

Moderator's Report
Penn Central Conference Annual Meeting 2020
Rev. Ann Graves

Though it has been a very busy, sometimes tumultuous and difficult two years, it's been mostly a blessing to have served this conference as your Moderator for the Board of Directors. Through it all, it has been clear to me that this as my calling for this time. I remember a few short years ago sincerely asking God what the meaning and purpose of my life should be as a retired pastor who still wished to serve God's people in some meaningful way. It wasn't too long before I received a phone call asking if I would be able to step into the position of Moderator under some unusual circumstances. After praying about it, I realized this was God's way of saying, "I'm not done with you yet, Ann." And so it was!!

This past year has gone swiftly with changes that none of us anticipated as we adapted to life in this new virus pandemic environment. We have been so blessed to have found the Rev. Dr.Carolyn Call right in our own back yard as our Transitional Conference Minister, after doing a nationwide search for the right person. She was assigned some specific goals to work on during this time, with the understanding that there would be an evaluation and hopefully, a recommendation that she would be nominated to be our Settled Conference Minister after a year. This evaluation was done during the past winter and early spring months, resulting in the Board decision at our April meeting to nominate Carrie for election as Conference Minister at our 2020 Annual Meeting. She has brought so many gifts to our conference and I trust that she will be elected to continue serving us for at least the next 6 years as Conference Minister. Our by-laws state that the Conference Minister is elected for a 6 year term and may then be nominated for re-election.

Over the past year, with the recommendation of our Transitional Conference Minister, the office staff and ACM positions have been evaluated and reorganized. Two positions - the director of communications and office receptionist positions were eliminated with communications being taken over by the Office Manager Paul Keller and the search and call posting responsibilities folded into the new ACM for Congregational Transitions. A new Coordinator of Camps and Retreats was hired after the resignation of the Rev. Patty Dodds last fall. In addition, a new Congregational Empowerment Team has begun working with churches. In addition, Rev. Ronette Comfort-Butler has become our Facilitator of Care to Clergy and Clergy Families after the resignation of Scott Watts.

We finally completed the search for a re-formulated Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Transitions. We were delighted to welcome the Rev. Dr. Marisa Laviola to our Conference on June 1 this year. She brings so much experience and love for the work of churches - both those seeking new pastoral leadership as well as those seeking to strengthen and empower their ministries in these days and time. She is already making her presence known and is available to work with churches as needed. She also is working with our Church Empowerment Team led by Rev. Bruce Bouchard, Michael Goss, Michael Gibbs and others as they begin work with churches developing mentor relationships with churches working through a church strengthening process.

This spring, the Board of Directors made the difficult and painful decision to sell our beloved church camp of many years, Hartman Center in Milroy, PA. There were many reasons for this decision, but finally, it was the long run costs of owning and maintaining this property were just too much of a financial burden for the conference to maintain, with decreased usage and support. As we all know, our church sizes are decreasing for the most part, our members are aging and the times are changing as well. Frankly, the overall support of our churches has seriously declined both financially and in numbers of campers, in recent years as well. The Board is deeply committed to maintaining an Outdoor Ministries program for years to come, but it will take on a different face. There are other options being explored. This decision has deeply pained some of our conference folk, while others have frankly breathed a sigh of relief we have finally taken this step. Our hearts go out to all who have been deeply affected by this decision.

A committee appointed by the Board of Directors has been meeting weekly since June to work through a process to put the camp up for sale. They are being very thorough and thoughtful in determining how to accomplish this and serve the best interests of the conference. A very careful search for the right realtor is being undertaken, as there are multiple possibilities for the future usage of this property. Steps are being taken to preserve the name Hartman Center for future use by the conference.

This has been an event-filled tenure as your Moderator and I am so grateful for the fine Board of Directors that have served over these past two years. They have worked very hard, often meeting far more frequently than usual to accomplish the tasks before us. They deserve a great big thank you for their service to Penn Central Conference. I have come to deeply appreciate the hard work of our Conference Treasurer, Ron Royer, as he has kept us on the path of financial stability and all those who have served on the Finance Committee, as well as those on the Personnel Committee, the Strategic Planning Committee and the Hartman Center Committee of the Board, as well as the Hartman Center Advisory Committee. My deep gratitude to all those who have helped to lead us through the past two years.

Submitted,
Rev. Ann Graves