

## Report of the Conference Minister, 2024-2025

*“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” - Philippians 4:8 NRSV*

This may be my final report to you as your Conference Minister and it may be our final report for an Annual Meeting as the Penn West Conference of the United Church of Christ. If the Keystone motion passes at General Synod in July, we will become the Keystone Conference on January 1, 2026. And while there will surely be some sense of loss at the change, I hope there will also be a real sense of joy and hope for the future of our new Keystone Conference and of what we will be able to accomplish together as we share our strengths together. We have had an amazing journey, both over the past 63 years as a Conference and over the past several years as our Keystone Working Group has been leading us toward this new day. Please pray with me as we look forward to the new Conference, that God might yield blessings in abundance for the ministry that awaits us.

In addition to our Annual Meeting at St. Paul’s UCC in Somerset on June 7, we are looking forward to a celebration of the Penn West Conference on Saturday, November 1. Come, and celebrate with me and our staff, the Rev. Shannon Garrett-Doege, Diane Fox, and Andrea Kopcak, as we look back over our history and then ahead toward what will come next. Please also place on your calendars the date of Saturday, November 22, which is the date of the first (pre-Keystone) Keystone Conference meeting, which we expect will be held by Zoom.

In every report that I have given as your Conference Minister, I have emphasized how grateful I am for the opportunity to serve in this capacity. 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. My love for this Conference, our churches, and our people runs very deep, and I hope that is reflected in the way that I minister.

Having shared this, I want to share a number of highlights from 2024-2025.

- **Visiting:** I continue to visit churches, sometimes to lead worship; sometimes to visit and/or bring greetings. It is always good to visit with you; please let me know if you’d like me to visit your church for any reason on any Sunday and if I am able to be there, I will.
- **Church and Ministry:** I continue to enjoy my work with Search & Call Committees, Committees on Ministry, Ministeriums, and Associations. Our Pastoral Ethics programs continue, with a continuing education focus this year on “Ministering with People with Disabilities.” Our Penn West Academy for Ministry continues to help prepare people for service in our churches. Please pray for all of these groups with their important ministries.
- **Global Missions:** We are planning to receive a special offering for the SHEEP (Sustaining Hope for Educational Expenses in the Philippines) Fund for our partners in the Northwest Luzon Conference in the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. We have been convening similar mission partnership teams in all four Pennsylvania UCC Conferences so that we can look toward aligned mission foci in working with all of our partners moving forward into Keystone. Please continue to keep the important work of our Global Missions Team in your prayers.
- **Annual Gathering & Meeting:** Last year’s meeting was perhaps the most memorable one I have ever attended. It literally took my breath away when I stood at the podium at the Penn Stater and looked out to see representatives from all four of our Pennsylvania UCC Conferences together in one place. It is something I will always remember and I hope you experienced it to be meaningful, too. This year, our theme will be “I Will Pour out My Spirit,” and the Presidents of our Associations in the Penn West Conference will host a program in which we will discuss the possibilities of our six Associations merging. Please keep this meeting, and the others I mentioned above, in your prayers.

- **General Synod:** Our Thirty-fifth General Synod will take place from July 11-15 in Kansas City MO. We will be voting on the Keystone motion, as well as a variety of actions that are being brought before Synod. Please keep our delegates in your prayers as they look forward to representing us there.
- **Association Presidents:** Our Association Presidents continue to work together collegially, and as I mentioned above, are planning the program at this year's Annual Meeting. Thank you for your prayers for their important work.
- **Justice and Witness:** Our Justice and Witness Team continues to work on a variety of important issues, and 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 continue to work for the financial health and well-being of our Conference. The Caring for Churches, Caring for Clergy campaign came to an end at the end of 2024, and we raised (in pledges and actual gifts) \$425,163.83 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 \$46,300.00 worth of grants to 29 of our local churches. 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 other 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 Christian Associates of Southwest Pennsylvania, and I serve on its Executive Committee. Ecumenical work is a passion of mine. I also serve on the Board of St. Paul's Senior Living Community in Greenville, as well as its Development Committee.
- **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 its Finance Committee), 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 Discipleship Team continues 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