



Missouri Mid-South Conference United Church of Christ

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Uniting Congregations for Ministry and Mission in Missouri, Arkansas, and Memphis, Tennessee

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2018 Conference Minister's Report: "Serving Beloved Community Now!"

Rev. Dr. Ginny Brown Daniel

Our Conference Ministry theme for 2017-2018 was, "Serving Beloved Community Now!" As your Conference Minister, I and your Conference Ministry Staff have equipped Churches, Ministers, and Members to be Serving Beloved Community Now in the following places:

- Worship Services Attended/Preached 57 Churches (30 Ginny/27 Other Conference Staff)
- Installations and Ordinations 7 Installations (1 EA, 3 STL, and 3 WA)
- Ordinations 2 Ordinations (1 STL and 1 WA)
- Association Meetings Attended 6 Association fall and spring meetings
- Training Events 6 Boundary Awareness Training (2 EA, 2 STL, 2 WA)
First ever Racial Justice and Equity Training
- Retreats Led or Attended 6 Retreats Led or Attended by Conference Staff
 - Conference Council, Women, Men, Committee on Ministry, Middle School, Senior High

I have had the honor to equip the Missouri Mid-South Conference Churches to be Serving Beloved Community Now in the following areas:

- **Personnel and Administrative Leadership: Staff Changes**

Since our last Conference Annual Gathering, we have had four Conference staff/Consultants resign: Dale Parson, Jeff Fulk, Gail Rosenberg, and Mike McKee. Upon their retirements or resignations, they provided the Conference with a combined 76 years of ministry to the Conference. Thus, 2017-2018 has also been a year of Personnel transitions.

We have hired seven members to our Conference Staff, all being part-time employees. They are: Cindy Birkner, Youth Ministry Resources Consultant, Rev. Courtney Chandler, Youth Events Coordinator, Rev. Nia Chandler, Minister for Authorized Ministry Development, Rev. Tyler Connoley, Minister for Search and Call Discernment, Nathan Fulk, Interim Executive Director, Shannondale Outdoor Ministries, Lorna Hale, Data Management Specialist, and Kathie Rainey, Office Manager.

We also hired Micke's O'Toole Law Firm, based in St. Louis, Missouri. They have specialty in labor and real estate. They also represent school districts throughout Missouri, which confirmed their knowledge of the diversity of culture throughout the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Our primary liaison is Grant Wiens, partner at the law firm and member of First Congregational Church, UCC, in St. Louis, MO.

- **Personnel and Administrative Leadership: Financials**

2017 was a strong year financially for the Conference. This is because of two primary factors: We had a \$57,000 surplus in OCWM giving and we had reduced Personnel expenses than were budgeted. Our OCWM surplus was only the second time in our Conference's history to have a surplus. The reduction in Personnel expenses came from the retirements and resignations.

- **Transition of the Rott Foundation Oversight to Cornerstone Fund**

In October, 2017, the Conference Council approved moving the oversight of the Rott Foundation to the UCC Cornerstone Fund. This transition was made with the approval of the Rott Foundation Board of Directors. All Rott Foundation loans will continue to be given only to Missouri Mid-South

Conference Churches but now the administrative responsibilities will be handled by the UCC Cornerstone Fund.

- **Church Legacy Fund with 5 Ministry Funds**

The Finance and Administration Standing Committee worked with the United Church Funds to clean up our designated funds related to Churches that have closed. Rather than having several funds named after the Churches that have closed, we created a Church Legacy Fund consisting of five Ministry funds that reflect the designated giving of the specific Churches. The five Ministry Funds are: Church Start and Renewal, General Operating Fund, Social Justice, Theological Education, and Youth. These Ministry Funds will also enable us to support Churches that are considering closing to have more options of where to designate their money that honors their Church's heritage and continues the Ministries of the Missouri Mid-South Conference.

2017-2018 Conference Minister Visions

At the 2017 Conference Annual Gathering, I provided two visions for our Conference to consider (understanding that I have no authority to implement these visions – only the encouragement to cast them).

- 1. Initiate a Formal Conversation with the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference**

We began initial conversations with a day-long meeting between myself and Edith Guffey as Conference Ministers. This was grounded in theological reflection as well as initial planning of how to begin the conversations. In November, members from both Conferences met for a day-long meeting to introduce ourselves to one another. This was an informative day of sharing and learning about each other. There was concern raised at two of our Association Councils about the process by which members were chosen for the November meeting. Immediately tensions arose between the Associations and Conference (some I had known and others that were unknown to me). In February, 2018, the Conference Council of the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference voted to end formal conversations with us.

I am grateful for our willingness to formally engage in this long-standing conversation. It affirmed certain realities about the Missouri Mid-South Conference that we can now strengthen if the Missouri Mid-South Conference is to be a healthy Conference. It also affirms our courage to try new things. Even if it makes us uncomfortable; even if we seem to “fail,” we are taking risks, which is a sign of a vital and dynamic Church Now!

- 2. Initiate a Conversation about Considering to Become an Open and Affirming Conference**

In February, 2018, the Justice and Witness Ministries Covenanted Ministry Team requested the Conference Council initiate a task force to engage the Missouri Mid-South Conference in an Open and Affirming process. The Conference Council approved this on April 14 and is beginning to develop the task force. In the next year, this task force will create an Open and Affirming process that will engage as many Churches, Ministers, and Members as possible to share, learn, question, and develop a conversation about the possibility of becoming an Open and Affirming Conference. In my guidance of this process, I promise to make sure all voices are included at all aspects of this conversation.

Summary of 2017-2018

The Missouri Mid-South Conference has adapted well to the many changes we have faced this past year. Our strength continues to be our strong Churches, Ministers, and Members. However, sometimes the autonomy of our strong leaders supersedes our ability to collaborate in new and transformative ways together. Therefore our weakness as a Conference is our inability to collaborate together as the Body of Christ. It is my prayer and goal for 2018-2019 that we will build courageous relationships in order to share our resources and gifts together as the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Thank you for the honor of Serving God's Beloved Community Now! Blessings, Ginny