



KANSAS-OKLAHOMA CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST



**"AS A BELOVED COMMUNITY IN CHRIST,
WE EXTEND GOD'S EXTRAVAGANT WELCOME, CONNECT CHURCHES, AND TRANSFORM LIVES."**

Conference Profile
January 2021

Formed in 1961, today the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ (UCC) includes 53 congregations with an estimated membership of 7,000-plus. There are forty churches in Kansas, and thirteen in Oklahoma. Although the majority are located in smaller communities, larger congregations can be found in Kansas City, Lawrence, Manhattan, Topeka, and Wichita in Kansas, and Lawton, Norman, Oklahoma City, and Tulsa in Oklahoma. Many of our member congregations were established in the 1800s, before either Kansas or Oklahoma became states.

BUILDING COMMUNITY – LOCALLY, NATIONALLY, AND GLOBALLY

We hold that while our faith is 2,000 years old, our thinking is not. We believe in God's continuing testament. For this reason, we are committed to hearing God's ancient story anew and afresh in our lives and in the world today. We endeavor to remain attentive to God's creative movement in the world. We prepare our members and leaders to be engaged in ministry in the present and future church, and we embrace all kinds of communities and new ways of thinking.

Social, Racial and Economic Justice. In multiple ways, the Conference continues to affirm and demonstrate its commitment to the UCC's historic devotion to working for justice for all.

In 2017, the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference adopted a resolution formally declaring itself to be an Open and Affirming Conference, communicating to our churches and to the communities we serve an unwavering commitment to welcome and affirm individuals who identify as LGBTQ+. [Open & Affirming — Kansas-Oklahoma Conference UCC \(kocucc.org\)](https://www.kocucc.org)

Since 2015, the Conference has made racial justice a priority, beginning with the Annual Meeting that year – *Becoming God's Beloved Community*. Subsequently, resources were deployed for the development and dissemination of a White Privilege curriculum. Rev. Traci Blackmon, UCC Executive Minister of Justice & Witness Ministries, was the 2019 keynote speaker. In 2021, the focus of Annual Meeting returns when Annual Meeting will align with the commemoration of the 1921 Race Massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

In 2020, despite the challenges associated with COVID-19, the Conference spearheaded a Medical Debt Relief campaign, inviting churches and individuals to participate. Together, with 23 churches, individual contributions, and the support of United Church Funds, we raised \$42,300 resulting in the abolishment of over \$5.2 million in medical debt for 3,234 individuals in 76 of 105 counties in Kansas and 60 of 77 counties in Oklahoma. This outpouring of support attests to the generosity of our congregations and their individual members to respond with compassion and the readiness to share resources – even in the worst of times.

Ecumenical Partnerships. The Conference maintains close relationships at the state level with the Oklahoma Conference of Churches (OCC) and Kansas Interfaith Action (KIFA). Locally, many congregations participate with community-based ecumenical efforts.

Faith Partnerships. The Kansas-Oklahoma Conference supports a strong global partnership with the Evangelical Church in Baden, Germany, a member of the United Evangelical Church of Germany. In the last four years, the relationship has deepened by K-O youth and adults traveling to Germany and a delegation of Baden clergy and lay members visiting Oklahoma in 2019. Individual congregations have partnerships with congregations in Mexico, Honduras, Nicaragua, and the Pacific Islands.

THE STATE OF OUR CONFERENCE

When Dr. Edith Guffey became Conference Minister in 2012, K-O faced a number of challenges to its viability. Thanks to the services of a knowledgeable and insightful interim CM, Edith began her work with a clear roadmap to change. Early accomplishments to create a more nimble and sustainable foundation included measures to reduce expenses and utilize resources in more mission-focused ways. Today, the Conference operates with a full-time settled CM who works from a home office.

Over the last two years, the Conference Council, working closely with the Conference Minister, has made the impending leadership transition a priority for much of its activities. During 2019, the Council hosted regional conversations with local churches and pastors and conducted online surveys in a process designed to develop an understanding of the needs and desires of congregations in relation to the Conference. Results of the regional meetings and the online survey revealed that participants identified five priorities for the Conference Minister:

- Connecting churches and individuals to resources and information
- Coaching, mentoring and training for clergy and laity
- Communicating - internally and externally
- Credentialing and call
- Collaboration among and between congregations and the Conference

At the same time, a missing component of the exploration of the role of the Conference was that of identifying a unified vision and clearly held purpose for the UCC churches in Kansas and Oklahoma. Although it proved relatively easy to identify **what** Conference members expect the CM to do, it's more challenging to identify **how** the United Church of Christ articulates the progressive Christian message in the heartland, and **why** it is vital to maintain a thriving presence in Kansas and Oklahoma.

