

2023 Moderator Report

As I complete my term as Moderator, I am both saddened and optimistic about the events that have occurred or are about to occur across the conference.

I am sad to report that we have lost four churches during the past year, leaving 97 member churches in the conference. Also, there are twelve pulpit vacancies across the conference; and there are not many profiles from which to choose a pastor.

There is much good news, however. Our many committees have remained active behind the scenes, and our beloved Conference Minister David Ackerman continues to aggressively pursue his vision for us.

The first positive I will address is that we are in the process of hiring a conference Youth Minister. Our hope is that this position will be filled to begin in July and that we will introduce the person we intend to hire at our summer meeting. All agree that this is an important step forward as we look to the future.

Another positive is our Caring for Churches, Caring for Clergy campaign. This campaign has a goal of raising \$500,000. The conference will keep \$450,000, and \$50,000 will be given to the national church for the purpose of assisting ministers who are struggling financially, many of whom are inadequately compensated or have very limited retirement monies. Penn West Conference will invest the remaining fund money so that the income therefrom will be used perpetually in our Mission Grants program to provide annual mission grants to individual churches throughout the conference for Reaching Out, Strengthening the Church or Operational Support. This program has been a vital part of assisting churches with their priorities each year. You can support this effort by making a financial pledge or, if you can't do that, by introducing someone who can to the committee.

In March, the Financial Stewards, Long-Range Planning, and the Board of Directors held a meeting with Brad Wallace of the Pittsburgh Presbytery (PCUSA) and Karen Roher of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, both of whom are employed in attempts to establish new worshipping communities. Various new church start methodologies were postulated and discussed. I am hopeful that in the near future we will make a commitment to begin a new church start in the Penn West Conference. Behold, the turtle, he makes no progress unless his neck is out!

We have been bequeathed monies in excess of \$300,000 by the Birmingham church and the Benford estate. Possibly, we could search for a seminary student who feels called to such a ministry and fund him or her in this effort. This would certainly not be an easy task and would require considerable effort by David Ackerman and perhaps a new committee to oversee such a project. Nonetheless, we have been charged to make disciples and we should use our best efforts in so doing.

The last positive is what has become known as Keystone Conversations. This has been and continues to be a meeting the four (4) Pennsylvania conferences for the purpose of seeing how we might more effectively work together or possibly even merge into one. These talks are ongoing. We are represented by David Ackerman, Tom Croner, Deb Long, Wendy Bigelow, David Mears and myself. Nothing definitive has yet developed, but all are hopeful about the possibilities.

I am writing this in early April, and I trust that by annual meeting time there will be much to update regarding all that I have mentioned.

George R. Kepple
Moderator