

2016 Annual Report of the Associate Conference Minister

Submitted by Rev. Steve Boorsma

I closed my first report to you last year by saying: “I am looking forward to having a full year under my belt and beginning my second year...” I am pleased to say that I was able to accomplish this! But then again, simply waking up every day is not very impressive alone. What is impressive, however, is the dedication of conference lay leaders and volunteers. And I am blessed to work with you. In any or nearly every report that I make, there will be mention and focus on one thing – Covenant. And it is in the realm of UCC covenant that we continue our testament of being the church through the conference’s many, voices, venues and paths.

There are many tasks and paths of the ministry we do together, and I would like to share some of the highlights of the past year.

One path of ministry is found in the work of the Committee on Ministry (COM). COM takes its responsibility seriously as each subcommittee faithfully carries out their tasks. Of the three, Covenant, Discernment and Preparation for Authorized Ministry (DPAM) and Subcommittee for Authorized Ministry (SAM), I staff SAM. SAM is the subcommittee that meets with those who are seeking to be authorized for licensed ministry, or to continue- their authorization, or to be granted the Ecclesiastical Endorsement required for chaplaincy/ professional accreditation, or to transfer their ministerial standing, to name just a few areas of responsibility. SAM is also responsible for boundary training for authorized ministers. They will be taking a serious look at boundary training this year and I will report on that work next year.

Our Prophetic Ministry & VITALITY Teams continue their efforts. It is my pleasure to staff and serve with these women and men whose passions continue to have a positive impact on the work and ministry of the Minnesota Conference. The Prophetic Ministry Teams are: Global Partnership, Justice and Witness, Immigration, ONA/LGBT and the Antiracism Team. I encourage you to read their reports and visit their resource page on the Conference website. The most recent activity has been the work of reestablishing the Antiracism Team. A defining document has been created and the team is still in development; we will have had at least one meeting prior to Annual Meeting.

Two exciting highlights this year are what I like to call “New Beginnings 2.0” and a new Ministry Connection. First, New Beginnings. We have four congregations that have entered into a new journey of discovery and exploration. These congregations are New Spirit UCC in Savage, Peace UCC in St. Cloud, Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Duluth, and Union Congregational Church UCC in Hackensack. Full church assessments were conducted in February and the congregations are in various stages of study as they begin a time of discernment of what and who God is calling each church to be today. To assist them during this time of discovery is the Center for Parish Development (CPD). CPD will engage each congregation in this time of change and transition, supporting them by introducing structures, tools and processes to help shape and implement renewal hopes.

The other exciting highlight is the establishment of a new Ministry Connection . Ministry Connection is part of a 10-year-old Minnesota Conference initiative. Becoming a Ministry Connection is an intentional time of discernment and faith growth. Three core elements of a Ministry Connection are 1) Worship, 2) Faith Formation and 3) Service /Mission. This year the Committee on Ministry formally recognized United Faith Community (UFC) of Buffalo, Minnesota. UFC is currently a small progressive faith community of like-minded Christians who have demonstrated a deep commitment to the United Church of Christ and the Minnesota Conference. Part of this journey is a three-way covenant between UFC, the Minnesota Conference and a sponsoring / partnering church. I am very pleased to report that United Church of Christ New Brighten has agreed to be the partnering church of UFC, and has entered into covenant to support, guide and coach UFC as necessary and needed. I look forward to reporting how the first year has gone in my next report to you.

In addition to these activities I continue to participate in my Ministry Excellent Group, "Practice in Ministry." My group consists of Associate Conference Ministers from five other conferences and includes a group facilitator. We meet electronically on a monthly basis and it is time well spent. It is an opportunity to learn and grow in our jobs through support, challenge and education.

Some shared responsibilities are wider conference events such as Church on the Move and Fall Convocation, to name just two. I am honored to be in covenant with staff who are completely committed to the mission and ministry of the United Church of Christ. There are other activities and involvements that are too numerous to mention. So I will conclude with a part of my job that I find extremely meaningful, empowering and life-giving. Being able to be engaged with our local churches is one of my greatest pleasures. I have been able to worship with and bring a morning message to many of our congregations and am still working on visiting more. I welcome every invitation to meet with each church (hint-hint). In addition to worship and meeting with church leaders, it has been my honor to lead leadership retreats and Pastor-Parish Relations Committee trainings.

I enjoy this calling. The work can often be difficult yet rewarding. In addition to the partnerships of conference pastors and lay leaders, I am blessed with the collegial atmosphere of my colleagues at the Conference Office. We work well together with the right balance of commitment, passion and humor. For this I am thankful.