

**Annual Report 2022**  
**Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Transitions**

This Annual Meeting marks two years that I have been Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Transitions. During these years, I have had joyful and blessed times helping churches and pastors find one another, working with the Congregational Empowerment Team to train coaches and generate new and innovative ideas for how to support the churches of our conference, and conducting workshops for small churches. I have also provided consultations at the request of COMs, and have met with a myriad of churches that are in varying stages of transition such as leadership struggles, governance re-aligning, communication among leaders, consultations for churches that are considering coming together, and mediation of varying amounts and kinds. These consultations have at time been exceedingly tender, given how the pandemic has worn all of us down. I have also had the blessed joy to preach on many Sundays in many churches

Specifically, the areas of my portfolio include:

1. **Churches in Search and Call:** I provide support, consultation, and guidance for churches that are seeking an interim, designated, or settled pastor. For churches whose settled pastor is leaving or retiring, I help congregations in their process of grieving the loss of their pastor and seeking a new pastor; and in developing their profile. I encourage them to begin to ask the questions: “Who are we right now, who is our neighbor, and who is God calling us to be for the future?” I also help churches to decide if they wish to call an interim pastor to help them with their transition, or if they wish to seek a designated or settled pastor (this decision varies according to the size and the unique nature of each church). I receive profiles of all pastoral candidates interested in serving our churches, and invite them to choose churches from the profile page on the UCC web site. All along the journey, church leaders can call on me for in person or zoom support, consultation, and guidance.
2. **Church empowerment and vitality:** This includes oversight of the Church Empowerment Team (please see the description on our web page) and supervision of the Empowerment Coordinators. Pastors and lay persons volunteer to receive training and supervision as coaches, and coaches provide guidance for churches who seek help with their financial or administrative functions, churches who wish to revitalize their ministry, and churches who wish to expand their mission into their greater communities. I am also available to meet with churches who want help with clarifying and revitalizing their view of mission, as God’s still speaking churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I also provide mentoring for pastors whose churches are seeking guidance from our coaches. Many thanks to Empowerment Coordinators Bruce Bouchard, Bruce Conrad, and Mike Gibbs, for their vision long before I arrived, and their continuing commitment to empowering our churches to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the people of central Pennsylvania. I have been blessed with the opportunity to facilitate four workshops for small churches in each of our associations. As research shows, and our experience bears witness, the future of God’s church is in the small church. We must celebrate and ensure that small churches thrive. In addition, I was invited to write an article for the UCC Church, Ministry, and Music Journal on the future of small churches in the UCC. That article was published at the end of May.

In the coming year, as we look to the unknown and uncertain future for all of us, I envision that search and call will require innovative methods for bringing candidates and churches together. Candidates are very scant in the PCC, and even full-time churches are challenged to call a pastor. Well trained and experienced interim pastors are also few and far between. I am working with the conference minister to

develop new ways to engage search and call, including not using interims and instead call designated ministers who can do interim tasks, and streamlining the call system in general.

In the coming year, I hope to engage with more and more churches around new and innovative ways to be church, reaching beyond the four walls of the church's buildings, continuing to reach out through streaming and other electronic means to engage more folks who are not necessarily interested in being physically in a sanctuary Sunday morning—and retaining those folks for involvement in the church on the other days of the week. Alongside the Congregational Empowerment Team, we will together offer guidance and support for all churches who wish to grow in membership or in ministry, seeking empowerment with the guidance of the Holy Spirit for how God wants us to be church in 21<sup>st</sup> century Penn Central. Specifically, we are offering two all day workshops in the fall. The first will focus on churches engaging in new kind of relational evangelism and becoming mission centers in the greater community. These two areas are essential for churches to thrive. The second workshop will address the challenge of not having enough to fill leadership positions. This workshop will focus on “right-sizing” governance. Both workshops will be packaged with coaches to travel with them for 3 to 6 months.

I am available for conversation and reflection; workshops for pastors, consistories, and congregations; mentoring for pastors; preaching and worship leadership. If you have any questions about my position and my vision for the coming year, do not hesitate to contact me. I look forward to getting to know all the pastors and churches of our conference. I end by offering my favorite scripture, verses that have sustained, nurtured, and inspired my ministry over the years.

*<sup>5</sup> Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup> Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, beloved,<sup>[a]</sup> whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about<sup>[b]</sup> these things. Philippians 4:5-8*

Blessings and peace,

*Marisa*

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