

PCC Ministerial Staff Annual Report

June 2024 – June 2025

Greetings Penn Central Conference! No one will argue that we didn't have a busy and productive year here at the Conference. Your staff were involved in a wide range of projects and activities and this report will highlight our primary areas of focus. As always, your questions are welcome!

Keystone

Carrie and Nora spent the largest amount of work this past year on various aspects of the Keystone Merger. Since our Joint Conference meeting in State College in May 2024, the work of building a seamless transition to Keystone has been consistent. After the vote last fall to become one Conference, a range of new committees and teams formed to guide this transformation.

These include:

- **Constitution and Bylaws** (Carrie)
- **Search and Call** (Carrie and Nora)
- **Combined Committees on Ministry** (Nora)
- **Association Presidents/Moderators** (Carrie & Nora)
- **Personnel/Staffing** (Carrie)
- **Congregational Vitality** (Carrie)
- **Annual Meeting 2026 Planning** (Carrie & Nora)
- **Budget and Finance**
- **Investment** (Carrie)
- **Legal** (Carrie)
- **Generosity/Development**
- **Website Development** (Paul)
- **Office Space and Logistics** (Paul, location is Harrisburg)
- **International Mission Partners**
- **Database Development** (Carrie)

More groups are still coming together, including ministry teams for Racial Justice, Open and Affirming, and a Mission Focus Group centered on *People of the Table*, which was introduced at our Fall 2024 Conference Meeting. Special thanks to Rev. Ken McDowell from PSEC who we hired in January to be our merger project coordinator.

Our delegates to the new **Keystone Board** will be selected at the Annual Meeting and the new Board will meet beginning August 1st. Both Carrie and Nora are poised to serve as Transitional Staff for Keystone if the new Board approves.

Search and Call

Securing pastoral leadership remains our most significant challenge. Carrie and Nora, with Ronnette's help, work with churches in transition. We meet with search teams and church councils, proofread church profiles, talk with potential pastors, and work to encourage ministerial sharing and collaboration. Carrie meets with churches needing to discuss legacy/closure and the processes involved in bringing a ministry to a close. In the past year we had:

Currently we have **27 total churches in various stages of transition** including 8 interims. We have nine settled calls listed on the UCC opportunities page, and those churches are accepting ministerial profiles. Ten of the total 27 in transition are full-time calls, with 2 others potentially being full-time.

One church closed: St. John's Jonestown (Lebanon Association)

One church will be closed by the end of the summer: Chapel Hill (Harrisburg Association)

New pastoral placements (20):

- Rev. Barb Brenaman, Pastor Melissa Mooseburk, and Pastor Patricia Miller, Team Pastors at St. Jacob's Stone, Newville
- Pastor Equilla Curry, Designated Pastor, St. John's, Red Lion
- Rev. Brenda Enders, Pastor, St. John's Blymires, Dallastown
- Pastor Amy Fawks, Pastor, Grace, Hanover
- Pastor Rhonda Feiser, Pastor, Zwingli in East Berlin
- Pastor Jamie Gruber, Pastor, Emmanuel in York
- Pastor Richard Hair, Pastor, St. Jacob's in York New Salem
- Rev. Donna Hughes, Pastor, Penbrook, Harrisburg
- Pastor Cindy Innerest-Axe, Lay Minister, St. John's Blymires
- Rev. Tom Kiepert, Pastor, Faith in York
- Rev. Fa Lane, Pastor, First in Carlisle
- Rev. Danielle Neff, Pastor, Trinity in Waynesboro
- Rev. Amy Northridge, Pastor, Mt. Zion in York
- Pastor Bradley Rhine, Bridge Pastor, Salem Rohrerstown, Lancaster
- Rev. Mark Ruzicka, Pastor, Church of the Apostles, Waynesboro
- Revs. Kathy and Pete Seiler, Co-Pastors, Locust Grove in York
- Pastor Justin Swingholm, Pastor, Salem Walpers in Jonestown
- Rev. D. Marie Tribble, Pastor, Heidelberg, York
- Rev. Grace Winakor, Associate Pastor, St. Paul's in Selinsgrove
- Pastor Amy Fawks, Pastor, Grace UCC, Hanover

Authorization

Penn Central has 20 Members in Discernment (MID) with 14 serving in ministry positions already. Since our last annual meeting, four MIDs were ordained with another planned for later this month, and we also welcomed clergy via Privilege of Call and extended Dual Standing to several of our new pastors.

Members in Discernment from all four PA UCC Conferences gathered at Hartman Center in Milroy for a **MID Retreat** in January 2025. Twelve PCC MIDs participated.

Pastoral Care

Dwight, Carrie, and Nora work together along with some volunteer Association “chaplains,” for coverage of clergy and clergy families in need, with Dwight taking on the bulk of visitation and regular outreach. In the past year we have served our clergy in the following ways: crisis presence and mediation, counseling referrals, and emergency financial assistance on a person-by-person basis. The Pension Boards Annuitant Visitors within the PCC who also connect with our retired clergy sometimes suggest people with whom we might connect for further care. This team approach to our more than 250 clergy is crucial to effective care for our clergy both active and retired.

We are intentional about care contacts with our clergy and/or their relatives with differing needs and life situations. A care contact could be a phone conversation, an in person visit or conversation over a meal, a Zoom conversation, or a visit to a home or a hospital, or our presence at a funeral or significant worship service. Recently, we began a monthly “Clergy Quiet Day Apart,” which are one-day retreat times for our clergy at different locations around the Conference that allow for spiritual reflection, prayer time, reading and time away for self-care.

Financial Assistance: Six ministerial assistance grants in amounts ranging from \$100 to \$3000 for scholarships, medical and personal needs, totaling \$4,866.50 in assistance money from Penn Central Conference.

