

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

SOUTHWEST CONFERENCE ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER

The last year began in the midst of the transition of conference ministers. November and December of 2022 I spent as Acting Conference Minister, then transitioning back to Associate Conference Minister when Rev. Dr. Toni Hawkins arrived and began work on New Years 2023. The first quarter of the year was spent getting to know each other, helping Dr. Toni get acclimated and settled. I had my own retirement in my sights but did not know when exactly I would be ready for it. When the plans were made for a new transitional conference minister, I thought that person would need at least a year to have a sense of their ministry potential and acclimation in the conference, so I planned for at least through the end of 2023 to see how everything unfolded. Towards the last quarter of the year, it became clear in my discernment that my ministry in the ACM role was rightly concluding. A new era of life was calling me, and also, I felt, an open space of staffing possibilities would be good for the Southwest Conference in moving forward. This whole transitional and discernment process was the main focus for much of my ministry in 2023.

In the second quarter of the year, my job description was changed in order to fit the needs of Dr. Toni's and my new working partnership. It was clear that camp was not going to be resurrected since the pandemic, and the arenas of Search and Call and COCAM B that I had been doing since November and December 2022, were added permanently. I worked with COCAM A to reduce my administrative work for them, plus continued to learn the Search and Call process, and get up to speed on the activities and responsibilities of COCAM B.

Within the third and fourth quarters of the year, the staff also began writing all the procedures done within our jobs. In the past, some of this had been done periodically within the office support staff, but since the ACM job was new with me, many of the procedures that I've created, which coincide with procedures from the Manual on Ministry for COCAM A, Members in Discernment processes, clergy oversight, plus the UCC search and call procedures, and trainings I do, had not been recorded in a public way. So, hopefully these will assist successors.

The activities of COCAM A are listed in the committee's report. I am so deeply grateful to all the committee members I've had the great pleasure to work with over these last 6 ½ years! The work is often intense and challenging, with a great deal of emotions to carry. I'm so appreciative of their commitment to be faithful, accountable, compassionate, and deeply discerning. The last two years, Rev. Dean Hokel has served as chair, and this year Rev. David Stabenfeldt has stepped into more co-leadership and learning as the chair-elect. Together we've navigated some delicate and confusing issues and relationships, and I am so grateful for their wisdom and commitment to these processes.

I've been more involved than I had been with congregations in this last year with the addition of COCAM B and Search and Call arenas of my portfolio. Rev. Julie Parmenter was willing to take the lead as chair of COCAM B, for which I was deeply grateful, and she has helped me learn some of their tasks – also described in their annual report. She stepped up to write many of their committee's procedures as well. And, I've greatly enjoyed some of the hands-on contact I've had with search committees and transition teams this year: Taos, Church of the Beatitudes, Church of the Red Rocks, Church of the Painted Hills, First Congregational – Albq, and First Christian in Las Cruces, and Black Mountain UCC.

I've also had the joy of working with a number of groups inside our conference and outside. The affinity groups we have that meet regularly are a joy to me: our monthly clergy group, our retired clergy group, and our faith formation leaders group, all meet via zoom for conversation and support. This year, we've also continued our partnership with the Antiracism Study-Dialogue Circles organization having moved into doing a third 10-week circle particularly for church teams to attend as well as individuals in order to strengthen and broaden our understanding of decentering whiteness in our lives, churches and conference. At the desire of some of our previous circle graduates, we created a monthly Community of Practice for those who wanted to continue and deepen their practice of antiracism in their lives after their experience in the ASDIC circle.

Our return as a conference to an in-person Annual Meeting in El Paso in April, was also the first larger event we as a new staff worked together on. It was so good to be back together face to face; it was also good to have a majority of us in the conference needing to share in the travel "pilgrimage" to get there and be present on the borders of our conference with El Paso and Las Cruces folks!

I'm grateful to Rev. Liana Rowe and Wende Gonzales who partnered with me in planning the annual Clergy Retreat. At the wonderful suggestion of Dr. Toni, we used the book *"Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto"* by Tricia Hersey, as our theme. I believe it was a deeply meaningful time in which we tried to embrace and open space for a good balance of rest and deep connections.

In addition to being part of an ACM Community of Practice monthly, I was also happy to be the local "host" and contact for the first UCC Associate Conference Ministers retreat, which was held the first few days of December at Spirit of the Desert Retreat Center in Carefree. It was bittersweet, since I felt I just had a wonderful opportunity to meet and get acquainted with many of my colleagues from other conferences...only to know I would be retiring from their ranks in another month! But they surrounded me during the closing worship, laid hands and prayers on me to send me forth!

I am writing this at the close of December 2023 in the last days of my ministry before retirement. Words cannot express the depth of my gratitude and love for the Southwest Conference and all my friends, partners in ministry, colleagues, church members that have supported me, accepted and affirmed my leadership, challenged me, prayed for Rich, our family and I over all the tides of experiences we've had personally and in doing ministry here for the last 30 years! We are planning to stay here in our home in Tempe (after all, AZ is a great place to retire, no?!), but I will be taking a break, observing my departure boundaries. I am not doing so to break or neglect relationships or friendships...but to hold important space for myself to stop, to rest, to release what is past, and allow to emerge whatever new creation God will grow in me. I will also hold the important space of absence so whatever newness God will introduce into our Conference, new staff members, new styles and practices, will be able to have fertile space and freedom to emerge unencumbered.

With great respect, love and gratitude!



Rev. Dr. Barbara Doerrer-Peacock
Associate Conference Minister