

Southwest Conference Lay Ministry Report

A lot has happened in the thirteen months since I stood before you and accepted the call to serve the conference as Lay Minister for Disability Education, Advocacy, and Awareness. To say that I have been busy traveling around the conference is an understatement.

I was invited to worship at Desert Palm UCC in Tempe, AZ as my first official act as conference lay minister. This was a very special Sunday in the life of their church as I was able to witness and lay my hand upon a differently-abled young man who was one of four new confirmands being welcomed as new members.

I have also visited and spent time with the following congregations: Desert Heritage UCC/DOC – Mesa, AZ Church of the Red Rocks – Sedona, AZ, The Good Shepherd – Sahuarita, AZ, First Congregational Church – Flagstaff, AZ, and Shadow Rock UCC – Phoenix, AZ.

Prior to receiving the news that I was being called to serve the conference as the Lay Minister for Disability Education, Advocacy, and Awareness, I was asked to represent the Southwest Conference at the 2018 Widening the Welcome National Gathering in Niagara, Falls NY. One of the three workshops that I had the privilege to attend was presented by a 25-year-old woman with an intellectual different-ability. She shared her story about what it was like growing up in the United Church of Christ. She felt that the church was a safe place full of connection when she was young but now is not sure what place God the church has in her life.

In this workshop I wrestled with the following:

- What makes a church welcoming for differently-abled members and friends?
- What turns differently-abled members and friends away from God and the church?
- Have you identified what is working and not working in regards to welcoming differently-abled and members and friends?
- Where is your church now and how do you get your church to the next stage?
 1. Do you throw the differently-abled member or friend a pity party?
 2. Do you ignore the differently-abled member or friend?
 3. Do you want to minister with your differently-abled members and friends but are not sure how?

In February 2019, I was honored and blessed to receive a special invitation to help plan the sixth Mental Health Weekend by the UCC Mental Health Network and the Southwest Conference of the UCC. The sixth Mental Health Weekend was held at the Church of the Beatitudes on Friday, November 1 and Saturday, November 2. If you would like more detailed information about the Mental Health Weekend feel free to connect with me in person or by email at swclayminister@gmail.com.

Your Partner in Ministry,
Michael Curry
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Southwest Conference UCC