

**2016 Annual Report of Associate Conference Minister
Submitted by Rev. Rick Wagner**

A large part of my work concerns **transitions in the pastoral leadership of local churches**. In the past 12 months I have consulted with 44 different churches on this issue. In some cases this has meant conducting and staffing traditional search processes. In other cases the transition has been more akin to 'succession planning.' And in still other cases the work has been mainly one of helping local churches find or keep long-term supply (part-time) ministers.

Some statistics: in case you haven't seen these figures previously,

- 54% of our active, non-retired clergy are over 60 years of age.
- 83% are over 50 years of age.
- 93% are over 40. Which means that only 7% of our clergy are under 40.
- The average age of a clergy person in the UCC (and also in the Minnesota Conference) is 60. As our clergy age, they become increasingly disinclined to make major transitions in their lives, and that has led to a reduction in the pool of ministers searching for new church positions. We still have at least as many ministers looking for church positions as there are churches searching, but many of the church positions are not attractive enough for the best ministers to want to apply for them.
- A majority of UCC Members in Discernment now come from larger churches (400+ members), but 75% of the church positions are in smaller churches. Many seminarians are nurtured and trained in larger churches and then expected to serve small churches. The adjustments are often hard to make.
- A majority of our Members in Discernment are also not looking to serve as pastors of churches. Instead they feel called to be chaplains, teachers, or advocates for social change. These ministries help change lives, and are an expression of the call to serve God by serving others.

Another significant part of my work involves the **Committee on Ministry**, specifically the subcommittee **DPAM** (Discernment and Preparation for Authorized Ministry). I am extremely impressed by and grateful for the wise and dedicated work of DPAM's members. They meet monthly to interview prospective Members in Discernment and candidates for ordination. They read hundreds of pages of psychological assessments, internship evaluations, sermons, CPE evaluations, written references and ordination papers to prepare for these interviews. They do not accept everyone who applies to become a Member in Discernment, nor approve everyone who comes for an ordination interview. Their concern for emotional maturity, professional readiness, and knowledge of and loyalty to the UCC all factor into their decision-making. The recommendations and requirements for further training and experience that they make of candidates try to balance the needs of the Church with the resources of local churches and the candidates themselves. DPAM has been blessed in the 8 years I have been on staff with excellent chairpersons. I am very grateful to Lynne Krehbiel-Breneman for her current leadership.

Local churches: Although I handle most Search & Call matters throughout the Conference, Associate Conference Minister Rev. Steve Boorsma and I split other common duties associated with local churches according to northern/southern geographic areas. These duties typically come in the form of requests for advice or resources for doing performance reviews, setting up Pastoral Relations Committees, ensuring or establishing healthy patterns of communication in the church, doing organizational restructuring (new bylaws and constitutions), and fielding questions about possible church closings, long-range planning, selling or remodeling parsonages, and demographic research. 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.