

## Conference Minister's Annual Report (June 2018)

### "Alive in Christ"

This year's Annual Meeting theme is "Alive in Christ" inspired by the words of Scripture found in Colossians 2: 6-19. Attendance at Annual Meeting is part of living into our covenantal relationship in Christ, and so we welcome all of you! A special welcome to all first-time delegates and guests, including a special welcome back to churches which have not attended in several years.

Preparation for Annual Meeting is a wonderful invitation to pause and reflect on the past year. Here are a few highlights from our work together:

#### 2017-2020 STRATEGIC (MISSIONAL) PLAN UPDATE

The three year (2017-2020) Strategic Plan was presented at last year's Annual Meeting. Next steps included scheduling meetings to review the plan in each of the eight Associations and to provide an annual update to the PCC Board of Directors.

Meetings to discuss the plan throughout the 8 Associations in the Conference are still underway with 7 already completed (Central, Lebanon, Mercersburg, Northern, York, Harrisburg, Lancaster). The final one is scheduled in Gettysburg on September 30, 2018. I am grateful for Rev. Ann Graves and Eric Dundore, who have attended many of the Association meetings. They are both members of the Strategic Planning Committee of the PCC Board of Directors. Interactive google maps are now available to show the proposed realignments, courtesy of Dale Mease, also a member of the PCC Board of Directors.

The Conference Commission on Ministry (COM) is exploring other approaches for doing their work, given the changes proposed in the Strategic/Missional Plan. Rev. Nora Foust and Rev. Dr. Monica Ouellette have invited Rev. Holly Millershank (MESA Team Leader) to facilitate a seminar in May 2018, and to discuss the various COM models being used across other UCC Conferences.

Most of the conversations and questions about the Strategic Plan have been related to the proposed realignment. Central and Northern Associations have begun intentional discussions about their future together. A few Associations have engaged collaborative activities with neighboring Associations, while others have not yet begun conversations. Based on feedback from Associations, the Strategic Planning Committee has prepared additional options for the proposed realignment:

#### STRATEGIC PLAN REALIGNMENT PROPOSAL *(revised March 9, 2018)*

##### Plan A (original proposal)

Central & Northern	50
Harrisburg, Lebanon & Mercersburg	49
Gettysburg & parts of Mercersburg	40
Lancaster & York	48

##### Plan B

Central & Northern	56
Harrisburg & York	43
Mercersburg & Gettysburg	45
Lancaster & Lebanon	43

## Plan C

Perry County & Harrisburg & York	49
• Carlisle, Mechanicsburg & Camp Hill	
Rest of Mercersburg & Gettysburg	39
• Option all Spring Grove	
Lancaster & Lebanon	43
Central & Northern	56

Updates from the first year of the plan were presented to the PCC Board, and will be shared at this year's Annual Meeting. Updates were also shared at a few Association Annual Meetings and ministerium gatherings. The results from implementing the action plans have been encouraging, so far, but a lot more work is needed for implementation of the next two years of the plan.

## **OCWM AND FUND/DONOR DEVELOPMENT**

New in 2018, with the approval of the auditors, the deadline for receiving end of year gifts was extended to January 12, 2018 (instead of December 31). As a result, OCWM gifts for the month of January 2018 are 33% less than 2017.

Thanks to your generosity, the Conference ended 2016 and 2017 with a positive balance to the budget. A generous bequest in early December 2017 from the former St. Stephens UCC congregation and some extra gifts from a few congregations helped to give a strong finish to 2017.

In a time when many of our congregations are struggling financially, we appreciate your covenantal relationship, commitment and gifts to Our Churches Wider Mission (OCWM), providing financial support to the Conference and wider church. We are deeply grateful for the support we receive from many congregations across the Conference.

<b>ASSOCIATION NAME</b>	<b># of CONGREGATIONS</b>	<b>% of CONGREGATIONS GIVING TO OCWM</b>
Central	37 churches	81%
Gettysburg	21 churches	95%
Harrisburg	15 churches	93%
Lancaster	24 churches	96%
Lebanon	19 churches	95%
Mercersburg	23 churches	83%
York	28 churches	100%
Northern	18 churches	100%

Under the leadership of Stephanie Rader-Titzel, the first *Friends of Penn Central Conference* OCWM fundraising effort in 2017 exceeded its financial goal of \$10,000 by achieving over \$14,000. *Generosity abounds in Penn Central Conference – THANK YOU!!*

A Money and Ministry workshop, in collaboration with United Church Funds and the UCC Office of Philanthropy, was held in late April. The twenty-one workshop participants included congregations from neighboring Conferences (PNEC and PSEC). More financial workshops and webinars are planned to further improve the fiscal health of our congregations.

## **CONGREGATIONS ARE AT THE HEART OF OUR WORK!**

From October 26, 2016 through the end of April 2018, I have visited 71 (unique) congregations for worship, celebrations and/ or meetings. During each visit I have cherished the opportunity to learn more about their ministries. I have also been pleased with the vitality evident in many of these congregations. The Conference staff routinely share highlights from church visits on social media (i.e. Facebook), which have been well received by both clergy and laity.

New and improved boundary training programs for clergy and lay leaders have been well received, especially the new Retired Clergy Boundary Training. The Small Church Vitality workshop presented by Rev. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, and organized by Rev. Nora Foust, was timely and well received. The workshop was live-streamed, recorded and is available on the Conference YouTube channel: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYxqxFp0sQ>). Plans for formation of Conference-wide Communities of Practice (clergy covenantal support groups) and Vitality teams (Architects of Excellence) are underway – thanks to Rev. Nora Foust for her leadership.

