

I want to thank the Executive Board for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today about the work of the conference office. I'm the Office Manager and manage the facility itself, the finances of the conference, and carry out the various events that we sponsor- like this meeting. So, come see me if there's a problem!

First- the conference Office itself. We moved last summer! We got a very good deal. We took advantage of a short sale (most recent prior owner paid \$1 million and we paid \$400,000). The building is in an historic district with very distinct décor and it works well for our needs.

The Disciples regional office moved in with us and their rent pays our utility/landscaping/janitor bills (except in summer!)

Our mortgage payment is half of what our previous rent was.

Currently the building is used by 2 new churches: Ktizo and Footsteps Ministries. Ktizo will likely be moving this summer- they have outgrown us!

It is also used by 3 new youth groups one night every month: Junior High, High School, and Young Adults. And we have had many youth activities take place here as well.

We've built connections to wider community & also try to foster our mission goals.

-Coronado HOA- we hosted their "thank-you" dinner for homeowners who displayed their homes in the recent neighborhood open house.

-FBI- meet quarterly with Hispanic leaders to foster greater communication between the two populations.

-David's Hope- a non-profit that works where mental illness and the legal system intersect. (prison reform and Widening the Welcome!)

-AEC- has used our building for several functions and meetings.

-Duet- a ministry of Beatitudes, has also used our building.

-Q Prom- a prom experience for GLBTQ homeless youth

We've tried to enhance our Communications over the past year, too.

Relevance & the Blog (links from the website)

In the Loop- Peggy has it looking better all the time!

Website- send us stuff! The basis of our website is information!

Video conferencing equipment- mostly paid for with grants.

Let me tell you about Finances- not quite as rosy a picture.

OCWM 10 years ago: \$384,000

OCWM 5 years ago: \$311,000

OCWM last year: \$266,000

OCWM pledged for 2013: \$256,000

Our staffing has been reduced: John is full time (actually more than full time) and myself, Peggy, and Barbara part time.

Rock is paid from Lay Academy income and a start up grant.

Michele is paid entirely from Youth donations- which will run out at year end unless more comes in. (So, give generously tomorrow afternoon!)

We make do the best that we can with what you give us, and we are able to complete our core mission, but we have had to cut back on more extensive programming due to monetary and staff constraints. And we definitely relied on the year end gifts that your churches and some of your individual members sent to us when they heard we were in the hole. We can't thank you enough for that.

And all this leads into a discussion I'd like to have with you around our relationship with each other.

We are in a denomination. I know that's not news to you, because you are here.

But we are also settings in Covenant. That means something a little different. That means we are connected to each other as churches and to the conference setting and to the national office with a promise. When you, as individuals, joined your church, you joined US. You may never have thought of it that way- but you did. When your church joined the UCC, it promised to be in covenant with the other UCC churches, the SWC and the National setting of the UCC. **We all promised to support and honor each others' ministries.**

Over the past several years, I've seen a pulling back. I've seen churches isolate themselves- become more self-centered- think they have to take care of themselves first. So, when the church budget gets tight, they cut back, or cut out, their support of the denomination. Well, in my eyes, that breaks our covenant. And that hurts all of us. Each time a church, **one** church, makes a significant cut in their support of OCWM, we lose a funded staff person- a staff person that works for all of you.

The question we hear is "Why should we support the conference? What have you done for us lately?" That's not really a valid question, because our relationship is not based on the national office and conference "doing" for the churches. Our relationship is based on all of us helping each other to build stronger churches.

But, what has the conference helped you do? Well, first, John Dorhauer is a pastor to your pastor. Who do you think your pastor turns to when he or she needs to vent

about you? Who can help them figure out an approach to a problem- or a crisis in your church- one that you may not know even exists? He receives hundreds of emails and spends hours on the phone and on the road working individually with your pastors. Otherwise, you would drive them crazy!

If your church is in search, the national setting maintains the profiles of all pastors in search. The conference office trains your search committee, gives them the tools to use in the search, spends hours in conversation with your search committee leaders during the process, and then vets your candidates. But if your church calls a pastor who is a good fit for you, then he or she will be an asset to the wider conference as they interact in the conference community. **We all benefit from the call that you make.**

If you have a concern about the fitness of your pastor, the Church and Ministry Committee of the Conference will handle a review of the situation and determine if that pastor should retain their standing in the denomination. And that decision helps the wider church maintain a standard of excellence in the quality of our leadership. And it leads to healing in settings that are in pain.

