

Penn West Conference, Annual Report of the Moderator, 2018 – 2019

This weekend we are gathered to participate in the 57th Annual Meeting of the United Church of Christ Congregations which make up the Penn West Conference of the United Church of Christ. We have come to the campus of California University of Pennsylvania to call upon our God to

strengthen us in our work as his witnesses in this world;
to thank him for promises kept and spirits revived in his name;
to praise him for his steadfast love and mercy as we do conference business, and
to encourage us, with our Lord's guidance, to grow in knowledge and faith.

I wrote those words as the first year of my term as moderator was ending. It was the spring of 2018, and I marveled at God's hand at work in our conference. Committees like the Financial Stewards, the Global Missions Team, the Justice and Witness Team and the Mission Grants Committee were holding regular meetings to manage specialized projects of the Conference. As the weeks and months passed, those committees, along with other committee members and staff, continued to focus their vision on the purpose of our Conference Mission:

“The Penn West Conference: Engaging in Covenantal Relationships; Sharing God's Love with All”

Sharing God's Love with All is the passion which drives both our Conference Minister, Rev. David Ackerman and our office's administrative assistant, Diane Fox. Rev. Ackerman, with boundless energy, is committed to strengthening all the churches in the Conference. He attends association meetings, local church meetings, often serves as secretary in committee meetings and represents us both in the national church and numerous ecumenical activities. Every time the phone rings, a mailing is received, statistics are requested by pastors, church members, and church committees, we can thank Diane Fox. And they are not alone in their efforts, every day members of conference committees work to reach out to new members, who are passionate about a wide variety of topics and causes. The 2018-2019 specific committee reports are available in this booklet. We are God's People working and serving in community and communion with our Lord and each other.

Some of the highlights of projects addressed by our committees in 2018 – 2019, include our continuing commitment to join with the national church in expanded justice and witness trainings for pastors and interested members of our congregations. In 2018 with the support of our Associations, our **Committee on Ministry** there was Anti-Racism Training, and right now all authorized ministers and Members in Discernment are completing a six-hour Boundary Awareness Training. Future topics for Continuing Education will include: Internet/Social Media Boundaries; Substance Abuse and Recovery; Ministering to Persons with Disabilities; Domestic Violence, Suicide and Crisis Response.

As usual, the **Financial Stewards** have continued to monitor the PWC budget, and along with Board approval, committed our conference to updating the conference office computer software, replacing the office copier, and adding a fire proof filing cabinet. Our records are our history, and archiving records will continue to be an important part of the Conference's mandate. Most importantly, in this 2018-2019 year, the conference office has continued to make full use of its dedicated space prepared for “Zoom Meetings.” 98% of committee meetings are now held via this new technology, and many more people are able to participate in face to face meetings while lessening the travel time for everyone.

As noted last year, Our **Global Missions Partners** are meeting monthly to plan a mission/work trip to the Northwest Luzon Conference of the United Church of Christ in the

Philippines. It is now scheduled for some time in 2020. Meanwhile, individuals, churches, and associations continue to offer their support to congregations in the Philippines through The Sheep Fund. Additionally, we are becoming more aware of how our own local churches define mission. We applaud the efforts of individual congregations who are reaching out with local mission projects, among them: Knitting for Peace, Days for Girls, Backpack Programs, Youth Mission trips, Prayer Blankets and Food Pantries.

The **Transformation and Renewal Committee, Legacy and Endowment Committees** continue to working with churches to envision new and creative ways to reach out and share God's love in community, and the **Mission Grants Committee**, in 2018, awarded more than \$46,000 in grants to churches so that local, church needs could be addressed in one of these three ways:

Reaching Out to strengthen relationships and visibility through service to its larger community.

Strengthening the Church by providing opportunities for leadership development, youth development or church growth initiatives.

Operational Awards to support local churches to update, maintain, or replace or repair their facility or equipment.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that from July 18 to 22, 2018 the Penn West Conference successfully hosted the United Church of Christ **Regional Youth Event (RYE)** at California University of Pennsylvania. Young people from across the Northeastern United States and two foreign countries gathered together. For five days, while making new friends, they worshipped and interacted with sacred scriptures. They left with an enthusiasm for mission and a commitment to God's love.

Engaging in Covenantal Relationships; Sharing God's Love with All is more than a slogan. Being engaged with each other and sharing God's love with all is a call to action which we in the Penn West Conference accept with open hearts and hands. If you or a member of your congregation would like to be a part of this vibrant approach to ministry in the 21st Century, monitor our website at www.pennwest.org, volunteer to serve on a committee, encourage individuals and local churches to financially support Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM).

In Romans 12 Paul listed marks of a true Christian:

*“Hold fast to what is good;
love one another with true affection;
outdo one another in showing honor;
be ardent in spirit;
rejoice in hope;
persevere in prayer;
extend hospitality to strangers.”*

As my term ends as Conference Moderator, I am grateful for the support and love offered to me over the last several years, and I look forward to our continued journey, all the way to the Promised Land.

Rev. Diane Wiley, Conference Moderator 2017-2019