

2017 Annual Report

Associate Conference Minister of Faith Formation for Children & Youth (ACMFF)

I am writing this first annual report as ACMFF as I begin my sixth month in this role. I am grateful each day for the opportunity to serve on staff of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ and for the passionate, competent, and dedicated staff and volunteer colleagues in ministry I am privileged to work alongside.

The Minnesota Conference is a place of abundant resources to equip individuals and congregations to engage the vitally important work of nurturing faith for all ages. Through the ongoing support of the Ashley Endowment and the time and creative energy freely shared by many folk from around Minnesota and beyond, the conference is becoming a national leader in the area of progressive faith formation.

I want to offer my gratitude to the following folk for their ministry with the conference:

- Lori Alford for her ability to hit the ground running and the gift of her dynamic leadership in such a brief tenure as Pilgrim Point Program Director
- Members of the conference Faith Formation Team and Pilgrim Point Camp Committee for their ongoing good work.
- Zac Norenberg for his abundant administrative and organizational gifts, institutional memory, and gracious spirit.
- Gigi Nauer for her years of service as Pilgrim Point Camp Director.
- Rev. Garth Schumacher for his leadership as interim ACMFF and the wisdom and good humor he has shared with me during this season of transition.

Following are some of the highlights of the important work the conference has engaged during the past year to support faith formation ministries:

Conference sponsored programs for children and youth

- Two summer youth camps during the 2016 season with over 100 youth and adult participants
- Four Conference Youth Events (Fall Middle School and High School events exploring issues of white privilege and racial equity; Winter High School and Spring Middle School events exploring activism and the Christian practices that help sustain our work for justice in the world).
- Provided grant for MN Conference Global Partnership Teams to support 2018 Philippines trip for young adult participants (age 19 and younger)

Local church support and leadership development

- Hosted seven "Fourth Thursday" gatherings for faith formation leaders
- \$10,000 in Ashley micro-grant funding to congregations for faith formation and intergenerational ministry
- \$15,000 in Ashley mission trip grants awarded to congregations for the summer of 2017
- Awarded over \$3,000 in other grants to congregations to sponsor community ministry initiatives
- Sponsored facilitator trainings for elementary and secondary Our Whole Lives program in which 28 congregational leaders were trained

Pilgrim Point Camp

- Developed new Program Director role to support existing programs, explore new program opportunities, and develop enhanced marketing for all Pilgrim Point ministries; are delighted to welcome Lori Alford into the Program Director role.
- Expanded partnership with Luther Crest Camp to provide all site staff for Pilgrim Point, creating a more sustainable staffing model and enhanced camper experience
- Extensive renovations for Dining Hall, North Shore Cabin, and Poem Lounge to maintain safe and welcoming spaces for all and to enhance program opportunities
- Developed new programs for the 2017 season, including “Be the Spark” eco-justice training, Deaf First Family Camp, a conference sponsored young adult weekend retreat
- Over \$50,000 of funding from the Ashley Endowment was allocated to Pilgrim Point’s operating budget to sustain this vital space for ministry

Wider church activities

- Ashley grant funding for a workshop on suicidality and self-harm for the Youth @ Synod program; Rev. Rachel Keefe, pastor of Living Table UCC, is leading this workshop
- \$10,000 in Ashley grant funding to the Faith Formation Team of the national setting for national children’s ministry conversation and inspiring models of ministry program
- ACMFF serves as board member for the Resource Center for Churches
- Sponsor of the ConNext Summit 2017, an ecumenical faith formation leader event; ACMFF serves on the ConNext planning team
- ACMFF serves as a member of Network of Wider Church Youth Ministry UCC (NOWCYM) organization
- ACMFF serves as the UCC representative to the board of the Alliance of Baptists

The programs and ministries listed above provide a snapshot of the past year. As we move into the coming year, we will continue to support many of these existing program initiatives and will explore new collaborative partnerships. I am excited to announce two new leadership development opportunities for staff and volunteer leaders in local congregations: Courage & Renewal for Faith Formation Leaders and Leading Well for Congregational Leadership Teams. These programs represent new partnerships with the Center for Courage & Renewal and Vibrant Faith, respectively.

One of my favorite benedictions is by William Sloane Coffin and includes the words:

“May God give you the grace never to sell yourself short;
The grace to risk something big for something good.”

This is my prayer for our shared ministry, as we move into the unknown future to which God has been preparing us. As a conference, we are gifted beyond our imagining and we have the opportunity to help cast a bold vision for generative, life-long faith formation for our congregations and the wider church.

Grace and peace for the journey ahead.