**Survey Findings: Health and Human Services in the United Church of Christ**

**Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, UCC**

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**About the Survey**

CHHSM conducted a church-wide survey in Fall 2016 to help shape the CHHSM’s strategic plan and to provide guidance on future ministry initiatives.

The survey sought feedback in four areas: 1) knowledge, attitudes and impressions of CHHSM and its member ministries; 2) the state of the relationship between CHHSM and the wider United Church of Christ (nationally, among Conferences and local churches); 3) interest among UCC local churches in health and human service ministries; and 4) CHHSM’s communication/marketing strengths and growing edges.

The survey was open to “anyone who has an interest in serving others,” whether or not they were familiar with CHHSM or the United Church of Christ (UCC). Participants identified themselves and their involvement in CHHSM and/or the UCC in a variety of ways, so segmenting and cross-analysis of survey results would be possible.

The survey was promoted widely for four weeks in October through CHHSM’s and the UCC’s e-newsletters, various list-serves, and targeted social media posts and advertising.

The survey included 39 multiple-choice, comparative and open-source questions and took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

**Who Participated?**

345 surveys were completed and submitted, which was a stronger than anticipated response.

In keeping with UCC membership, 57 percent of respondents were over age 60, 36 percent were in their 40s or 50s, 7 percent were under 30. 89 percent were white and 11 percent people of color. (Nationally, UCC membership is 87 white/13 people of color). 69 percent were female; 30 percent male; and 1 percent transgender or gender variant (3 respondents). 79 percent identified as straight; 21 percent were LGBTQ.

52 percent were lay persons; 46 percent were UCC Authorized Ministers (ordained, commissioned or licensed); and 2 percent were Authorized Ministers in a denomination beyond the UCC.

Of the Authorized Ministers, 24 percent were local church pastors (51); 8 percent worked for CHHSM ministries (17); 7 percent were chaplains (15); 5 percent worked in Conference Ministry (11); 4 percent were national/global UCC staff (7); and 14 percent identified as working in another setting of ministry (30).

Participants were sophisticated in their knowledge of, history with and involvement in the UCC. This is due, in one respect, to the high number of Authorized Ministers who participated in the survey, who would understandably be more inclined to have a deeper understanding of the history and relationships with UCC-related health and human service ministries.

61 percent of respondents had been familiar with the UCC for more than 25 years; 23 percent for 10 to 24 years; 14 percent less than 10 years. Only two percent had very little or no knowledge of the UCC.

35 percent grew up in the UCC, 43 percent were members who came from other denominations. 10 percent were employed by UCC ministries.

79 percent identified as having no formal relationship to CHHSM. 21 percent were board members (13), CEOs (10), employees (28), Nollau graduates (15) and service recipients (7). 81 percent had never attended a CHHSM annual meeting; 18 percent had attended.

**Major Findings: *Knowledge, Attitudes and Impressions***

When it came to knowledge of CHHSM’s existence and mission, respondents generally fell into four somewhat equal categories: 33 percent knew a great deal about CHHSM, 31 percent had a working knowledge; 18 percent knew very little and 18 percent knew nothing. Roughly the same percentages applied when persons were asked if they could identify CHHSM ministries by name: 32 percent could name many; 23 percent could name several; 19 percent could name one or two; and 27 percent could not name any.

Interestingly, those under age 40 were slightly *more likely* to both know about CHHSM and its member ministries and to be able to name specific CHHSM ministries than those over 60. This was not expected, since much of CHHSM’s focus is on ministries with older adults. It also suggests that CHHSM may be doing a better job of communicating to younger UCC audiences than older, given its heavy reliance on email and social media delivery systems for communication purposes.

The phrases most associated with CHHSM are: “Meeting Human Needs” (80 percent); “Compassion” (71 percent) and “Direct Service” (51 percent).

The phrases “Social Justice” (41 percent) and “Public Policy Advocacy” (17 percent) ranked lower than one might expect given the justice-emphasis of many CHHSM ministries and that the UCC is a denomination that prides itself on its social justice work and commitments. This suggests that opportunities exist to make more explicit the connections between CHHSM and social justice concerns.

The phrase with the least amount of resonance with respondents was “Business Enterprise Historically Tied to the Church” (11 percent), which suggests that respondents dismiss the idea of CHHSM being a “yesteryear” or outdated endeavor.

When asked to agree or disagree with 14 phrases, the top 3 phrases with the most resonance with respondents were those tied to the ministries and passions of local churches and their members: “Health and human service ministries are vital to the future of local churches,” (85%) “Health and human service institutions are born out of church members’ passions to serve God by serving others,” (84%) and “CHHSM should play a more active role in helping congregations address local needs.” (83%)

Two statements about ministries’ relationships to denominational structures were included for sake of comparison, with 72 percent saying they could understand why a faith-based health and human service ministry would want to be a member of CHHSM, slightly less than the 80 percent said they could understand why a local church would want to be a member congregation of the UCC.

67 percent strongly/somewhat agreed that “The corporate values of faith-based health and human service ministries are influenced by their denominational affiliations” and nearly the same number (66%) affirmed that “CHHSM ministries are one of the most profound ways the church boldly lives out its mission today.”

The statement with the least agreement (17%)) and the strongest levels of disagreement (55%), by a wide margin, was “CHHSM is basically an organization that honors the church’s historical ties to old institutions, but it has little relevance to the church of today,” again suggesting that respondents do not view CHHSM as a “yesteryear” or “has-been” ministry.

