

2017 Report of the Moderator and Chair of the Board of Directors MN Conference
United Church of Christ Janet Bartz

It has been my privilege to serve as your Conference moderator and chair of the Board of Directors (BOD) this past year. I am reminded each time the Board meets of the talent and dedication each Board member and Conference staff brings to the service of the wider church. The Board is willing and able to do the work of oversight (financial, policy and mission) and engage in discernment and strategy to move the Conference forward in a rapidly changing world. I want to extend a thank you to our talented and committed Conference Minister. Rev. Shari Prestemon leads us with energy and vision and the Board is grateful for her ministry with us.

This past year, the BOD has been pleased to work with our Conference Minister on a set of measurable outcomes for conference staff in support of our strategic priorities: equip clergy and laity to lead; create and sustain healthy, vital congregations; strengthen faith formation across the generations and increase our capacity for compassionate service and prophetic witness. A concise report of progress towards the goals is shared with the Board at each meeting. The report brings a new visibility, transparency and accountability to the work and assists the BOD in monitoring progress and providing necessary support.

The Board acted strategically to equip clergy and laity to lead, when it approved a part-time position of Director of Leadership Development. Rev. Vicki Wunsch has been hired and will work to launch two initiatives: Young Adult Service Communities and Lay Leadership Academy. Leadership development has long been a passion for me and I am so pleased the Board approved the new position. For the Lay Leadership Academy, the plan is to partner with the Wisconsin Conference to create a lay leadership development program to grow our capacity across the Conference for strong lay leadership, provide for multiple paths to authorized ministry, and invigorate/equip the Church for the future.

The Board lived out the priority for creating and sustaining healthy congregations when it responded to a request from New Spirit UCC in Savage. The congregation, working through the New Beginnings program, has developed a specific plan with measurable outcomes to revitalize with a mission focused on gender and racial equity. The Board was pleased to provide a grant to assist them with their revitalization. The Board and Conference staff will monitor progress and work with New Spirit to assure they reach their desired outcomes.

Board members have been energized around a concept to become ambassadors to local churches. In March, as a first step in that regard, they agreed to partner with the Development Committee in thanking local churches for financial support of the Conference. Board of Director members were asked to share thanks in person, at a Council Meeting or during Sunday worship, as they are able. The intent is to eventually engage directly with every church in the Conference.

As part of its oversight responsibilities, the BOD has been working through a review and update of Conference policies. This is detailed, behind-the-scenes work but critical nonetheless. A number of Minnesota churches have moved to policy-based governance models and though not directly transferrable to the judicatory level, the BOD is seeking to implement aspects of the model where helpful and appropriate. The intent is to create a proactive, timely environment of empowered ministry.

The BOD carries out its financial oversight duties with diligence and foresight. We continue to support the ministry at Pilgrim Point Camp and we are encouraged by recent site updates and the efforts of new staff and all volunteers. The Conference is financially healthy, but existing trends suggest that we must be proactive in our discernment and strategic planning activities. Board leadership is formulating an approach to focus the planning effort at a retreat in the fall of 2017.

In summary, the Minnesota Conference is well positioned for the work ahead. We rely on our shared purpose of “inviting and equipping inspired Christian leaders and communities” with articulated values of empowerment, faithfulness, innovation, justice and stewardship to undergird all we do. Our strategic priorities, mentioned above, shape our specific work to achieve an envisioned future. As a Board, we are grateful for the gift of time we receive from each volunteer and for the generous spirit and vision our churches demonstrate when they share their financial gifts with the wider church. We move forward with hope and energy knowing that God goes with us on each and every step to the future.