

Conference Council Moderator's Report

*So much is unfolding that must complete its gesture,
so much is in the bud.* - Denise Levertov

For now we see in a mirror, dimly... - 1 Corinthians 13:12a

We sat quietly in our backyard garden on a recent Sunday evening. Birds above were going about their end-of-day fluttering and the trees shifted slightly with the wind. Lynne and I basked in the late Spring beauty of it at the end of a sweaty afternoon of tending. Then, as always, we began to look past the garden's glistening to make lists of things still to do – composting, staking, weeding, pruning, watering. A garden is both a work-in-progress and a thing of beauty.

Looking back on 2016 and early 2017, the Missouri Mid-South Conference is a work-in-progress and a thing of beauty. *So much is unfolding that must complete its gesture – so much is in the bud.* Relish these reports. Celebrate the growing number of people engaged and guided by the Five Mission Imperatives, rising from our visioning process. Of course, there's more to do *to be the Conference* – to become a stronger expression of God's unfolding plan.

Look at all the people coming together, *Living Our Change*, as Ginny Brown Daniel's theme suggests, working the soil of this Conference. Celebrate our standing committees: **Leadership & Program, Finance & Administration, Local Church Ministries and Wider Church Ministries**. Through these committees, the Conference Council carries out much of its work. Standing committees also have the responsibility to support our covenanted ministries. As we move from a hub-and-spoke, Conference office-centered culture, to a web of effective and sustainable networks, these relationships need cultivating in 2017, 2018 and beyond.

Celebrate our growing covenanted ministries: **Communications Covenanted Ministry, OCWM Covenanted Ministry, Church Vitality Covenanted Ministry, Older Adult Covenanted Ministry, Youth Covenanted Ministry, Committee on Ministry Covenanted Ministry, Justice & Witness Covenanted Ministry, MoVal Camp Covenanted Ministry and Shannondale Camp Covenanted Ministry**. At this year's CAG, we anticipate the addition of the **Heritage Covenanted Ministry** – an outgrowth of our former Heritage Committee. These covenanted ministries serve as leading edges of our shared ministry, adding new ingredients to grow more faithful and inclusive. Conference Council will step up our oversight to support these ministries, to evaluate their effectiveness, to guide changes and to envision new expressions as we live into our strategic plan. As the Vision Implementation Team completes its charge in the next year, we thank them for their persistence and vision.

Our increasingly deliberate efforts to strengthening our networking model through standing committees and covenanted ministries will help us avoid the difficult financial outcome at the end of 2016. Our 2016 budget expectations did not have adequate, ongoing infrastructure in OCWM and "Friends of the Conference" outreach to our churches. Stung by the seriousness of the 2016 shortfall, and the need to scissor back on our 2017 budget expectations this Spring, Conference Council has redoubled our effort to develop a robust, long-term OCWM Covenanted Ministry and a Friends of the Conference program. We need to reignite our connections to local congregations and pastors to clearly say that we're listening, we care – and we need one another.

Celebrate Shannondale and Mo-Val – gems of this Conference. Thanks to the fine leadership of Jeff Fulk and Jeremy Force and their staffs and Covenanted Ministries which serve our UCC family and their surrounding communities. Our carbon credit program is an unfolding resource – we’ve not yet seen these leafy assets reach our bottom financial line, due to a lack of demand in the marketplace. Our 2016 budget expectation for carbon credits was an unintended overreach that hurt us at year’s end when we didn’t receive hoped-for income to meet expenses. The spare 2017 and 2018 budgets do not count on income from this asset. Its day will come.

Celebrate our other hard-working Conference staff – our Conference Minister, Ginny Brown Daniel, who brings vision, organizational care and bubbling enthusiasm to this regional work. Thanks to our ACM, Dale Parson, who for so many years is a prophetic voice, pastoral companion, and a faithful counsellor in our many expressions. Thanks to Nia Chandler, who offers such creativity as we learn how to network and communicate in new, innovative ways. We appreciate the work of Renee Cordes and Kris Scott, whose departures have reminded us that the devil (and the angels) are surely in the details. Thanks to Lorraine Brooks for her steady presence and sharp pencil. And this year, special gratitude to our Conference attorney, Mike McKee, who’s walked many a legal mile with us and has been an incredible source of institutional memory about the life of this Conference for more than three decades.

As we’ve trimmed back staff, we’ve learned that more of our common life depends on a widely-shared energy. Our staff can’t do it all. So we, of both necessity and grace, become more resourceful, creative, collaborative, curious as we discover new ways of being Christ’s church.

Thanks to Conference Council members – dedicated leaders who serve not only on Conference Council, but also on a Standing Committee and as Council liaison to a Covenanted Ministry. Thanks also to Conference Council’s Executive Committee – Vice Moderator Chase Peebles, Treasurer David Rauch and Secretary Rhonda Stockglausner – who’ve worked hard and have been so supportive of all of us.

Thanks to our Council for Health and Human Services (CHHSM) agencies in the Conference – and see their report in this year’s CAG materials. We are very blessed to have them among us as partners in ministry. We can learn a lot from their faithful resilience and organizational savvy.

And at last, thanks to the Conference Annual Gathering Planning Team, under the leadership of Rick Oberle and Jane Porchey, who, in the sudden departure of Renee Cordes, really “stepped it up” and worked the details into submission so we could have a great CAG this year.

So much is unfolding that must complete its gesture, so much is in the bud. In our yearning for a more pruned, sustainable Conference, let’s be patient with one another even as we’re persistent. Paul the Apostle wisely reminds us that our view is limited – like *seeing in a mirror dimly*. God sees us for who we are – a work in progress and a thing of beauty!

In Christ, who makes all things new,

David Mehl

