

Report of the Conference Minister

“Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.” – 1 Timothy 1:8-9

It’s hard to believe that I will soon be entering my third year of service as the Conference Minister here in Penn West Conference. At times it still seems like a dream! It is a real honor to be able to serve in this role, and I really love what I do. At times the volume of work still seems overwhelming and there are still difficult situations to handle. But I really do love the people of the Penn West Conference and am grateful for the opportunity that we have to serve God together. So I am thankful to God for this ministry, and I am grateful to all of you for enriching my life in so many ways. There is much to celebrate here in Penn West Conference!

There are many things that I could highlight about this past year, but here are just a few things in no particular order that I think are worth lifting up and noting:

- **Visiting:** Thanks to so many of you who have welcomed me graciously as I visited and preached at various churches. Hopefully, by this time next year, I will be able to say that I’ve visited all of our churches at least once on a Sunday morning.
- **Church and Ministry:** I really enjoy working with Search & Call Committees, Committees on Ministry, Ministeriums, and Associations. I value the deepening of relationships that this kind of work brings.
- **Global Missions:** After our ambassadors from the Philippines joined us in June, we rejoiced in October to welcome Judy Chen, a Global Ministries missionary to Hong Kong. We have now begun an initiative, in cooperation with our partners in the Northwest Luzon Conference of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, to raise funds to help with their efforts in educating young children in schools as well as pastors for ministry. Please keep this effort in your prayers and please plan to support it!
- **Justice and Witness:** Our Justice and Witness Team worked with our Association Presidents and Open & Affirming Team this year to create an inspiring All Association Spring Meeting this year. The theme was, “What Does God Require of Us?” and we explored seven different areas of justice and witness in our world today. The response to the meeting was very positive, and we will continue to live out the implications of this meeting in the life of our Conference as we move through this Annual Gathering & Meeting and into the future.
- **Youth Ministry:** It has been great working with Valarie Poole, our Associate for Youth Ministry, and we are incredibly excited about the prospect of our hosting the Mid-Atlantic Regional Youth Event in 2018!
- **Annual Gathering & Meeting:** Last year’s meeting was deeply meaningful, especially as we welcomed our ambassadors from the Philippines with us. A lot of time and energy has also gone into making this year’s Annual Gathering & Meeting at California University of Pennsylvania special. We are looking forward to the Rev. Tom Johnson’s presentations on the theme, “Feed My Sheep.” Along with our Constitution & By-Law changes and Continuing Care Retirement Community resolution, we look forward to

celebrating the sixtieth ordination anniversary of the Rev. Dr. Paul Westcoat. I'm deeply grateful for the planning team for bringing together such an amazing event!

- **General Synod 31:** Our delegation for General Synod 31 has been doing our homework, and we are looking forward to heading to Baltimore, Maryland, from June 30 through July 4. Please keep us in your prayers as we vote on Constitution & By-Laws changes, as well as various resolutions.
- **Finances:** I have really enjoyed working with our Financial Stewards, the Mission Grants Committee, and the Endowment Committee as we have made significant strides in fostering the financial health and well-being of our Conference. We hope that our investments, in concert with our Mission Grants program, will continue to strengthen the work of our local churches for years to come. Also, if you haven't had a chance to read our brochure, "*Why Give to "Our Church's Wider Mission?"*" please do so!
- **Ecumenical Ministries:** I enjoy serving on the Executive Councils of both Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania and the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. Ecumenical work is a passion that I have.
- **Council of Conference Ministers:** I was honored to have been elected Secretary of the Council of Conference Ministers, and by virtue of this, I have begun serving on the Cabinet of Conference Ministers, as well.
- **Transformation and Renewal:** Our Transformation and Renewal Team has been working on discovering ways to reach out to millennials and others through social media as well as other web-based technologies. We are always looking for ways to encourage and strengthen our churches for ministry.
- **Partners in Faith Formation:** Our bookstore continues to sell good resources from our national church. Visit us at First Reformed United Church of Christ, 312 South Maple Avenue in Greensburg. Or see the bookstore here at the Annual Gathering & Meeting!

I'm sure that there are other highlights that I've missed, but this provides a pretty good start to the list of things that have been happening. As always, we are deeply grateful for your prayers, your support, and your gifts to OCWM, which make all of these ministries that we are doing in Christ's name possible. May God continue to bless you and your congregation as we live together as God's children into God's amazing future!

Respectfully submitted,

David Ackerman