

## Report of the Conference Minister

*“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Romans 12:2 NRSV*

As we have continued to adjust to the ever shifting sands of the pandemic, now described in many circles as having entered the endemic phase, we are facing a world on the cusp of still more changes. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has dominated the news in the early part of this year, and indeed, our hearts ache for the current struggles of the Ukrainian people. In the midst of all of this, we as a Conference continue to strive to minister faithfully to our churches and to our world in Christ’s name. It has not been easy, nor do we expect it to be easy. God doesn’t call us to easy lives, but instead to live faithfully.

In every report I have given, I have emphasized how grateful I am for the opportunity to serve as your Conference Minister. When I look at my life, I realize that I have so much to be thankful for and so many reasons for rejoicing. Each day that I get to do this work is a blessing to me, and I still at times have to pinch myself that I am doing what I do where I am doing it. My love for this Conference runs very deep, and I hope that is reflected in the way that I minister here.

Having shared this, I want to share a number of highlights from 2021-2022.

- **Visiting:** My in-person visitation has certainly increased over the past year, as most churches have either partially or fully pivoted toward regathering in person (with varying degrees of masking/social distancing). It has been good to see people again and to connect with you in our local churches.
- **Church and Ministry:** I continue to enjoy my work with Search & Call Committees, Committees on Ministry, Ministeriums, and Associations. Our Pastoral Ethics programs have gone virtual and have been helpful. Our Search & Call team continues to work, as does the ministry of our Penn West Academy. Our Committees on Ministry recently held an event on Situational Support Consultations. Please pray for all of these groups with their important ministries.
- **Global Missions:** We were glad to celebrate a couple of Mission Nights over the course of this past year with missionaries from Global Ministries. We have spent a considerable amount of time and effort this past year ensuring that funds that we sent were received and they were. We are hoping to take steps to promote the SHEEP (Sustaining Hope for Educational Expenses in the Philippines) Fund in 2022-2023. Our ambassador trip remains on hold. Please keep the important work of this team in your prayers.
- **Youth Ministry:** With the resignation of our Associate for Youth Ministry, Melissa McLean, our team pivoted to consider how we might best do youth ministry in our Conference during this time. We recently met with youth leaders throughout the Conference and hope to be in ongoing conversation with the Personnel Committee and the Board of Directors about what next steps will best serve the youth of our Conference. Please keep this team in your prayers.
- **Annual Gathering & Meeting:** Last year’s meeting was our second virtual Conference Annual Meeting, and I thought it was a real improvement on the 2020 meeting. We were blessed to welcome the Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister & President of the United Church of Christ, as our keynote speaker. We were grateful to Somerset Association for providing opening devotions and Clarion Association for leading our closing worship. We were glad to support our featured Mission Partners in Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania and St. Paul’s Senior Living Community. We had a workshop day that also received positive feedback. We were thankful for the technical assistance of the Rev. Dr., Deirdre Hainsworth, who helped us navigate the technical challenges of the meeting. And we really appreciated the leadership of our Board officers and Planning Team in helping us to improve on the pacing and quality of the meeting. Our 2022 Annual Meeting will be a hybrid, and this will be a new challenge for us. Please keep this time in your prayers.

- **General Synod:** Our Thirty-third General Synod took place virtually last year, with Pre-Synod events having been held from July 7-10 and with General Synod 33 having taken place from July 11-18. Our delegation represented us well! Please keep the delegates to General Synod 34, scheduled to take place in Indianapolis in 2023, in your prayers.
- **Association Presidents:** Our Association Presidents continue to work together collegially. We worked with our Justice & Witness Team on an amazing All Association Spring Meeting: Sacred Conversations to End Racism: Racial Reconciliation Journey, which was held in March. Thanks to everyone who helped with the leadership of it and who participated in it. Also, our “Talk, Listen, and Pray” group continues to meet monthly.
- **Justice and Witness:** Our Justice and Witness Team continues to work on a variety of important issues, from racial justice to Christ’s Extravagant Love And Hospitality to economic justice and creation care. I am deeply grateful for the good work of this team.
- **Finances:** I have really enjoyed working with our Financial Stewards, the Mission Grants Committee, Endowment Committee, and Caring for Churches, Caring for Clergy Team as we have made significant strides in fostering the financial health and well-being of our Conference. The Caring for Churches, Caring for Clergy Team works diligently to help benefit both the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance as well as our Mission Grants program. Our Mission Grants program last year gave away over \$35,000 worth of grants to our local churches. This is extremely exciting! And, of course, we continue to thank our churches for their generosity toward Our Church’s Wider Mission, and if you haven’t had a chance to read our brochures, “*Why Give to “Our Church’s Wider Mission?”*”, “*What a Difference ‘Our Church’s Wider Mission’ Makes!*” or “*A Mission Grant Is...*” please do so.
- **Ecumenical Ministries:** I really enjoy serving with both Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, the Southcentral PA Judicatory Leaders, and the Pennsylvania Council of Churches. Ecumenical work is a passion of mine.
- **Council of Conference Ministers:** I continue to rejoice to serve among this supportive group of colleagues. I am currently on the Board of the Insurance Board, as well as the Board of the United Church of Christ. As part of this Board, I also serve on the Executive Committee and the Governance Committee.
- **Discipleship:** Our Transformation and Renewal Team has undergone a transformation! We are now referring to ourselves as the Discipleship Team. We continue to help our churches discover ways in which they may encounter renewal and new life.
- **Legacy Team:** Our Legacy Team continues to work with churches that are considering closure and/or are in the process of closure. This is very important work, and we are blessed to have a team of dedicated people who want to do this critical ministry well.

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 the ministries that we are doing in Christ’s name possible. May God continue to bless you and your congregation as we live together into God’s amazing future.

Respectfully submitted,  
David Ackerman