

The United Church? Yes. The Uniform Church? Not so Much.

I believe one of the challenges facing our church is that while we may be United we are most definitely not Uniform.

We all know that each congregation and Pastoral Charge has its own unique history and context. But because we function as a national church, and only set policy nationally, it means that we expect all Pastoral Charges to be uniform in their ability to function.

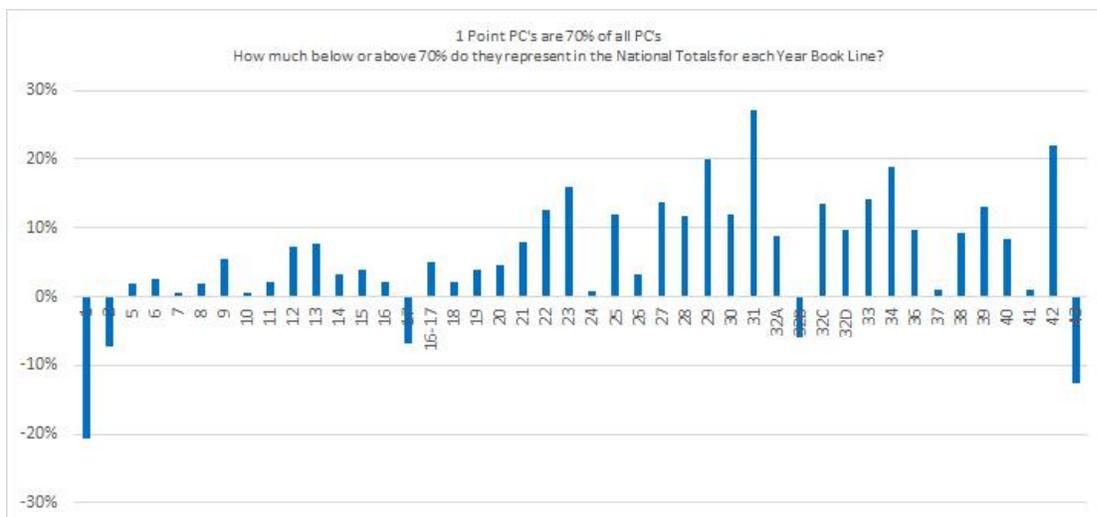
This expectation in terms of statements of faith, worship practices, and social outreach encourages the lively conversation that makes us United.

But this expectation in terms of personnel policies – salaries, allowances and benefits; and organizational issues – board structures, leadership, etc. – can be a real burden and stumbling block for many congregations and PC's because we are not Uniform.

In 2011:

- 1 Point PC's were 70% of the total number of PC's
- 2 Point PC's were 21%
- 3 Point PC's were 7%, and
- 4 or more Point PC's were 2%

But as the following chart shows, for almost every Year Book line, 1 Point Pastoral Charges have a greater share of our people and financial resources.



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But this is just the tip of the ice berg, because when we look at the differences within 1 Point Pastoral Charges, we find that there is a large difference between those with the highest worship attendance and those with the lowest.

In fact, the 10% (154 congregations) with the largest worship attendance have the same people and financial resources as the 50% (774 congregations) with the lowest attendance. That is to say, a congregation in the top 10% has, on average, 5 times the resources of one in the bottom 50%. The table below gives a sample of what this looks like:

	Top 10% Average Congregation	Bottom 50% Average Congregation
Worship Attendance	224	33
Local Givers	300	51
M&S Givers	144	20
Church School Membership	91	12
Resident Members	455	73
Offerings	\$356,000	\$50,000
Total Raised	493,00	84,500
Total Expended for Operations	327,000	62,000
UCW M&S	1,800	300
Congregation M&S	35,200	4,600
Total Salaries	78,000	21,600
Housing Allowance	29,700	6,100
Travel Allowance	3,600	1,200
Salaries + Housing + Travel as Percentage of Expended for Operations	34%	47%

I would suggest that the situations congregations face are so varied that we need to significantly diversify our expectations, resources, and strategies. And this can NOT be coordinated nationally.

For example.

- We may need a national pension and group insurance plan. But do we really need national salary, housing, travel, book, continuing education, sabbatical, secretarial, and telephone policies? Could these not be delegated to the

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Conferences? And thereby be more responsive to local contexts?

- Could we not delegate to Presbytery the authority to approve a congregation's governance structure without any reference to Manual requirements? And thereby allow for the recognition of forms of ministry which we now cannot conceive of?
- Could we not differentiate between requirements to belong to a national Order of Ministry, and requirements for commissioning and ordination and give Conference the sole authority to determine those whom it will ordain and commission? And thereby allow Conferences to commission or ordain local leaders while also maintaining a standard for nationally recognized members of an Order of Ministry?
- Could we not establish organizations for connecting congregations in similar contexts for mutual sharing, support, and strategizing? A synod for the top 10% and one for the bottom 50%? As well as ones for those in between, and ones for multi-point Pastoral Charges? We desperately need think tanks and supports that recognize the differing circumstances for ministry.

We are in a situation where the surrounding culture has changed so much – and in ways that are the antithesis of what we do – congregate – that no one can say for sure what is the correct response. Rather, what is needed, is the kind of flexible, local, contextualized support for experimentation. Including the experiment of being a traditional congregation.