

## **2017 Annual Report of Associate Conference Minister Submitted by Rev. Rick Wagner**

A significant portion of my work involves **Search & Call**, or transitions in pastoral leadership. I consult with local church leaders and assist them in the search for interim, supply, or settled pastors. Some churches need very little assistance. Others need a lot. Some churches have no difficulty attracting many applicants. Others have a hard time attracting any. Finding appropriate pastoral leadership requires a lot of flexibility. Approximately half of our congregations have a less than full-time pastoral position. In the past 12 months, I've consulted with 28 different churches on transition issues including retirements, resignations, yokes (or sharing a pastor), disciplinary action, and changes from full-time to part-time ministry.

In 2016, a **new Local Church Profile (LCP)** was introduced. It includes significant changes from the previous profile and requires additional resources, most of which have to be provided by Conference staff. The new LCP can be used as a planning tool, and MESA (Ministerial Excellence, Support, and Authorization) from our National UCC office encourages every church to complete a LCP every three years. I'm offering a workshop about this at this Annual Meeting.

We don't generally like to talk about **church closures**, but since 2008, the UCC nationally has averaged one church closure every two weeks. The Minnesota Conference has averaged one a year. Most church leaders have seen materials that describe the "life cycle" of churches and there is a growing consensus among judicatory staff nationwide that we need to be more proactive with churches in the last stages of this life cycle. Helping them frame a missional narrative and discussing maintenance, legacy, and closure issues can be healthier and more faithful than simply fading away. The UCC has a good resource to help with this, *Living Legacy Workbook*, which I or any Conference staff can provide.

The **Committee on Ministry**, specifically the subcommittee **DPAM** (Discernment and Preparation for Authorized Ministry), is another focus for my work. I am impressed by and grateful for the dedicated work of DPAM's members. They meet monthly to interview prospective Members in Discernment and candidates for Ordination and Privilege of Call. They read hundreds of pages of psychological assessments, internship evaluations, sermons, CPE evaluations, written references and ordination papers. In their decision-making, they try to balance the needs of the Church with the resources available to local churches and candidates. In other exciting news, the much-awaited revision of the UCC **Manual on Ministry** has been presented in draft form. Some of the proposed changes may require amending the UCC Constitution and Bylaws, and thus are being widely debated. Stay tuned!

**Local churches:** Although I handle most Search & Call matters throughout the Conference, Associate Conference Minister Rev. Steve Boorsma is staffing a few. He and I split other tasks associated with local churches according to geography (Rick-North; Steve-South) or expertise. I, for example, do more with stewardship "best practices" and Steve does more with congregational vitality. We also attend church anniversaries, ecclesiastical councils, installations, ordinations and farewell services for pastors based on geography or our availability.

I find this work both challenging and rewarding, and I am grateful for the support of our authorized ministers, local churches, and the excellent staff who are part of the Minnesota Conference UCC.