

50 Years of AUCE



Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit.

- Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NRSV)

This scripture image from Jeremiah chapter 17, inspired your AUCE Board of Directors as they reflected back on AUCE's 50 years. The images of strong and sturdy trees, deep roots, and the anticipation of renewed life that new shoots bring, paint a beautiful picture of our faith formation ministries – apt images for our look back at the ministry of AUCE.

The following words are from Rev. Ruby Schroeder, who was present at AUCE's birth in

New Orleans in 1971. Ruby is Professor of Christian Education Emerita at Eden Theological Seminary and served as AUCE's Chair from 1976 to 1978.



Ruby writes:
A group of about ninety folk gathered to explore the future of the predecessor of AUCE, which was the United Christian Education Fellowship. This early church educator group

was formed for fellowship among church educators and was dependent on the national UCC for arranging its meetings. So the question on that day was, "Shall the Christian Education Fellowship continue to be a fellowship group – an organization led by and dependent upon the national UCC Christian education staff? Or, shall we become an independent organization, self-supporting and responsible for our own advocacy, able to stand up not only for quality church education, but also as advocates for educators?"

As you can guess, AUCE was born out of an enthusiastic "yes" to the question about independence and advocacy for educators and for Christian education.

At the end of that day, it was the consensus of the group gathered, that our future was to

support quality church education and professionals in the field. And AUCE was born.



Rev. Jim Boler served on the AUCE Coordinating Committee from 1973 to 1978 as the Western Representative, then followed that with the role of Interdenominational

Representative, and then from 1984 to 1987 as AUCE Chair. Jim writes:

Greetings AUCE Friends,
I want to share a story with you that paints a rather vivid picture of the role of the Christian educator in the 1960's. It was in 1968, right after I graduated from seminary and was approved for ordination, when I was called to serve a United Church of Christ congregation in suburban Chicago. At a meeting of the Church Council within my first year at that church, I asked that my title be changed from Assistant Minister to Minister of Education. This caught everyone by surprise – including the senior minister.

This desire came from my experiences meeting with Chicago area professional church educators, who, by the way, were led by some of the founding mothers of AUCE. "Minister of Education" seemed a better and more apt description for my ministry. But it was what happened after the meeting that brought what I was actually doing to light.

Standing in the hallway after the meeting that night, the chair of the Trustees, who was also my apartment landlord, whispered, "Jim, I voted for Minister of Education because you seem to really want that title; but I don't understand why you wanted the DEMOTION."

And suddenly my eyes were opened. I become aware of the undervalued importance of education in the church and the significance of the Professional Church Educator. The

Association of United Church Educators then became my family.

I fought for church educators in the United Church of Christ by doing things, on behalf of AUCE. For example, we added, "and church educators," to a General Synod motion that referenced the UCC's support of ordained ministers. This was a time of great growth for me, and all of us, as professional church educators.

Rev. Ken Ostermiller served from 1972 to 1976 as the Middle Atlantic Representative, then from 2000 to 2003 as the national UCC Staff Liaison. Ken writes:

I was actively involved in the Association of United Church Educators for 39 years before my retirement!

AUCE allowed me to develop friendships and collegial relationships with others who shared similar ministry in the United Church of Christ. I could test ideas, get feedback on successes and failures, share experiences, and learn from the ministry of colleagues. AUCE was the place where I grew in exploring new ideas about theology, faith formation, worship, social justice, ministry with various age groups, and new resources.

I experienced working with others in AUCE in three phases of my ministry – in local churches in the Middle Atlantic and Great Lakes Regions, on the conference staff of the Penn West Conference, and then on the national staff of the United Church of Christ.

Much of my time on the national staff was spent supporting and creating Christian education curriculum resources:

- The Inviting Word
- The Present Word
- Bible Quest
- Seasons of the Spirit
- Gather 'Round
- Faith Practices





AUCE = Partnership

Each time we introduced new resources we did events to enable leaders to use them. We developed the Partners in Education program in 1996 which allowed us to offer a national event to enable leaders from each conference to do introductory events with associations or local churches, and for AUCE to offer workshops at regional AUCE events.

These UCC curriculum materials joined the ranks of other materials, models, and trends in faith formation over the decades:

- In the 1970's, many churches were offering Learning Centers.
- In the 1980's, our sister denomination, the United Church of Canada, produced "The Whole People of God."
- In the 1990's, some UCC congregations were trying the Workshop Rotation Model and Godly Play. The United Church of Christ joined with the Unitarian Universalist Association to create the Our Whole Lives sexuality education materials.
- In the 2000's, the UCC joined with sister denominations in Canada, England, New Zealand, and Australia to develop "Seasons of the Spirit."
- And in the 2010's, I initiated the creation of the UCC "Faith Practices" materials.
- Today we are using digital and online materials, moving the traditional Sunday School into the home, and encouraging faith formation ministries throughout the life of



our congregations.