The search and call workshop and cooperative ministry opportunities were well received by clergy and MIDs – thanks to Rev. Betsy Bruaw for her leadership.

Association chaplains have been very responsive to the needs of our clergy and their families – thanks to Rev. Richard Luciotti for his efforts in recruiting chaplains.

The Conference hosted an Epiphany Worship Service at Mt. Zion UCC on January 23 at 6:30pm. The service was live-streamed and two congregations (St. John's UCC, Boalsburg and St. Paul's UCC, West Milton) served as "viewing locations" for the live-stream. This was a new approach for a Conference-wide worship service and, overall, the technology worked well. The worship service was recorded and is also available on the Conference YouTube channel: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cdbF50xVFDE>) Approximately 14 congregations currently use Facebook Live, website livestreaming or television to broadcast their Sunday morning worship services.

The PCC Board Finance Committee is working on details for a NEW Innovation grant. The grant will provide seed money (and offer coaching) for churches interested in creating innovative community outreach ministries. We hope to announce more details about this soon.

So far, two (2) churches have closed in 2018: Emmanuel Penns Creek (2/11/18) and Grace UCC York (4/15/18). Trinity, Biglersville withdrew from the UCC (4/1/18). We celebrate the rich legacy of these congregations even as we grieve their loss. With the loss of these 3 churches, PCC now has 184 churches and is still ranked #7 out of 38 UCC Conferences (*based on number of churches*)

There are now 18 Open and Affirming congregations in the Conference, located in the following Associations: Lancaster (5 churches), Central (4), York (5), Mercersburg (1), Northern (1) and Harrisburg (2). The newest ONA congregation is St. Paul's UCC, Selinsgrove (as of April 2018).

Several of our congregations have been featured in local news and the National KYP e-news, including members of our PCC Disaster Response and Recovery team (Bill and Ellen Matten).

## **COMMUNITY, NATIONAL & ECUMENICAL OUTREACH**

My lectionary-based reflection in the weekly e-News was an opportunity to reach out to our congregations with spiritual insights on a weekly basis. I am grateful that the reflections were fairly well received by both clergy and laity. A few congregations included the reflection routinely in their

worship bulletins, making use of the formatted bulletin insert from the e-News. After 17 months, I have put the weekly reflections on hold for now.

Being interviewed for 2 articles in a Lancaster Newspaper was an opportunity to share my perspectives on DACA and the Johnson Amendment with the wider community:

- [http://lancasteronline.com/features/faith\\_values/faith-organizations-condemnrump-s-decision-to-end-daca/article\\_b259f8b6-94bc-11e7-a75b-271acfa9cb7.html](http://lancasteronline.com/features/faith_values/faith-organizations-condemnrump-s-decision-to-end-daca/article_b259f8b6-94bc-11e7-a75b-271acfa9cb7.html) (re DACA in September 2017)
- [http://lancasteronline.com/features/faith\\_values/johnson-amendment-houseprovision-that-would-have-freed-up-churches/article\\_bd3d88e0-e1c6-11e7-8be2-63b43ae5bd9f.html](http://lancasteronline.com/features/faith_values/johnson-amendment-houseprovision-that-would-have-freed-up-churches/article_bd3d88e0-e1c6-11e7-8be2-63b43ae5bd9f.html) (re Johnson Amendment in December 2017)

It was a blessing to participate with ecumenical colleagues in local and international events commemorating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation:

- I participated as the Bible Reflector and Preacher at the annual Craigville Colloquy in Cape Cod (July 9-14, 2017). Overall, the attendance from Penn Central Conference clergy at this event was impressive!
- I also participated as an ecumenical guest in the Commemorative Reformation Worship Service, with an invitation from Bishop James Dunlop (Lower Susquehanna Synod, ELCA). The service was held on October 31 in the beautiful chapel on the campus of Gettysburg seminary.
- As a member of the UCC and United Church of Canada delegation, we visited various European partners in September 2017, including the Reformed and Waldensian Churches. The UCC delegation included John Dorhauer, Traci Blackmon, Jim Moos, CEO of Pension Board, Chair of UCC Board of Directors, Executive for Middle East and Europe, and a few other leaders.

At the invitation of Rev. Russ Clark (PCC Board member), I was the guest preacher at the Hanover Area Council of Churches Week of Prayer for Christian Unity Service on January 28, 2018.

## **STAFF UPDATE**

Rev. Nora Foust status was changed to a permanent Associate Conference Minister position in October 2017 (no longer designated). Wendy Hepler was promoted to Office Manager.

Rev. Dr. Laurene Bowers resigned her ACM position on January 1 and Rev. Richard Luciotti resigned his position in late March. Therefore, we currently have 2 Staff openings – 1 full time and 1 part-time position. The part-time position for Facilitator of Care to Clergy and Clergy families will be posted and interviews will be scheduled in May.

## **HARTMAN CENTER**

The Hartman Center Board of the Directors developed a Strategic Plan for Hartman Center, which was endorsed by the PCC Board at the April 7, 2018 meeting. The plan calls for an increased focus on non-church (secular) customers to account for 80% of total user days year-round. This is an intentional effort to improve the viability and sustainability of this outdoor ministry. Rev. Patty Dodds and the Hartman Center Advisory Committee (HCAC) continue to provide summer camp programming and fundraising support. The UCCR staff continue to offer effective management and marketing for Hartman Center.

*I am deeply grateful for the Conference staff's efforts in coordinating and implementing plans for this year's Annual Meeting! After Annual meeting, the Conference Office will be closed on Monday, June 11. This gives the staff some time off for rest and renewal, after a hectic schedule.*