If you have someone in your congregation that is considering the ministry, the conference acts as their guide through the process. There are scholarships, special programs for seminary students or new pastors, networks. Many of you know Brian Gruhn and Josh Whistler who were both ordained recently. Those children of our conference were nurtured by their home congregation, nurtured and trained as leaders by our conference youth programs, guided by the conference Church and Ministry Committee through their seminary years, counseled by the conference minister- and are now bringing all of that nurturing to their calling bodies in Mass. and Colorado.

And it's not just about money. I experience the loss of our covenant connection in other ways, too. I hope all of you receive the conference newsletter- the In the Loop. How many of your churches forward the newsletter to all their members? They should. Every local church should be communicating to its members about SWC opportunities. And not just communicating about them, **but actively recruiting and encouraging participation.** How many of you know about the Lay Academy? We bring in national theological educators to expand the religious and ethical knowledge base of our lay members and maybe get 20 – 25 participants from almost 50 churches. Why? Because clergy and members don't actively invite those in their congregations that would enjoy the Academy opportunity to broaden their education.

We recently received a grant to train up to 20 Young and middle-aged Adults in Leadership skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. An individual would have paid several thousand dollars for this course. We were only able to get 13 students to sign up.

We are offering a day-long retreat and idea-sharing event for all church secretaries and administrators and even committed volunteers. We're offering to pay their plane fares so folks can fly here from out of town to attend. So far, we have 3 reservations. It's next month- please give your church office worker permission to come without loss of pay and encourage them to participate.

We have nearly 50 churches in the SWC. Do you know how many churches were represented by kids attending summer camp last summer? 13. How many kids came from NM? 3. From El Paso or Southern NM? None. And you senior churches aren't off the hook- grandkids count! We even held the SH camp in NM hoping more NM kids would come. Is this because we don't offer a great camp experience at a reasonable price? No. Is it because we don't have any kids in our churches? No, it's because the churches don't honor our covenant and encourage their kids and their kids' parents to send them.

Let me tell you about the Mission Planning Board. This board is comprised of one representative from each church that come together to plan, oversee, and envision the future of the SWC. We have 7 churches, 16%, that, in 2 years, have not been able to find one person to represent their church on this board.

**Our churches, clergy and lay folks, don't emphasize the importance of our relationship with each other and communicate that with the entire congregation.**

I could go on and on, but you get the picture. And I'm not going to end this sounding like a nag. I am disappointed and discouraged at times, but I also have great hope. I love the UCC. I love the SWC churches. I admire our pastors and our members and all of you. I think that our denomination is a shining light in a sometimes dark world. I am so proud of our General Synod for being on the leading edge seeking justice and equality. I am so proud to work for your Conference Minister. I delight in his speaking at rallies and protests and assemblies and forums that spread our version of the gospel across our 3 states. I love that his schedule is packed with meetings and visits to churches so that you all know him and have heard him. He returns phone calls, too.

I have great hope for the Mission Planning Board. I have great hope that these individuals will be leaders in your churches and will take the reins and communicate with you about opportunities that you have and also about responsibilities that you have. I hope that you will let me know if you have something to communicate to the rest of our churches. I hope that you will let me- or John- know if there is a need that your church has that can be met by our office or the national office, or by a fellow UCC church.

We have great volunteers- folks that I can call and they show up to help.

I have great hope that YOU will speak up about our covenant with each other during budget discussions at your church. I encourage you to set a percentage of your income as OCWM and try to increase that percentage annually until you get to 10%. That way we rise and fall together, sharing our good years and bad equally. That's what we do at the SWC- we send 25% of the OCWM we receive to the national setting.

I have great hope that our churches, although going through difficult times, will succeed because we will all work together to make that happen, either church to church, or by your churches providing the resources for the conference to facilitate that success.

I love my job- as do all your staff- and we try to do our very best for you every day.

I have confidence, not just hope, that all of this will happen. Because we've promised each other that it will. We just need to be reminded. Thank you.