A recent advancement includes the introduction of the following part-time support positions: Development Specialist, Communications Specialist, Registrar, Consultant for Equity and Inclusion, Disaster Coordinator, and a Ministry Assistant for Pastoral and Congregational Relations. These paid and volunteer positions are held by a group of gifted individuals who bring both an understanding of our tradition and fresh perspectives to the United Church of Christ in Kansas and Oklahoma.
[Conference Staff — Kansas-Oklahoma Conference UCC \(kocucc.org\)](http://kocucc.org)

The state of the K-O Conference would not be complete without consideration of our financial position. According to the October 31, 2020 Statement of Financial Position, the Conference holds \$1,485,156 in total net assets. The 2021 operating budget as approved by delegates participating in the Annual Meeting is \$276,317. Of concern – and a motivation for introducing the part-time position of a Development Specialist – is the continued fragility in OCWM giving, due primarily to the ongoing decline in the number of viable congregations, a trend that mirrors the steady decline of rural communities in both states.

Pertinent to the overall state of the Conference has been the impact of the Coronavirus Pandemic. From early March, through the present continued surge, congregations and pastors quickly pivoted to operating virtually. They have demonstrated creativity, innovation, and compassion in their efforts

to maintain connection, support, and safety for their members and communities. The Conference and many churches applied for and received Payroll Protection funds. In addition, the Council designated \$15,000 in grants to support local churches in building or upgrading their technology capacity.

THE KANSAS-OKLAHOMA CONFERENCE UCC: THRIVING IN THE HEARTLAND

While exploring big picture questions about vision and purpose remains a priority, an organizational infrastructure that combines innovation with an emphasis on social justice ensures that the Conference Minister's efforts are strengthened and expanded to meet the most pressing needs of churches and pastors.

Every UCC Conference is different and Kansas-Oklahoma is no exception. Because there were questions of viability when Dr. Guffey became Conference Minister, K-O was perhaps early in making crucial operational changes.

- K-O was the first UCC conference to transition from a fixed physical location to a CM's home office. We have operated virtually since 2014. All records are digital.
- We faced the difficult reality that we were unable to continue to support a camp, but refused to allow the decision to divide us. The camp continues as a separate entity and some churches and individuals continue their strong ties to the Camp.
- Virtual meetings became the norm over the last five years. K-O's Committees on Ministry and the Conference Council have been meeting via ZOOM long before ZOOM became a household word. This practice not only reduced travel expenses, but also expanded clergy and lay participation in leadership.
- The Conference shed the traditional committee structure that slows down decision making, opting instead for task groups formed for specific purposes then disbanded when the goal is completed.

Today the Conference is characterized by a spirit of experimentation – a willingness on the part of ministers and lay leaders to take on challenges with enthusiasm and an optimistic view of the future, yet mindful of the realities of today's world. A successful Annual Meeting held virtually in the fall of 2020 demonstrated that, in addition to clergy who quickly shifted to technological solutions to coping with COVID, lay members adapted too. Participation in keynotes, workshops, worship, and business sessions met, and in some cases exceeded, previous in-person events.

In a small conference, strong and capable volunteer leadership represents an essential component of success. Supported by the Conference Council, the CM secured a Transformation Grant from the Kansas Leadership Center ([The Kansas Leadership Center](#)) that offers Conference staff, Council members, and local church clergy and lay leaders the opportunity for training designed to equip participants with the skills and insights to tackle challenges in an increasingly complex, divided, and unpredictable world. The Conference also benefits from the six clergy who have completed or currently participate in the Next General Leadership Initiative. **Next Generation Leadership Initiative (NGLI)**.

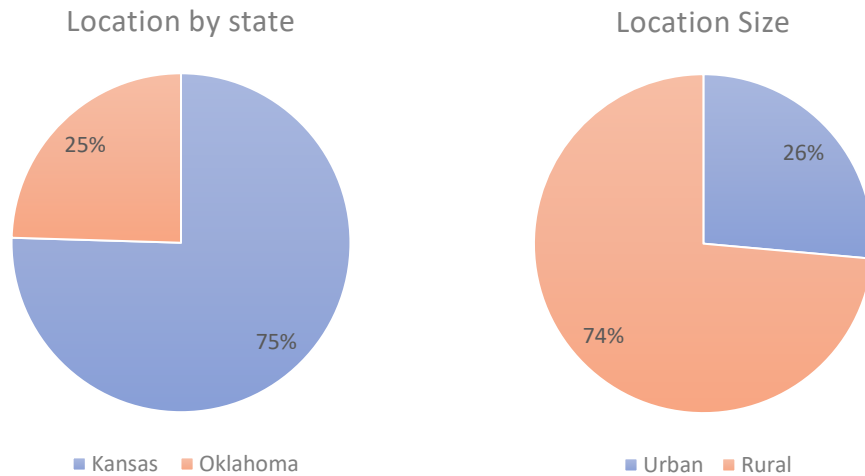
In all its work, the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference seeks to demonstrate the imperative of social, racial and economic justice for all embodied in the extravagant welcome expressed in the greeting, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, YOU are welcome HERE."

