

## Conference Minister 2019 Annual Report

Life in the Wisconsin Conference is full of energy and enthusiasm! A huge highlight of 2019 came in June when we hosted **General Synod 32 in Milwaukee!** Some 400 volunteers worked tirelessly to provide warm Midwestern hospitality. Gifts from local congregations and individuals totaling \$70,000 successfully funded our efforts.



This summer, following the retirement of Associate Conference Minister, the Rev. Joanne Thomson, we welcomed the **Rev. Lorraine Ceniceros** to our field staff. Lorraine has primary responsibility for the Southwest Association and half of the Southeast Association (Waukesha and Burlington Districts). She brings a steady and joyful presence, wonderful gifts and wisdom for judicatory work.

Last April we were very fortunate to bring onto our staff **the Rev. Andrew Warner** to lead our new Generosity initiative. With extensive expertise in stewardship and development, Andrew leads the fundraising efforts of the Conference and supports local churches in building planned giving and strengthening philanthropy. In just nine months, Andrew has offered numerous webinars and digital resources, helped us create the **Wisconsin Foundation UCC**, negotiated management of the Foundation funds through UCC Pension Boards and is actively working with congregations to cultivate **Legacy Gifts**. Already some congregations are exploring the possibility of shifting reserves/endowments into the Foundation because of very favorable fees and excellent management. Andrew also serves as a Generosity Outreach Officer of the national setting of the UCC.

As for the ongoing work of the Conference, our essential mission is “**to connect, support and resource local congregations and leaders as they creatively and vibrantly live out the values of Jesus in this time and place.**” Throughout the past year, our Field Staff has guided over 60 pastoral searches, launched several new “shared” ministries, and offered the “ministry of presence” in times of grief, challenge and change. Board and staff leaders continue to cultivate relationships of support and trust across the Conference. Cohort learning opportunities abound, connecting pastors and educators through Mentoring, Coaching, and Communities of Practice.

Our **Church and Ministry Teams** faithfully carry out the ecclesiastical work of the Church, guiding Members in Discernment (MID's) and managing matters of ministerial standing. We have launched a new formative track toward authorized ministry. The **Damascus Project** is a shared initiative with the Minnesota Conference, also intended for the purpose of providing continuing education coursework for clergy and biblical foundations for lay people.

The Conference Faith Formation efforts continue with a thriving **Lay Academy** and several **Youth Retreats**. Next summer many young people will participate in a National Youth Event held at Purdue University. One of our current goals is to better equip local congregations with curriculum resources, a wide array of spiritual practices, and emerging models for children and youth ministries.

The **Conference Catalyst Team** offers grants for new initiatives around Church Vitality. Many of these ministries are community based, serving a wide network of people, often in partnership with other

congregations or non-profits. This collaborative approach expands our reach and allows the Church to be a relevant social agency that helps meet the needs of those beyond our doors.

Our beautiful Outdoor Ministry settings – **Moon Beach Camp and Pilgrim Center** – provide ideal opportunities for multi-generational spiritual formation. We are blessed to work collaboratively with Executive Director Glenn Svetnicka and the talented staff of our sister organization, United Church Camps, Inc. As of January 2020, UCCI added a third ministry site, assuming management of **Cedar Valley Retreat Center** near West Bend. They are blessed with an extraordinary site manager in Rebecca Conde.

In 2019 the Conference Board and Staff continued to prioritize the work of our **Justice Ministries**. Two major anniversaries are prompting significant attention and action – the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the first slaves brought to North America (1619) and the 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the landing of the Mayflower, and subsequent movement toward colonization by white settlers (1620). We also continue our advocacy for immigration reform and more compassionate treatment at our borders. Together, we are advocating for racial justice and a deeper understanding of the effects of white privilege. And we are developing resources around climate care (next June's Annual Meeting theme).

While we don't have final 2019 OCWM (**Our Church's Wider Mission**) contribution totals quite yet, we are tracking strongly and hope to close the year well. THANK YOU! These OCWM gifts primarily support the shared mission of our Conference Life. They also support the work of the National setting of the United Church of Christ, and important ministries such as the Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC), United Church Camps, Inc. (UCCI), the Council for Health and Human Services (CHHSM), Chicago, United and Eden Seminaries (CUE) and Wisconsin Campus Ministries.

Beyond that, our amazing **Special Mission Gifts** offer relief and compassion here at home and around the world. Altogether, we contribute approximately \$335,000 to the four UCC special offerings: *One Great hour of Sharing*, *Strengthen the Church*, *Neighbors in Need* and the *Christmas Fund*. Thank you!

Friends, despite all of the challenges the Church faces these days, the spirit and energy of our Conference life is strong! Our covenant of care – and the bond of love we share in Christ – is a beautiful expression of God's shalom, offered to a broken and fragile world. Together, as we collectively embody the values of Jesus, we impact our communities in truly transformational ways!

With deep gratitude and great hope,

Rev. Franz Rigert  
Conference Minister