Teaching

Nora has planned 10 **Boundary Training** sessions for clergy with Carrie facilitating a few of the topics. The **Alliance of ACMs** has been sharing their online courses and our PCC sessions that are not connected to clergy ministerium groups have attracted wide audiences from across the UCC (and even a couple folks serving in foreign missions).

Additionally, Nora has met with several **Pastoral Relations Committees** for training and shares a reminder that *A Sure Foundation* (available at UCC Resources) is a great guide for this work.

Carrie and Nora also meet with local church search committees and consistories to go over the rapidly changing landscape in search and call.

Nora offered specific training for new Committee on Ministry members and Portfolio Development Training for our Members in Discernment. Training for the **Manual on Local**

Church (MLC) has begun with Committees on Ministry with a monthly focus on a Mark of Faithful and Vital Local Churches. A few consistories have also been trained on these new Marks for use as a vitality measurement and ministry evaluation tool. The Manual on Local Church includes resources for covenantal practice and local church governance as well. The final version of the MLC will be introduced at General Synod in July and copies will be available from UCC Resources.

Carrie taught a variety of classes/workshops to local churches focused on Emotional Intelligence and Leadership.

National and Regional Ministries

Carrie is active with the **Council of Conference Ministers (CCM)** and in the past year designed and led a retreat for her colleagues in December in Arizona, as well as a new Conference Minister orientation program in Cleveland in March. Carrie arranged the **Mid-Atlantic Regional Conferences (MARC)** Judicatory meeting in April at Bear Creek with representatives from all four PA Conferences alongside Central Atlantic and New York. This has become an important annual collegial networking meeting.

Carrie will be serving on the **UCC Board** beginning in the Fall of 2025. She served previously while an Associate Conference Minister in Indiana-Kentucky Conference and while working at Lancaster Theological Seminary. In this service cycle she will be the Mid-Atlantic Regional Conferences representative. Carrie also returns to the **UCC Historical Council** in the fall and continues to serve on the Board of the **Congregational Library and Archives** in Boston.

In April Carrie spent three days with thirteen other Conference Ministers and nearly forty UCC leaders to consider the identity and future of the United Church of Christ at ***A Tent of Our Own Making***. The gathering included voices from across the church: UCC Financial Ministries, Open and Affirming (ONA), Faithful and Welcoming (F&W), COREM, TFAM, United Black Christians, United Samoan Ministries, The Collectivo, Disability Ministries, PAAM, Native Hawaiians, AIM, STAR, and MRSEJ. A presentation from the Center for Analytics, Research, Data and Development (CARDD) provided statistics on our demographic and political diversity. Note two key indicators:

- There are now more women than men in UCC pulpits—and pews.
- Of those surveyed: **34% identified as conservative, 32% moderate, and 28% liberal**—challenging assumptions about a uniformly progressive church.

This sparked the primary question for discussion: Are we truly inclusive of all people? Can we be? Is it too late to balance all perspectives? Our General Minister and President, **Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson** – who called the group together - has a rare gift for holding our theological, sociological, and political tensions with grace. She invited us to ask whether the UCC has the capacity to live out our covenantal commitment to all God's people—and, if so, how we might embody it more faithfully. The group will meet again, likely next Spring.

Nora serves as the secretary for the **Alliance of Associate Conference Ministers** and worked with the MESA Team on a study of bias in the fitness review process to make recommendations for procedural changes. At the close of 2024 she stepped down from coordinating the national **Communities of Practice for ACMs** after several years of leadership. She continues to support the Polity Teachers' Network helping to coordinate the meetings and the basecamp site for members.

Nora has been working with the **MESA and CARDD Teams** at the National Office as they continue to work out the “bugs” in the new data management system that has affected clergy profiles, local church profiles, as well as limited access to all clergy and church data. Staff understands this has caused frustrations for search committees and clergy working on their profiles as well as Committees on Ministry as they engage work with Members in Discernment, Clergy, and Congregations. Nora is in regular contact when problems are experienced or reported.

Continuing Education

Carrie participated in a weeklong course designed by **The Development Center** and led by Dr. Frances Unsell (https://developmentctr.com/bios/frances_unsell_psychotherapist.htm) at Mt. Holyoke College alongside three ELCA Bishops, two UCC Conference Ministers, one Presbyterian stated clerk, and three Episcopal Bishops. This included in-depth leadership training and analysis using case studies of leadership dilemmas in judicatory settings. She used this material in developing the program for New Conference Minister orientation in March.

Nora participated in a Leadership course with the **Pennsylvania Academy of Ministry** and in the **Interim Ministry Network's** Transitional Ministry Training for Judicatory Officers. Nora also participated in the 2-day **Lifelong Learning Summit at Moravian University** in a Lily sponsored event. The Seminaries at Moravian are looking toward developing Lay Ministry education that focuses both on those that are seeking to serve churches in call Lay Pastoral roles as well as those that are seeking personal edification or additional skills for teaching roles in their local congregations. Watch for more information as these programs are developed, and in the meantime be sure to check out the Pennsylvania Academy of Ministry and Crossroads programs that already have courses for these potential students in addition to the degree programs.

Synod 2025

Carrie, Nora, and Paul (alongside Board leaders) pulled the **Synod delegates** together for our last biennial Synod happening in Kansas City on July 11-15. Penn Central will have 24 delegates plus Board president and moderator. The motion to approve the moving of Conference Boundaries to form the Keystone Conference will likely take place on July 14th or 15th and the

Conference will be informed when we know of the exact time. All Synod plenaries are live-streamed.

Carrie will facilitate the **GMP's Open Mic for Poetry Night** at Synod on Sunday evening July 13. This event was requested by Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson.