Why are the contemplatives of the United Church of Christ gathering?

1) God is doing this. Our ideas of God are ever transcending yet inclusive of our spiritual lineage. The contemplative approach to God while maintaining intellectual integrity is based on direct experience which transcends the egoic mind. God is alpha omega, before within and beyond all these things. We live move and have our being in God. God is not an instrument for some greater end. There is no wholesomeness apart from God. So it is God who gathers. God who guides. And God who finishes this work. God has made our hearts to long for the divine, and has placed the path of salvation within us. We seek God because we must. There is no where else to go, and nothing else to do. This is why UCC contemplatives are gathering.

2) Jesus Christ is the way truth and life of our spiritual lineage. In Jesus Christ we see the fullness of the salvation path embodied. We see the kenotic emptying of the incarnation. We see Jesus as a movable feast of liberation to everyone who had eyes to see and hearts to receive. We see Jesus radically including outcasts into the beloved community. We see Jesus morally confronting the racist, sexist, religious, political, and economic, authorities of his day. So it is that Jesus was executed by these unjust authorities, showing us that our Christian faith is not about enlightenment, without loving sacrifice for all. As Paul has written, "If I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (1 Cor. 13:2 NRSV) And finally God vindicates Jesus in the resurrection and ascension. As God's church, we are the present embodiment of the Jesus way in our world. We are called together to join Jesus in his great path of incarnation, liberation, confrontation and vindication. The internal reality of participatory incarnation is as important for human wholeness as the external manifestations of incarnation which look like justice. This is why UCC contemplatives are gathering.

3) The Holy Spirit is involved with the globalization of salvation. God speaks through Joel to us, "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh."( Joel 2:28) There is nowhere on our planet we can go and not see God's presence, guidance, and love at work. In God's house are many mansions.

The best hearts and minds of our lineage were not willfully ignorant. They always made efforts to understand God, and the path of salvation, conditioned by all the information that was available to them.

Today this must include a humble and critical overview of our historical theologies, our Bible, and our culture. Today this must include the truth spoken from other cultures and other religions. And it must include all the understandings of modern science, economics, technology, politics, and psychology. And as always it must include the interior path.

Joyfully we see that among the religious cultures of the world there is a great confluence. In the path of internal silence, in the via negativa, it looks like our paths converge in mystery, transcendence, and love. How beautiful it is that "God is love", "Allah the beneficent and merciful", "this Buddha is only compassion", and "Sat Chit Ananda", fit together so well. And how wonderful it is that we share a common wisdom about personal ethical behavior, and share a common hope for a just, sustainable, compassionate world.

The point of this is not that we must become some kind of new mega-religion for humanity. Our beauty is in our diversity as much as in our points of convergence. By the interior and exterior paths we are walking each other home. At the great pot luck supper at the end of the world when the whole family gather's at grandmother's house, we all have our special dish to share. The interior ones are part of this. This is why UCC contemplatives are gathering.

4) While much of the efforts of contemplation are alone and within, we are not alone. We meet and wait together for the new birth, in the dark womb of God. So it is when we find each other in the daylight, we recognize siblings even across religious lines.

Contemplatives are actually maximalists. We are giving our grace infused lives to full and complete union with God, the deepest reality, in all things, and full and complete justice in the world for all beings. This world needs such maximalists. And maximalists need each other. This is why UCC contemplatives are gathering.