

ASSOCIATE CONFERENCE MINISTER'S REPORT

January-December 2021

Another year of pandemic meant conference ministry tasks stayed mostly online and in home and Conference offices! Nevertheless, significant ministry, equipping churches and clergy, nurturing leadership, making seismic shifts, changes of location and perspectives all still happened by God's grace and inspiring!

FAITH AND LEADERSHIP FORMATION continue to be the overarching umbrella for my ACM ministry. The following are specific topics that I worked on this last year:

- **Decisions Regarding Camp:** After a number of years of struggling with sustainability and then the last two years of pandemic that prohibited summer camp from happening, I felt called to recommend to the Executive Board to spend some time exploring other options for conference-sponsored summer faith formation than the week of youth summer camp. Those of you who know me, know that I've been a camp kid all my life, so this was a very difficult call for me to make. I've seen our UCC camp program through many shifts and changes, and even led some major ones. I discerned that it was necessary to let go of the camp model, at least for now, in order to have a clear and clean space to discern what might be God's new leading for us in the future.
- **Faith Formation Group:** I called on the wisdom of our faith formation leaders and clergy in this discussion. The Faith Formation leaders from our churches have continued to meet monthly on a Zoom call, which has been a great time for us to share ideas and have deep conversations.
- **Emergence of the Idea of Pilgrimage:** In course of conversations, the idea of "pilgrimage" caught our attention. Pilgrimage is different than either camp or mission trips, though it certainly has qualities of both. It is an experience of call and transformation that comes when we feel restless in our lives, when some need for transformation begins to assert itself. It may be a journey or a process through travel or some sort of challenging experience in our lives. It is an ancient form of discernment and practice in many religious traditions. It can get us out of our comfort zones, and into a place of receptivity to something new, where God is revealed and guides us in new ways.
- **PILGRIMAGE EMERGING in 2022:** This idea is catching excitement. It is the theme of our annual meeting, a Pilgrimage Team is planning for some sort of initial event this summer (at this writing, it is still being revealed!). While it won't be a full-fledged pilgrimage - due to lack of time for preparation and the uncertainty of COVID, it will be some sort of experience to help us explore with high school youth and adults what pilgrimage can mean, how to prepare, how we might develop something for the summer of 2023. Also, the Pilgrimage will continue to be a theme for our Clergy Retreat.

DISCERNMENT:

- **For Those Pursuing A Ministry Vocation – MEMBERS IN DISCERNMENT:** God continues to call people into ministry, and companioning these folks and working with their Local Church Discernment Committees continues to be a joy for me. With COCAM-A, we continue to navigate the many "paths" to ordination, how to shape them within the

ever-changing terrain of our culture, and how to continue to form and prepare people for ministry with integrity and competency.

- **...AND THOSE ENDING A VOCATION – RETIRED MINISTERS:** Another form of discernment for clergy has emerged and is being named in our conference. I've continued to meet monthly with our retired minister zoom group. Out of that meeting has come a passion to make stronger connections and build community with each other, but also a CALL is emerging this year. It is the call to **ELDERHOOD**, recognizing the difference between aging, and just having to endure its natural consequences, and rather taking on an intentional spiritual practice of "eldering," which opens one to a whole new and deeper purpose in life – one that is not recognized well in our White-centered American culture. The Clergy Retreat in 2021 had a special invitation to retired clergy to attend and explore more about elderhood in breakout sessions. The theme is continuing to grow in interest.

EQUIPPING MINISTERS AND MINISTERIAL TRANSITIONS:

I continue to staff our Committee on Church and Ministry, section A, in its work of authorizing ministers. Other ways that I have worked to equip ministers in 2021 have been:

- **BEST SKILLS-BEST CHURCHES course:** The SW Conference sponsored a course that we offered to other Western Region UCC Conferences in conjunction with the ASU Lodestar School For Non-Profit Management. About 26 students took part, with roughly half of those coming from the SW Conference, in learning topics related to management of non-profit organizations, with then interpretation by an expert from the church realm.
- **CLERGY RETREAT:** I staff planning for the annual Clergy Retreat. This year, the theme was HEALING, and thanks to Conference Minister Bill Lyons, the Endowment Committee and Executive Board's approval, we comped the retreat price for all employed clergy as a way to say thank you and offer this nurturing event as a gift for their leadership in these very difficult years. We also offered scholarships and invitations for our retired clergy to take part as well. One of the most powerful moments of the retreat was the closing ritual of a circle of blessing offered to the employed clergy by the retired clergy.
- **HEALTHY MINISTRY MODULES:** are offered annually to our clergy for their accountability. I'm grateful to our trainers: Rev. Gail Joralemon, Rev. Sarah Tevis Townes, and two new trainers this year, Rev. Julie Parmenter and Rev. Drew Terry. A big thank you to Rev. Dr. Donna Cavedon and Rev. Len Silvester for their years of service in being boundary awareness trainers! Clergy are also required to take at least 6 hours of racial justice training every 5 years, and they may pick their own experience that is relevant for them. I do want to thank Rev. Dean Hokel for designing and teaching a "De-Centering Whiteness" 6-hour series for our active clergy that also meets that basic requirement.

ACTING CONFERENCE MINISTER DURING BILL'S SABBATICAL

I was honored to be entrusted once again with covering for our Conference Minister Bill Lyons, while he took a much-needed 3-month sabbatical from July through September this last year. I think I was able to keep most of the balls in the air with both our jobs by staying "up on the balcony." This could not have been done if it hadn't been for the capable leadership of everyone on our Executive Board, and moderator, Rev. Sarah TevisTownes. I'm also especially grateful

for Treasurer Scott Greenwood, advising and covering so well on all things financial (whew!) including various property sales, and Rev. Dr. Rebecca McElfresh and her counsel and support regarding keeping up with the shifting terrain of COVID and its impact on our churches.

- **Selling the “917” and Moving Conference Office:** was the major activity for the month of July. We were happy to have found a new home with the Desert Southwest Annual Conference United Methodists in their conference center, so when our 917 E. Sheridan property sold for full price, we kicked into high gear to get moved. **Genevieve Benham**, our office administrator and executive assistant to the CM, orchestrated movers and cleaners and a myriad of details. Along with **Rich Doerrler-Peacock**, who generously offered help to his beleaguered wife, the three of us managed to get our offices downsized and moved in to our new, smaller, 3-office home with the United Methodists on Meadowbrook Ave. about 3 miles north. The serendipitous blessing happened when former SW Conference staffer, **Holly Herman**, was able to make an amazing connection with a new migrant/asylum-seeker assistance center being developed in Sonoyta, Mexico. The organization folks helping to fund the project were thrilled to take all of our office remains and re-home them to their new community center facility which was in need everything we had to offer!

I continue to be grateful for being able to do ministry in this wonderful conference with wonderful people: Bill, Genevieve and Wende - my staff compatriots, and all our clergy and laity in our wonderful churches! We are all in this crazy time together, and I pray for everyone's strength, health, grace and faithfulness as we continue to walk this pilgrimage together!

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Association Conference Minister