Looking back over all these years, one of the things I admire most about AUCE, is that this independent organization has provided a vibrant,

steady community of ministry that connects creatively with the many different ways that ministry is organized in local churches, conferences, and the national United Church of Christ.

Rev. Ruth Hainsworth served as the New England Representative from 1998 to 2001, and then from 2002 to 2005 as AUCE's Chair. Ruth writes:

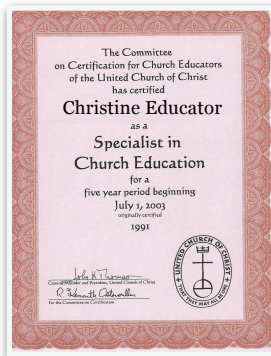
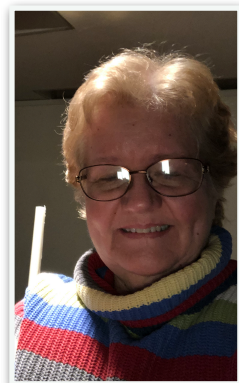
Happy Birthday, AUCE! Over those years, we had conversations about national United Church of Christ Christian Educator Certification, Commissioned Ministry, and what we could do to further support volunteer educators, while at the same time lifting up the role of professional educators in the church, much in the same way Ruby Schroeder shared how AUCE was doing this from its early beginnings.

AUCE played a very big role in the creation and presentation of four General Synod resolutions over the years:

1993 Children and Communion

1999 Prevention of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Youth Suicide

2001 Health Effects and Impacts of Tobacco on Children, Teenagers, and Their Families





Debbie Gline Allen, Becky Johnston

2003 Affirming the Essential Role of Commissioned Ministry as an Authorized Ministry

AUCE is granted Voice Without Vote at General Synod, which allows us to speak up for faith formation and all who serve in that ministry throughout the United Church of Christ.

General Synod also provided an arena for AUCE to connect with the wider United Church of Christ by having exhibit space. Rev. JoAnne Bogart from Colorado, a long-time AUCE Coordinating Committee member, inspired us to give away prayer beads, which have become very popular among Synod attendees, and helps to spread the word about AUCE's resources and support for faith formation in local churches.

I need to give a huge thank you to AUCE for all it has meant to me in my professional career in ministry. My experiences with AUCE formed the foundation for all I have become and all I have been able to achieve. For that I will be forever grateful.

My prayer is that AUCE will continue to be able to provide that foundation for all who are just beginning to ponder possibilities in

churches all over the country. May we always trust that with God all things are possible.

Debbie Gline Allen has served AUCE beginning in 2001 as Newsletter Editor, and has transitioned with this position as communication technology has developed over the years. From 2010 to 2014, she served as AUCE's Chair. Debbie shares here a brief overview of where we have come in the past decade.

In 2012, Rev. Dr. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi completed her year of research on faith formation ministries in the United Church of Christ, and published them in the document entitled, "Foundations, Findings, & Futures: Christian Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of

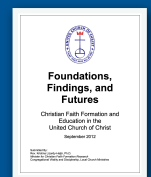
Christ." AUCE provided some background and history which informed much of her content. Kristina captured AUCE's essence in one of her concluding paragraphs which reads:

AUCE's history and legacy is a networking organization for faith formation ministries... The regional structures that AUCE... has in place, as well as the annual conferences and retreats for professional development that occur each year through the organization, serve to support faith formation leaders...[as they] continue to be a separate, but collaborative partner with the national setting [of the United Church of Christ].

Today, AUCE is working in collaboration with the Faith INFO Team at the national UCC offices, to resource, support, and network



Ted Huffman, Thom Bower



Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi

Roots to embrace
New shoots to nurture

Pivoting - Networking - Supporting

Faithful Fruit

with faith formation leaders and clergy throughout the United Church of Christ.

So the question that faces AUCE today is, what roots do we still embrace and what new shoots is AUCE nurturing?

This past year has pushed us all to pivot into new delivery systems and models in our faith formation ministries. We have learned that faith formation manifests itself in a wide variety of forms — in worship, in service to others, everyday at home, in solitude, in the faith community.

We have moved outside of the church building as well as out of the Sunday School box. We are transforming this ministry into what it needs to be for the 21st

Century.

We are crowd-sourcing, we are sharing resources over the Internet, we are pivoting into the unknown — and AUCE is here to undergird our networking and support for both who we are as faith formation practitioners and for the ministry of faith formation.

Blessed are we who trust in the Lord. We are like trees planted by water. We do not fear when heat comes (and it comes!) and the leaves of our ministries stay green and abundant, and we are not anxious, but bear faithful fruit. And the legacy of AUCE continues. Each and every one of us is a part of this history and this future — a part of its roots and its shoots.

May all with whom we minister be blessed, and may we be blessed. Amen.

