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**July 2019-July 2020: Ministry in Review**

Remember the dandelions of last year's annual meeting? This idea that a dandelion inhabits and prospers in so many different habitats, along with the question to ponder from our posters asking how our church might thrive in different places was a little prophetic, I think. The call to Be The Church remains alive during this season of pandemic and I have been humbled and blessed to watch it over and over in so many different ways across our Conference in these past 6 months.



**Dandelion inhabits different habitats that provide enough sunlight: meadows, grasslands, edges of the forests, gardens and lawns.**

**In what ways does this describe you faith? Your church? Our Conference?**

Let's take a moment to look back over all the ways we have been planted and grown in the last year:

- **Morsels of Excellence Vlog** – In 2019, I recorded 11 installments of a video-log on a variety of topics for congregational life and excellence. These vary from social media to behavioral covenants and church budgets to hospitality. All vlogs included discussion questions. You can find them on the Penn Central Conference YouTube under playlists.
- The staff picked up the vlog idea again with 4 installments on **Ministry in the Time of Pandemic**. These vlogs include home workspace, Sabbath, grief and spiritual practices. They can also be found on the PCC YouTube under playlists.
- Another seed planted shortly after the Annual Meeting last year was a new round of **Clergy Communities of Practice**. Two groups for transitional pastors and two other groups had existed and 5 more were added. A total of 7 of these groups still gather regularly. One facilitator writes, *"I am so grateful for this awesome group. I believe God has used the group as a source of sustaining presence during these last strange and difficult months."*
- Two **Ministerial Education Forums** were held this Spring, along with 3 last Fall. These events gathered 125 clergy for continuing education to cover topics like the opioid crisis and politics and the pulpit.
- More than **800 hours of Boundary and Ethics Training** were completed by Penn Central Clergy this past year. These opportunities have continued online during the pandemic with two sessions completed and 4 opportunities remaining this year (How to Be An Antiracist Book Study, Politics and the Pulpit on September 16<sup>th</sup>, Supply and Retired Boundaries on October 20<sup>th</sup>, and Boundaries in Crisis Seasons on November 17<sup>th</sup>.)
- The Association **Committees on Ministry** have all continued to meet via Zoom and work on behalf of their Associations. We have **24 Members in Discernment** across the Conference. Two of those have been approved for ordination pending call and are actively seeking calls. The new **Portfolio Review Team** is working with 5 of the newer MIDs and have received several pieces of portfolios and one complete document.

- **Ecclesiastical Councils, Ordinations and Installations** have all continued via the gifts of technology with some totally online and others with mixed audiences, both live and online.
- The **Pennsylvania Academy of Ministry continues at Lancaster Theological Seminary** having completed their first course this summer in Communication and Conflict and continuing enrollment for their upcoming October course, Christian Theology. These courses are open to all: lay leaders, those seeking ministerial authorization and authorized clergy. Rev. Thomas W. Caruso, a course participant offered this reflection: *"Garnered a lot of new insights and ideas on how to handle church conflicts and communication crises in a Summer PAM online course through Lancaster Theological Seminary. Peer and staff support was great, too."*
- No 2020 Report would be complete without naming some of the changes in workload brought on by the **pandemic**.
  - The life giving and sustaining, **daily prayer pauses** were vital for me. I enjoyed the shared leadership with conference ministers and associate conference ministers from Penn Northeast and Pennsylvania Southeast Conferences. These met daily in March, April and May then moved to weekly in June.
  - The weekly **Worship Planning Zoom** was another highlight for me. A small, but consistent group gathered each Tuesday afternoon from March through June to discuss the lectionary, online worship planning, and even how pandemic life had changed us as pastors and preachers.
  - **Weekly Conference Connection** Zooms like **Check-ins and Coffee with Carrie and Nora** were also shining moments in the Spring. This offered an opportunity to get to know several clergy better and resource them in needed ways.
  - I was able to "visit" with so many of our churches via **Facebook, Zoom, Conference Call and YouTube worship** services. I also provided **pulpit supply** from both my dining room and backyard.

This season of pandemic has called out creativity and innovation that has blessed the Church! Romans 12:6 reminds us that we each "have different gifts." Paul goes on in verse 12 to call on Christians to **"Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."** These are wise words for the Church today as we each use our gifts and continue to creatively find ways to worship and serve in a time of global pandemic.

Looking forward, I am excited about the work that I am doing with the Portfolio Review Team with Members in Discernment! The Antiracist Book Study is a continuing education event for which I find myself deep in preparation. I want to continue discussions with Committees on Ministry and associations around anti-racism continuing education for clergy and congregations. I am also excited to begin planning for additional continuing education events for clergy and congregations around being the church for such a time as this.

I am privileged to serve with the people and churches of the Penn Central Conference and I thank God daily for the call to serve in this time and place.

*Blessings and Peace! Nora*