

Growth Animator Report Spring 2026

Message of Hope to the Regions of UCC-East

Dear Friends across the Regions of UCC-East,

Grace and peace to you in this season of reflection and renewed hope. As we look back on the ministry, we have shared through this past year, there is much to celebrate. Across communities of faith, we have experienced people gathering with courage, deepening spiritual practices, listening, praying, experimenting with new forms of community, getting beyond our walls, developing community partners and being intentional to “invite! Invite! Invite,” building vital connections, strengthening invitation, discipleship identity, and deepening relationships grounded in care, belonging, and faithful presence. The work unfolding in congregations, pastoral charges, and regional gatherings reflects the Spirit moving persistently among us, always meeting us where we are, accompanying us in our next small step forward.

Our shared call to Deep Spirituality, Bold Discipleship, and Daring Justice continues to shape our path. These words are more than vision statements. These words are lived daily in worship, pastoral care, outreach, equity, diversity, advocacy, and the quiet acts of kindness that build trust and hope. We have witnessed ministries adapting with creativity and resilience, and we give thanks for the many leaders and volunteers who continue to offer themselves generously.

This year has also held meaningful milestones. As we celebrated our one-hundredth centenary, we rejoice that 34 pastoral charges across UCC-East participated in the One Hundred Tables Project, joining 117 tables nationally. Around tables both ordinary and sacred, people gathered to share stories, nourishment, and build community — a powerful sign that belonging continues to expand when we make room for one another, making ourselves visible and present in our neighbourhoods. Keep embracing resilience to think outside the box, getting to know neighbours, listening, learning and working together.

We have gratefully explored neighbourhood profiles, noting surprises about the community around us, wondering and trying new things to connect with our neighbours. Continued curiosity to survey the fertile soil around us, finds us considering new possibilities. It is another tool in ongoing conversations about our renewal and new ministries possibilities. If you have not yet connected with me, do reach out and let’s discuss what tools and resources will support you in your context.

We have used the “A Place at the Table” photograph in our worship, lunch and learns, workshops and webinars to help invite conversations beyond our walls, using the postcards as topics for wider outreach, invitation and connection.

Through our workshops on strengthening invitation, visioning, belonging, collaboratively working together-imagining, and in conversations 1:1, with communities of faith, leadership, and groups of churches we’ve been vulnerable in our situations, and explorations. Weekly growth ideas have found their way to your in-boxes through the weekly regional announcement newsletters. Seasonal letters and resources I have shared, continue to plant seeds of possibilities. The Wednesday 30-minute virtual drop-ins have helped us build community across the regions and share ideas, as we support one another.

We recognize some work has felt too big and overwhelming, and with grace, adapted our action plans to fit our unique contexts. We celebrate the wins of each small risk, when we've dared to try that new thing, always learning from it.

We hear again the words of scripture: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" — Isaiah 43:19 (NRSVUE)

These words invite us to notice the new life already emerging. As we look ahead, we embrace "Toward 2035" — not as a distant plan, but as a hopeful movement grounded in faithful small steps. Together, we are learning what it means to simplify, to collaborate, and to focus on what gives life so that communities can thrive in changing times.

Learning and shared reflection will continue to guide us. Opportunities such as the 2026 Toward 2035 webinars, and resources for our communities of faith, remind us that the wider church is dreaming together about how we might reshape the future. We are invited to imagine new ministry models, vibrant worship, and governance that supports energy and mission. These conversations strengthen our sense that we are part of something larger than ourselves — a church seeking to embody Christ's presence in every context.

"Inspired, resilient, and diverse contextual communities of disciples seek to continue the story of Jesus by embodying Christ's presence in the world. The church is present and deeply connected coast-to-coast-to-coast in rural and urban settings, and in ecumenical and global relationships. Guided by hope-filled, adaptive and effective ministry leaders, the denomination is increasingly multigenerational, multiracial, and intercultural". — Towards 2035 Vision Statement

As Growth Animator, I want to offer encouragement and gratitude. The work you are doing matters. Every small step taken toward welcome, inclusion, justice, and spiritual depth contributes to the unfolding future God is already preparing among us. Transformation often comes through steady, faithful movement rather than large leaps.

Please know that you are not walking alone. I invite you to reach out, to share ideas, questions, hopes, and challenges. Together we can continue to nurture communities shaped by belonging, invitation, and hope.

With gratitude for all that has been and trust for all that is still emerging,

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