

ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER

Annual Report 2021

Rev. Dr. Barbara Doerrer-Peacock

- **MY OWN BALCONY VIEW – LOOKING BACK**

Certainly, the world as we knew it changed in early 2020. We waded week to week for the first few months of the pandemic starting in March, not imagining that this strange virus was going to last any longer than maybe a few weeks, then months at most. But, as time went on, we all began venturing more and more into the virtual world, stretching our technological capacities beyond our comfort zones. We tried a virtual, Zoom-based camp program in July. A good effort, but that didn't work very well on Zoom-fatigued youth. We began regular Zoom calls with various groups in our Conference for connection and support, sharing stories and news. Suddenly we found the long-held barriers of distance in our large-geography conference began to melt away. We had to cancel Clergy Retreat last October...but tried a belated virtual Annual Meeting. In the in-between times, we on the staff managed to get workable systems in place as we all worked from home, missing each other's presence, yet enjoying the time flexibility and lack of commuting stresses and cost.

Being thrust into massive and necessary shifts of how we need to do things, how we connect, how we stay separate, how we stay safe, yet also productive and creative...it feels as if we've all been in a global laboratory experiment. I decided early on that I would take as my pandemic mantra the saying given by Desert Father Abba Moses, to a young monk who was struggling with the realities of living the hermit life in the ancient desert wilderness,

“Go sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”

Fortunately, I'm an introvert, so “sitting in my cell” - or in my case--my comfortable home office/studio, has not been a hardship for me. I have been very grateful to staff and colleagues in the Southwest Conference for a great spirit of experimentation, creativity, flexibility, and copious amounts of grace and support as we all try to navigate this new world of ours!

I also chose to respond to the invitation presented by the “second pandemic” that emerged last year – that of awakening more fully to systemic racism in our country and such “new” concepts as “White-centeredness” and “White fragility,” Black and White “spaces” and “bodies;” plus a whole host of American history that has gone largely unacknowledged and unrecognized in my own White European-centered experience. My “cell” has given me time to reflect and focus, to begin to awaken and learn.

All of these reflective “cell” experiences offered by the pandemic have been tremendous sources of adaptation, painful learnings, deconstruction, plus tools and materials for creative reconstruction...much of which none of us would have chosen, but because it was forced on us by an insidious pandemic, we find ourselves living into newness – like it or not! And, I believe we will be better for it.

- **SPIRITUAL FORMATION, AUTHORIZATION AND TRANSITIONS FOR CLERGY:**

The work of the Committee on Church and Ministry-A continued (see the committee report). I continue to greatly enjoy the many conversations I'm able to have with clergy who are

exploring and discerning next steps in their lives...a transfer in or out of our conference, retirement, explorations of a call to ordained ministry, the challenges and humbling experiences of crossing or violating boundaries, and many heart-to-heart conversations with fellow staff and committee members about how to shape our procedures and practices in ministry for this new emerging world.

One thing is certain – while the pandemic has shaken the sustainability of several Conference churches, it seems to have also been a time when the Spirit has spoken through the hearts and lives of a number of individuals. Over the last year, I have had conversations and trained Local Church Discernment Committees to work with possibly nine new individuals on paths of discernment toward some sort of authorized ministry. So clearly God is doing something new, and our challenge is to create the new wineskins for this new wine!

The other arena I've greatly enjoyed is working more intentionally with our retired clergy. We began a monthly Zoom gathering, which has been met with great enthusiasm and gratitude. Disconnection and feeling isolated have long been challenges felt by our retired clergy. With the enthusiastic help and initiative of a few of our retirees – we were able to get a monthly gathering off the ground and organized with ongoing leadership. Thank you to **Rev. Dr. George Ault, Rev. Dr. David Stabenfeldt and Rev. Victoria Ubben** for their great leadership and enthusiasm! This is now a lively group, with connections throughout the conference, and even some living in other Conferences and those who winter here. Topics being explored include clarifying what is active vs. exempt standing, what kind of continuing education would be useful, how is retirement like being “wilderness wanderers?”

Accountability requirements for clergy: Our Healthy Ministry Modules and discernment about how to offer anti-racism training for clergy have continued. Due to the pandemic, we offered the four Healthy Ministry Modules which are our Boundary Awareness Training, online last fall. There were some great benefits to that we experienced. COCAM-A is continuing to discern what our “hybrid” model might be moving forward – in order to keep the best of the online and the in-person formats.

Anti-racism training has been an ongoing discernment. I had originally thought we would add two more healthy ministry modules to cover that training...but the more I was educated, the more I saw that one-size-to-adequately-fit-all was an impossibility. During this pandemic, we have offered credit for this requirement for workshops and sessions people have found within and outside our conference, with approval. We decided it might be best to continue that model, so that clergy could find an event that would be of interest and suitable for them. We will also be curating a list of possible sources to help with that process.

- **FORMATION WITH YOUTH AND ADULTS WORKING WITH YOUTH:**

In the absence of camp or the ability to hold any sort of youth events, I turned attention to using our Zoom connections to create closer networking of those who work in faith formation leadership in our conference.

- ✓ **Faith Formation leaders** meet once a month for conversation and sharing ideas. This too is another way our leaders have felt a new connection and enrichment as they share experiences, theory, pandemic projects, and creative approaches within our churches.

✓ **Camp is on hold** for another summer, but a new idea catching interest for the summer of 2022 might be a **family camp** format. If not a permanent format for camp – this might be a great way for us to reacquaint kids, parents...and maybe even include elders and single folk, to the camp experience after the two-year hiatus. Intergenerational experiences are growing in preference for faith formation. An intergenerational camp may offer a new and more sustainable format for our camp program. Also – **REMEMBER EMMANUEL PINES** as a possible individual, family, church retreats. They are hosting smaller groups with health protocols and a thriving Air BnB with their individual cabin rentals.

- **MY OWN BALCONY VIEW – LOOKING AHEAD:**

I am excited by the prospects of the summer of 2022 and some intentional programming for youth. There will be no national or regional UCC youth events planned (which they usually are on the years between General Synod). This creates a creative space for other possibilities such as a mission trip of some kind and the family camp idea. I am looking for ways to partner with our churches on these types of projects.

I am also looking to the coming months of July, August, and September to cover for our Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Bill Lyons, as he takes a much-needed sabbatical! These are generally lower activity months for me (with the exception of the virtual General Synod this year), so with our Executive Board and Standing Committees' capable leadership, at this point we are not planning on calling in any other supply staff. I will beg your patience and grace as Genevieve, Wende, and I "hold the fort!"

As always, I am so grateful to be a part of this dynamic conference, working with wonderful clergy colleagues, a creative and supportive staff, and wonderful congregations and leaders! Thank you all!

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