

Moderator's Report Annual Gathering 2017

God has blessed me in so many ways, since coming into the family of the United Church of Christ, some 13 year ago, and perhaps one of the most extraordinary and life changing blessings has been to walk with you, the Penn West Conference, as your vice-moderator, and for the past two years, your moderator. Through-out this time, I have witnessed the better nature of our congregations, and have witnessed God's magnificent love in ways that I previously never thought possible.

As I write this report, looking over my shoulder toward where we have been, and looking around to see what God has done, and what God is doing, I marvel at the trust which has been given to us. God has empowered us to be the church of today and tomorrow in such ways that those who are athirst can receive the life-giving water handily, if we but permit it to happen. The challenge then falls to us, to go deeper in Christ, in our faith if you will, to equip our churches to be the ministers of hope needed in these days.

Throughout my tenure as a board member, and an officer, there have been many conversations surrounding resources, money, time and talents; as you might guess most of those conversations were focused on how to do so much more with an ever-dwindling amount of resources. So many of the conversations would bear the comment which would sound something like: "If each active person would only give _____, then we could equip even more ministry opportunities" Typically the sum mentioned was less than a few dollars.

As I have prayerfully watched the days of my time in this role diminish, I have wrestled with God as to whether I could have done more, especially in this area. My prayers have led me to this understanding, and I would like to share it with you. We cannot be true to our claim of faith in Christ, and then allow the ministry of our churches and our conference to go wanting and be in peril, for small sums of money. If we have food in your fridge, clothes on our back, a roof over our heads and a place to sleep we are richer than 75% of the world. We have each been so richly blessed, you and I, and to think we are allowing ministries to scramble for funding is troubling, for in so many cases, we have not denied ourselves as much as we are asking our churches and conference to deny others. Our budget challenge this year, translates to just about \$1.11 giving per active member on a weekly basis in our churches. Join with me in pledging to increase our giving, and to work within our home congregations to be enablers of ministry. We will be asked at this conference, to once again consider Jesus' words to "Feed My Sheep". We must ask ourselves as the Penn West Conference, are we setting for a bountiful table, or are we challenging the sheep to survive on what scraps we can spare? It is a question for each of us to answer. As for myself, and my family, we will be increasing our giving once again.

One of the many wonderful things I have witnessed during these past few years, has been the reawakening of a Mission Grants committee, and much needed help being extended to our churches, to become active in ministry. Along with this, our conference committees have been diligently working together to become more active and thus more involved in answering our collective call to ministry. The challenge comes in finding people who are willing to serve and who can attend meetings, and give of their time in these exciting aspects of ministry. Please prayerfully consider seeking God's leading, and consider serving.

I have been greatly honored, and deeply humbled to walk with you for this short period of time, as one of the officers in our conference. As I once again return to a less hectic role within ministry, I just want to thank each of you for your prayers, your willingness to answer God's call to serve, and for your friendship. You are each special blessing, and permitting me to serve as your moderator has been and unexpected and much treasured blessing.

Blessings and Joy be with you All! Jim