

#UNCO13

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This is the fourth year of [UNCO](#) that I've hosted. During that time, we've gone from a small handful of people who really wanted to meet one another after interacting on Twitter to meeting on two coasts, concocting dreams and implementing creative projects. If you're a pastor, lay leader, seminary student, writer, academic or anyone interested in working toward the future of the church with action that moves beyond hand-wringing and an institutional nostalgia, then by all means, **go to UNCO**. You'll find kindred souls there.

**UNCO is short for Unconference.** In many fields (particularly tech), there are Unconferences. They are open-space gathering, which acknowledges the fact that most of us really gain more from a conference when we meet someone by the coffee table and begin to talk with one another. So the conference is designed to focus on sidebar conversations with the participants.

- First step—**Create a graffiti wall.** We write down all of the cares/concerns/dreams/ideas that we carry into the conference.
- Second step—**Host discussions** on particular topics.
- Third step—If there's a particular project that needs further fleshing out, then we **hold a planning session** to decide who/what/how it's going to happen.
- Fourth step—**Report back** to the group.
- Fifth step—**Stay in contact** with one another, encouraging one another throughout the year.

Unlike a lot of conferences, we talk about where people are, so subjects might be, "How do I close my church?" "My church can't afford a full-time salary any longer, how do I transition into bi-vocational ministry?" "What am I going to do about health insurance?" "How do I get a new church started?" "How can I minister with the homeless?"

Or it might be around the general interest of the participants. There might be sessions on Geek church (what does Star Trek and the church have in common? I have no idea... I missed the session.). The Beatitudes. Contextual Bible study. Spraypainting liturgy. Making bread. Engaging in spiritual practices with cracked pots (literal pots!). Addiction and grace. How to write, publish, and market a book. How to start a publishing company. How to raise money for non-traditional ministries.

We have dreamed about social justice issues, experimenting with how we can leverage our social media voices for particular causes. And we have worked to establish food ministries.

Through UNCO, and with UNCO connections, we've seen many projects start—[Liturgy Link](#), the [PW Facebook page](#), a new church development, book projects—and there are many things that are still in the works. We worship and pray a lot. We have a not-so-silent auction to support existing, creative ministries, like [Love Wins](#).

But, most of all, the beautiful thing that has come out of this conference has been the incredible support network. The people in UNCO are the people I call when I'm in the midst of a crisis. They are the colleagues who show up to help me move, who text me when my dad is in hospice, who support our family as we start new ministries. They are the ones who remind me constantly to keep writing and inspire to keep working. Each time I'm part of a gathering, I look around at all creativity,

imagination, passion, and love, I know that the church is going to be just fine.

If you're interested in attending, we'll be at Stony Point in New York on June 10-12 and San Francisco Theological Seminary on October 21-23. Please contact me if you have any questions. I'm on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), or you can contact me through my [website](#).