

**LIVING WATER ASSOCIATION, OHIO NORTHEAST, UCC
FROM THE ASSOCIATION GENERAL MINISTER | OCTOBER 2021**

The Transformation of NEOSOM

WHEREAS NEOSOM – the North East Ohio School of Ministry was born in early 2017 as a result of merging *Partners in Ministry* (Eastern Ohio Association) and *Lay School of the Church* (Western Reserve Association)

WHEREAS NEOSOM was created in the traditional model that existed in many UCC Conferences to provide schooling for ministry, to authorize lay people for ministry, to create multiple paths toward ordination, and to enrich the lives of those seeking theological and spiritual nurture

WHEREAS NEOSOM is an accredited school, and offers a three-year cycle of basic courses for both those on the path to authorized ministry and others seeking theological and spiritual growth

WHEREAS TODAY most UCC Conferences/Associations have closed their schools of ministry and some have transformed them into something new

WHETREAS TODAY we can do schooling online where a myriad of opportunities exist even in UCC seminaries, as well as other institutions, offering courses for lay people seeking authorization as well as accreditation

WHEREAS THE MULTIPLE PATHS TOWARD ORDINATION is guided by the Discernment Working Group of the Committee on Ministry

WHEREAS OUR CONGREGATIONS can benefit from resources, simple courses, workshops and guidance in faith, ministry and theology, as well as practical matters in church leadership and futuring

WHEREAS THE ASSOCIATION’S PURPOSE is to provide resources and support to our congregations and our Calling is to Explore, Experiment and Excite, and aligning the school with our purpose is wise and prudent

The purpose of our Association is:

To be a resource and support for the health and wellbeing of our congregations, that we may grow into communities of healing and grace embodying Christ in the world.

The Calling of the Association is:

Explore Experiment Excite

THEREFORE, The Association Council along with the General Minister has determined to align the school with our purpose by transforming NEOSOM into a *School of Possibility* named:

The SPIRE Center – School of Possibility Inspiration Reimagining and Exploration

THEREFORE, the purpose of the SPIRE Center is to provide resources and training to church leaders, members, pastors, faith explorers, and all those hearing the call to be part of the creative labor and the new birth the Church is experiencing in our evolving world.

THEREFORE, the aspiration of the SPIRE Center is to stretch our thinking and question our assumptions in a church and world in continued movement. Pastors, leaders, lay church members, staff, members in discernment, anyone hearing the call will benefit.

THEREFORE, the SPIRE center will be responding to resource the needs and the calling of a church in movement in a fast-moving and changing world.

THEREFORE, The SPIRE Center will offer theologically based, relevant, progressive, inspiring, current and fresh perspectives, with contextual and practical approaches to ministry in order to equip people for ministry today, as they grow in faith and spirit, in leadership and vision, in learning and engaging in ministries of healing, reconciliation, justice and wholeness. It will offer a variety of learning opportunities as well as training, including workshops, courses, seminars and more.

THEREFORE, The SPIRE Center will be:

- Open to all learners, seeker, church leaders, members, pastors and those seeking authorization.
- Affordable and accessible, with scholarships available.
- Utilizing a variety of approaches to teaching and learning
- Addressing the “upkeep and remodeling” some of the most practical aspects of congregational life, such as right sizing churches, generosity development, creative meaningful worship, community engagement, justice and mission, congregational governance structure, faith and spirituality, theology, ministry assessment, ministry evaluation including staff, and much more...
- Challenging the most profound aspects of a congregations’ calling, purpose and lifespan

THEREFORE, The Spire Center will not be:

- A seminary or accredited educational institution
- Granting degrees or certifications
- Authorizing persons for ministry

The task of authorizing persons for ministry belongs to the Committee on Ministry of the Association. Those seeking or on the path to authorization will be guided to our seminaries that offer courses for lay people on that path, to other UCC Conference programs such as the Damascus Project, the joint program of Wisconsin and Minnesota Conferences, to the Pathway program of Southeast Conference, New York Conference’s School of Ministry and to other institutions that offer such program of studies.