

**2017 Annual Report of the Associate Conference Minister**  
**Submitted by Rev. Steve Boorsma**

The nature of covenant this year can be defined as housekeeping with some strategic planning, and a bit of challenge as well. I have to be honest, one of the things that I do miss in this current ministry setting are the daily and weekly relationships that develop in the local church setting. There is something to be said about intimate covenantal relationships that are nurtured each week. So, I am always thankful and honored when I am able to be with the church and meet the members, whether that is with church leadership or in worship. I have had the privilege to worship with many of you and bring a greeting from the conference and/or the morning message to 24 congregations. Additionally, I have attended 12 ordinations, ecclesiastical councils or installations. I have also met with church council / leadership of 13 of our congregations as well having 14 meetings with clergy to discuss several ministry issues such as Pastor/Parish Relations Committee, Church Council, staff relationships, professional development conversations and coaching. I welcome every opportunity to meet with our churches, am not afraid to ask if I may come, and welcome every invitation to be with you!

I consider the most important aspect of conference ministry is to live out our covenant. It is not always easy or absent of difficulties or mistakes. I am all too familiar with the “mistakes” part – however, the nature of covenant affords us the opportunity to continue to grow and “live into” covenant. Yeah – I use that word a lot; it has always defined my work in the church. This is, in part, why I enjoy being in our churches. One activity that has been meaningful this year has been the “Ministry Conversations” that have taken place around the state. My colleagues and I have met with several clergy clusters to ask “how are things with your soul?” We wanted to hear from you how things are going in your settings and how or if current events were affecting ministry. We wanted to know how we could help and support each of you as you minister to your congregation – and how we might minister to you. These conversations have been very helpful and I thank you for your commitment and partnership.

Living in covenant is not always easy nor is it always joyful; it can at times be painful. This year the Committee on Ministry convened a Fitness Review. As the one who staffed the Fitness Review team, I recruited support persons and, with all parties, we engaged in hours of training and investigation. Rev. Elizabeth Dilley from the Ministerial Excellence, Support & Authorization team (MESA) office in Cleveland provided first-rate support and training for staff, and both the Response Team and Fitness Review Team. I was able to provide pastoral care to affected parties, support the members of the team, and ensured that proper procedures were followed and carefully and completely documented. The review took literally hundreds of hours of volunteer and staff time. I was inspired by the members of the teams through their commitment to fairness and pastoral concern and care for all those involved and affected by the review. The congregation continues to be nurtured and cared for by conference staff.

I continue to staff the prophetic ministry teams of the conference. The people who make up our teams are passionate and committed individuals. The teams are: Open and Affirming (ONA), Justice & Witness, Immigration, Global Partnership, and the newly-instituted Racial Justice! It is my pleasure to be associated with these team members. To be truthful – they need little guidance from me; it is I who often learn from them. It is inspiring to see them work! This speaks well to those members and we can be assured that the Minnesota Conference is well represented by these individuals. It is covenant being played out! As you carefully read through this report, please make sure that you take time to read the team reports. And please, visit the exhibit tables AND the Prophetic Ministry recruiting table – you just might find a good place to engage ministry in action!

Allow me to get personal for a moment. I married into a farm family, and “helping” out on the farm gave me an appreciation for ministry in ways that I may not have otherwise. Much of farm work is unseen, and ministry is like that – there is always work to be done and the work is never finished! It is exhausting and exhilarating at the same time! Visiting a college friend at his family farm, I recall Dan excitedly showing me the difference between an unplanted and planted seed. The unplanted seed was dried and seemed lifeless – the planted seed he had unearthed was plump and ready to burst with new life. He looked at me and said “isn’t that incredible!” It was not a question but an exclamation!

Two “seeds” I am working with are part of the strategic plan approved by the Conference Board of Directors in November. The Conference Minister and Associate Conference Ministers last summer began to identify strategic goals/outcomes we would focus on during the next 1-3 years. I am responsible for two of these. The first “seed” is a continuation of our sacred conversations on race – specifically learning about and working to understand White Privilege. Later this fall, a training event will take place to help prepare church leadership to lead their church in a study of the resource “White Privilege: Let’s Talk”. This resource is an adult curriculum from the United Church of Christ that is designed to invite church members to engage in safe, meaningful, substantive, and bold conversations on race.

The second “seed” is one of vitality. This seed is not yet ready to bloom, but it is getting closer. The goal will be to engage up to at least three congregations in 2018 and 2019 in an intentional revitalization / renewal program. At the time of writing this report, perspective programming is in the process of being identified and reviewed. Once the program is selected, church recruitment to participate in this program will take place.

I look forward to this continued work and appreciate this opportunity. I remain thankful for the partnership of the collective work of all conference staff and the partnership with the pastors and members of our conference churches.