When asked in open-ended fashion what their general impression of CHHSM is, the most popular words used were “positive,” “ministries,” “services,” and “human needs.” The more negative sentiments shared a common theme: “not well known,” “unknown,” “never heard of,” and “blank.”

**Major Findings: Relationships**

59 percent agreed that the “UCC denomination holds it health and human service ministries in high regard as central to the mission and identity of the church.” However, CHHSM ‘insiders’ (present or former CHHSM board members/staff, CEOs and Nollau graduates) agreed much more strongly (72 percent).

More striking, 100 percent of CHHSM insiders strongly or somewhat agreed that “CHHSM ministries greatly value, promote or leverage their UCC affiliation,” while only 59 percent of general respondent shared that view.

CHHSM insiders were nearly twice as likely to affirm that “CHHSM ministries feel a closer relationship/kinship toward UCC than the UCC does toward CHHSM ministries,” 37 percent to 18 percent.

When it came to relationships between CHHSM and the UCC’s Conferences, there was no discernable disagreement among CHHSM insiders and general respondents, with 20 percent of all survey participants characterizing the relationships as “strong” and 24 percent indicating the ties were “fairly loose.” Many respondents felt they didn’t have enough information to answer (42%).

36 percent of respondents said their local church maintained a strong or loose relationship with at least one CHHSM ministry.

**Major Findings: Health and Human Service Ministries in Local Churches**

The most prevalent health and human service ministries in UCC congregations are: 1) Food Pantry or Feeding Program; 2) Homelessness Ministries; 3) Backpack or School Supplies; and Ministry to Drop-Ins and Transients.

Nearly half of respondents (48%) say their local church is very much or somewhat entrepreneurial in its approach to identifying and addressing human needs, again underscoring the second-most-popular sentiment strongly affirmed earlier in the survey: “Health and human service institutions are born out of church members’ passions to serve God by serving others” (84%).

Asked if any of their local church’s ministries have become independent organizations, governed by a separate board of directors and/or operating budget, 18 percent said, “Yes, but they maintain a relationship with our congregation” and 7 percent saying, “Yes, but the relationship has diminished or distanced.” (Obviously, with 18 percent [55 respondents] stating that such organizations exist, that bodes well for potential new CHHSM members, if the case can be made. And, in the very next survey question, an identical 18 percent of respondents affirmed there could be some potential for these stand-alone ministries being interested in CHHSM membership.)

**Major Findings: Communications**

Only 33 percent said they received the CHHSM newsletter (*Diakonie*) or followed CHHSM on social media, compared to CHHSM insiders at 92 percent. Even worse, only 23 percent of general respondents said they received any communication directly from CHHSM member ministries, or followed them on social media.

Even smaller numbers indicated that they ever received information about CHHSM ministries from the national UCC, their Conferences or local churches. In fact, a disturbing 23 percent affirmed that “I never hear about UCC-related health and human service ministries.” This strongly suggests the need for two CHHSM communication/marketing goals: the need to greatly expand CHHSM’s audience reach into the wider UCC and the need for CHHSM to become more of a conduit between its member ministries and general UCC membership, connecting them to one another.

CHHSM insiders (again, defined as present or former CHHSM board members/staff, CEOs, and Nollau graduates) were twice as likely as the general audience to agree that CHHSM does a good job (33% to 17%) or adequate job (53% to 25%) of communicating/marketing itself and its member ministries.

A majority of general respondents felt they didn’t have enough information to speak to quality of CHHSM’s website (65%) and social media presence (58%), but of those who did respond, most rated each as good-to-strong. Again, CHHSM insiders rated these areas much more positively, with 63 percent saying they regularly or occasionally see CHHSM posts on social media, compared to 27 percent of overall survey participants.

An overwhelming number of respondents (87%) expressed interest in learning more about CHHSM, a very encouraging sign. At the survey’s conclusion, more than 60 persons opted to share their email addresses and requested to be added to CHHSM’s monthly e-newsletter subscription list – nearly 20 percent of survey respondents.

**In Summary: Major Take-Aways:**

* Respondents strongly dismissed the idea of CHHSM being a “yesteryear” or “has-been” ministry, expressing in multiple ways that health and human service ministries are central to a vital UCC and its future.
* Those under age 40 were slightly *more likely* to both know about CHHSM and its member ministries and to be able to name specific CHHSM ministries than those over 60, suggesting CHHSM may be doing a better job of communicating to younger UCC audiences than older, given CHHSM’s heavy reliance on email and social media delivery systems for communication purposes.
* The phrases most associated with CHHSM are: “Meeting Human Needs” (80 percent); “Compassion” (71 percent) and “Direct Service” (51 percent). “Public Policy Advocacy” (17 percent) ranked lower than expected, suggesting the need for CHHSM to be more explicit about its members’ work to address social justice concerns.
* Phrases that most resonated with respondents were those tied to the ministries and passions of local churches, with a strong belief that “CHHSM should play a more active role in helping congregations address local needs.” (83%)
* Only 33 percent said they receive some form of communication about CHHSM, and a disturbing 23 percent affirmed that “I never hear about UCC-related health and human service ministries.” This strongly suggests the need for two CHHSM communication/marketing goals: the need to greatly expand CHHSM’s audience reach into the wider UCC and the need for CHHSM to become more of a conduit between its member ministries and general UCC membership, connecting them to one another.
* An overwhelming number of respondents (87%) expressed interest in learning more about CHHSM.
* 18 percent of respondents indicated their local church had started stand-alone organizations that might be interested in CHHSM membership.