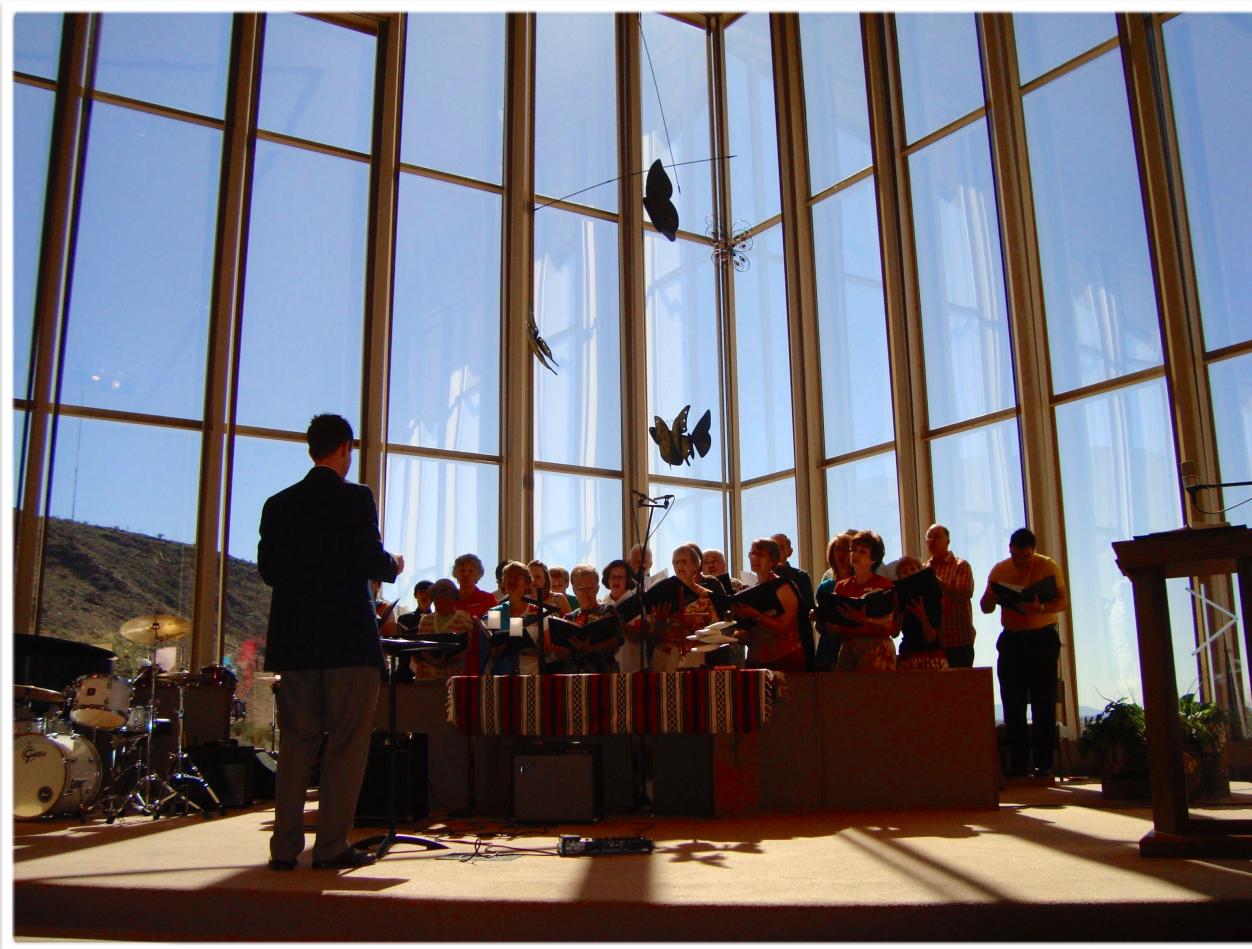
## Ministry

- Spiritual leader to all aspects of the Conference, e.g., boards, committees and people;
- Counselor and advisor to pastors and their families;
- Counselor and advisor to congregations;
- Encourage and support innovation and experimentation in the Conference and local churches;
- Act as pastor at large and share worship and celebrations with local churches.
- Communicate to each local church the love and concern of the Conference;
- Boldly speak and act as the prophetic voice of the UCC and the Conference on issues concerning society, especially issues concerning social justice;
- Act as representative of the Conference in interfaith, interdenominational and UCC programs and structures.

## Administration

- Assist and guide the search and call process of the Churches;
- Work closely with, give input to, and respond to Conference Boards, Committees and Staff;
- Prepare written reports;
- Organize, direct and coordinate programs and activities of the Conference;
- Manage the financial affairs of the Conference;
- Administer the Conference office and supervise staff;
- Delegate responsibilities as appropriate;
- Advise General Synod delegations and serve as resource on denominational matters;
- Establish and maintain active liaison between Conference and all aspects of the national setting of the UCC;
- Establish and maintain active relationship with appropriate ecumenical bodies.

## Election and Term of Office



The Conference Executive Board will interview, select and contract with the Designated Conference Minister for a mutually agreed upon period of time of perhaps one to three years. During or at the end of the contract period, the Executive Board, with the consent of the Designated Conference Minister, may request the Conference Annual Meeting for a vote to call the Designated Conference Minister as the Settled Conference Minister, or the Executive Board may initiate a separate call process in which the Designated Conference Minister is eligible to participate as an applicant.