



**United Methodist
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Turning the Ship: How the Courageous Congregations Collaborative (C3) Helped One Church Embrace Change

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Change rarely comes easily in a congregation. Traditions, cultural shifts, and generational differences often lead to what one pastor called “if only” thinking: *If only our church would do this, if only the leadership would do that, if only a certain generation acted differently.* But authentic ministry requires more than quick fixes, it begins with exploring deeper hopes, naming challenges, and staying open to learning.

Rev. Paul Hahm from Orchard Lake UMC shared how his church’s journey through the Courageous Congregations Collaborative (C3) helped them shift this mindset. “Too often, we externalize our problems, thinking the problem is over there and the solution will come from here,” he said. “Instead, C3 helped us ask: How can we act in alignment with our values and take responsibility for meaningful change?”

C3, developed by the Texas Methodist Foundation and supported in Michigan through a grant from the Lilly Endowment, equips congregations to strengthen five essential “muscles” for ministry today: **grieving well, discerning purpose, walking alongside, tending power, and expanding imagination.** Michigan cohorts bring church teams together to learn, experience, and apply these practices in their local settings.

When asked to describe their C3 experience in three words, the team chose: **reflective, authentic, and open.** Each phase of the process invited them to reflect on their hopes and challenges, align their ministry with core values, and remain open to new possibilities rather than fearing them. This posture allowed them to engage in what their pastor called “courageous conversations”—discussions that sometimes felt risky but led to greater clarity and trust. **“Meaningful change grows from self-reflection and courageous conversations,” they said. “It feels uncomfortable at first, but that’s where the real transformation begins.”**

One memorable insight came from another church’s story: measuring their effectiveness by the number of cigarette butts in the parking lot, a sign they were reaching people who might not otherwise feel welcome. “That got us thinking, what is the equivalent of ‘cigarette

butts' for us?" Rev. Hahm said. "It is not the old metrics of attendance or offering plates. If we want to stay relevant, we need to measure impact differently, and that's good ministry, too."

The team likened their journey to turning an aircraft carrier: slow, intentional, and requiring a wide berth. "They say it takes four miles of open water for an aircraft carrier to make a 90-degree turn," the pastor said. "C3 helped us begin that turn. **It gave us a trajectory, not a quick fix.**"

Openness made all the difference. "You cannot go in with your arms crossed, asking, 'What will this do for me?'" said Rev. Hahm. "You have to come with the mindset that you'll get something valuable out of every session."

Today, the congregation feels less anxious and more hopeful. "C3 didn't magically solve everything, but it gave us courage to explore what relevant and meaningful ministry looks like for today," he said. "We're excited about what's ahead."

3 Lessons from Their Journey

- **Start with self-reflection.** Do not wait for outside factors to change; look inward first.
- **Have courageous conversations.** Risky dialogue can bring healing and clarity.
- **Measure what matters today.** Old metrics may not reflect meaningful ministry now.

This fall, the C3 Michigan cohort will bring church teams together from across the state to discern God's movement and call, cultivating vibrant, faithful, and fruitful communities of disciples.

Learn more or sign up for an upcoming C3 cohort by contacting gary@umfmichigan.org

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