

## Moderator's Report

It seems like only yesterday that I jokingly made the comment that I only have 23 more months to serve as moderator. Today that causes me to think about the old saying that time flies when you're having fun, but I must say that the past 12 months have been both blessings and a whirlwind of activity. The Pennwest Conference is truly blessed with disciples possessing many talents and passions that they give freely to do God's work, not just in Western Pennsylvania and Maryland but around the world as in our global mission efforts.

If I had not been involved, as I have been over the years, I would be clueless as to what goes on in Pennwest. I guess my farming background has enabled me to capture both the spoken and unspoken language along with the actions and deeds. Animals do not speak but the careful observers know when things are good, as opposed to not good, as in an illness. Working with our different churches I have observed a few things and feel called to share them at this time in hopes that we can pursue future conversations, cultivating a spirit of collaboration in the Pennwest Family.

First: I notice that our most active and vibrant congregations are actively involved in conference functions and committees. I always refer to communication as a two way street, active sharing of words and deeds. Such activities benefit **all** parties who are actively engaged. These benefits spark hope, excitement, creativity, and endless possibilities in those congregations.

Second: I notice that the folks in our congregations and committees are getting older (yes I include myself in the observation). God has called us to be and to go forth and make disciples... We often get the first part but the second part takes more work. We find it easier to just do it ourselves, or may even be fearful of giving up our control. However, we have to be prepared for the day we are called home. We have the opportunity to be mentors to our new disciples and add those voices to the conversations. Helping new voices to be heard breathes life into your church, and I find it's a lot of fun to watch and add fuel to the fire!

Third: I notice that clergy who participate in conference events and activities tend to have active vibrant congregations. I know that it just doesn't happen by osmosis but there is a relationship between being engaged in the planning process and supporting the plan or program. Perhaps it's called ownership? My observations support the concept that "if you help to plan the battle you won't battle the plan." Our clergy provide the much needed spiritual leadership to our congregations, much like the sparkplug in an engine. It does however take all of the components working together in concert to propel the church forward. It is a glorious sight to behold when a congregation realizes for the first time what they can accomplish together, almost on the magnitude of Christmas!

Forth: I notice that the United Church of Christ is a very diverse denomination with clergy coming from variety of backgrounds and denominations. When we come together as an association or a conference we may have differing theological views which have the potential of creating tension and conflict. Perhaps these conflicts could be affecting our participation at these events. We often take pride in our various covenantal relationships. I believe we have an opportunity to have another one between the local churches within our associations. If we focus

our attention on our common beliefs we may find that we have more in common than our differences, thus providing a platform for another covenantal relationship. The more we can take advantage of our collaborative efforts the more our local churches can benefit by sharing their excitement, successes, and common missions.

Thinking about these four observations together, I get excited about the possibilities of the future of the Pennwest Conference and our Local Congregations who are willing join their voices to the many conversations taking place in each of our committees. Our Mission Grant program can help facilitate changes in local churches. Our Global Mission Committee works on ways to support missions both nationally and internationally. It is good to witness firsthand how our local churches support missions. Our Justice and Witness Committee follow our national church efforts in this area to monitor and support causes where appropriate. Our Transformation and Renewal Team has been helping our congregations do some mission and visioning into what their future looks like and holds.

OK so the moderator makes these observations they may or may not strike a chord with you. What are we going to do with this information? I would suggest and encourage each of you to take advantage of every opportunity to discuss these observations with others in your church family, in an attempt to see if others would be receptive to sharing their thoughts with you. If you find everything is going right in your congregation, association, and conference group nothing needs to be done. If not take time to have conversations start and invite more people to share their thoughts. Bring someone with you to the next meeting so that they might lend their voices.

Just as with our own faith journey, we are called onto service, but we must step up and engage in the conversations, support the process if not physically, emotionally, financially, and putting our shoulder to the wheel with our brothers and sisters. "We reap what we sow." Let us each step up to the challenge and be the fertile ground on which we choose to plant our seeds.