*"We have before us the glorious opportunity
to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of our civilization."*

 Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Kansas-Oklahoma Conference UCC – BY THE NUMBERS

Geographic distribution of churches



Of the total membership of UCC congregations in K-O, 55% belong to the 14 urban churches. The remainder belong to the 39 churches in rural communities.

Congregational Membership:

500+	2
200-500	5
100-200	18
<100	28

Open & Affirming Congregations:

Of the 53 UCC congregations in Kansas and Oklahoma, 13 have formally declared themselves to be Open and Affirming. While this number reflects only one in four churches that have completed the formal ONA process, the membership of the thirteen ONA congregations represents 48% of the total UCC members in the two states.

Authorized Ministers: 99

- 40 serving in church pastor roles (22 UCC; 8 OMPS or Dual Standing; 10 Licensed)
- 13 serving in specialized ministries
- 37 retired/Exempt (16 Exempt Standing)
- 2 Leave of absence
- 2 ordained, seeking call or specialized ministries
- 5 ordained, not seeking call
- 4 Ministers in Discernment

Budget History

Year	Budget	Actual
2017	242,700	246,439
2018	265,315	227,634
2019	253,538	231,089
2020	262,203	In development



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POSITION DESCRIPTION

TITLE: Conference Minister

AUTHORITY: The Conference Minister derives spiritual authority from the call of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures and ecclesiastical authority from the Bylaws of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference UCC, the actions of meetings of the Conference, and decisions of the Conference Council.

ACCOUNTABILITY: The Conference Minister is accountable to the Conference and the Conference Council.

SUPERVISES: The Conference Minister has oversight of the work of Conference employees and contractors.

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As the chief executive officer and public voice of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference UCC, the Conference Minister shall be responsible for the general spiritual and operational management of the Conference.

ESSENTIAL FUNCTIONS

1. Spiritual and Leadership Development

- Serve as pastor at large to the Conference, and upon invitation, share worship and celebrations with local congregations
- Envision and articulate a strategic direction for the Conference and the imperative to sustain a progressive Christian voice in Kansas and Oklahoma
- Coordinate the search and call process with congregations
- Participate with, and as needed guide and resource, the leadership of Committees on Ministry
- Support competent pastoral leadership, both ordained and lay, and foster collegiality among ministers
- Be available to help local churches and/or pastors address specific challenges, providing referrals to resources or consultants where appropriate
- Inspire congregations and communities by advocacy and witness in support of issues of social justice

2. Administrative

- Provide general supervision of the operational work of the Conference – organization, direction, and coordination - in order to implement the priorities, goals, and constitutional provisions of the Conference, including oversight of Annual Meeting arrangements
- Partner with the President of the Conference and the Conference Council to implement the priorities of the Conference and the various Conference committees
- Facilitate effective communication between and among the Conference, Conference entities, and congregations
- Oversee all Conference publications, electronic and printed materials
- Make regular reports to the Conference Council and submit written reports to the Annual Meeting of the Conference

3. Resource Development and Dissemination

- Understand and clearly articulate the financial assets and needs of the Conference
- In cooperation with the Conference Council and Finance & Stewardship Committee, lead the pursuit of philanthropic activities of the Conference to ensure the financial sustainability of the UCC in Kansas and Oklahoma
- In consultation with local church pastors and lay leadership, cultivate emerging leaders for participation in Conference committees
- Promote evangelism and church growth and revitalization through advocacy and connection to planning and development resources

4. Denominational and Ecumenical

- Promote the covenant relationships among congregations, authorized ministers, the Conference and the wider UCC
- Serve as the liaison between the Conference and the National setting of the United Church of Christ: interpreting the actions of national bodies; helping to connect the Conference to wider denominational programs, structures, and priorities.
- Ensure strong Conference participation in General Synod
- Actively participate in the Council of Conference Ministers and the national setting of the UCC
- Advocate for and support efforts that strengthen participation in the German Partnership
- Represent the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference in ecumenical relationships and partnerships, including the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and other interfaith, social justice, and leadership organizations

QUALIFICATIONS

1. An Authorized Minister in the UCC or having ordained ministerial partner standing.
2. Able to maintain availability and a significant physical presence within the geographic boundaries of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference.

3. Demonstrated capacity to effectively manage the executive, administrative, and organizational development aspects of a leadership position comparable to a nonprofit chief executive officer.
4. Able to travel as needed within the geographical boundaries of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference.
5. Experience with understanding, managing, and interpreting financial management policies and practices.
6. Prepared, through mindset, experience and demonstrated ability, to actively oversee and pursue Conference fundraising efforts.
7. Comfortable with the use of technology as a tool of ministry.
8. The ability to communicate and work cooperatively with diverse groups.
9. A demonstrated commitment of working for justice and peace while modeling partnership, compassion, and healing in all relationships.