

**LIVING WATER ASSOCIATION, OHIO NORTHEAST
HEARTLAND CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

CREATIVITY ADAPTABILITY TRUST COMPASSION

Be a resource and support for the health and wellbeing our congregations, that we may grow into communities of healing and grace embodying Christ in the world

2023 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ASSOCIATION'S GENERAL MINISTER

I write this in the midst of a world that continues to live with anxiety, grief and confusion wondering what's next not only for the Church but also for our country and world.

2023 has been a year of various experiences - the war in Ukraine continues, a new war in Israel and Palestine damages and destroys, Armenia experienced the continuing of its genocide and lost its land under Azerbaijani rule, war and conflict continue in Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Libya, Syria, and more. The political polarization not only in the US but around the world is causing wide divides, inflation with high food and fuel prices bring hardship to many... In the midst of it all the Church, where many had found comfort and community, continues to change around the world. No wonder many are anxious and overwhelmed.

But, we are a people of faith and hope, a people of rebirth and resurrection, so we have kept on with our ministries and missions, with service and justice work, with worship and celebrations, with making the world into more of God's realm, a realm of love and grace, justice and peace. Yes, with small steps in the right direction does the Spirit lead us onward on this journey of life, which is a gift.

My biggest gift this year was my Sabbatical of three months. I am grateful to you all for the gift and especially to our Association's Council who graciously agreed that my sabbatical should be about rest and rejuvenation. And so it was. I hope you were able to read my sabbatical's report in our Streams of Connection. Thank you!

Our Spring Vitality Festival - The Marks of healthy and effective congregation with the Rev. Dr. Chris Davies, Executive Minister for Programs and Initiatives for the Southern New England Conference UCC and former Team Leader of Faith Education, Innovation, and Formation, Justice and Local Church Ministries of the UCC, generated much enthusiasm.

Church Vitality, Health and Completion of Ministry continue to be reimagined. Our congregations are discovering new ways of being the church as they explore new possibilities and as they continue to live the Gospel. Some congregations are experiencing growth not just in numbers but spiritually. Others, having led by the Spirit are discerning their future. Still others are completing their ministry and sharing their resources with neighboring UCC congregations. Yes, God continues to call us to be the Church, to continue to live the Good News of Love and be communities of healing, grace and justice for all.

THE SPIRE CENTER: School of Possibility, Inspiration, Reimagining and Exploration in its second year has offered numerous learning opportunities seasonally. The learning opportunities have included – Futuring Church, Restructuring Church Governance, Discovering Vision and Mission, Lay Leader Burnout, Adaptive Leadership, Effective Annual Evaluation, Anxiety and Mental Health in the Church, Appreciative Inquiry, Community engagement, A Theology of Abundance, Church Moderators/Presidents workshop, and more. In the upcoming winter season the learning opportunities include: A panel discussion about Marcia McFee's Worship Design Studio about how it continues to shape worship planning and implementation in our congregations; Anglo Saxonism and decline of Western Church; How to keep hope alive. Grants for churches;

and more. 300 persons from our congregations and conference registered; over 200 attended representing over 50 of our congregations.

The learning opportunities presenting practical issues in congregational life were especially well attended. We will continue to offer opportunities to nurture leadership development, practical steps in developing healthy congregations who engage within and without to do ministry. A Generative Circle continues to guide the ministry of this Center. We are open to receiving ideas for learning opportunities. Let us know what learning opportunity might be helpful to your congregation.

Healthy Practices in Ministry for Authorized Ministers including a retired ministers monthly gathering continue to provide opportunities for growth, community and sharing. These professional and vocational development events have welcomed authorized ministers from our sibling Associations in the Heartland Conference as well as from other denominations.

Communities of Practice continue to nurture 55 of our Authorized Ministers as they participate in these support groups for the purpose of sharing, learning and growing spiritually and vocationally.

Committee on Ministry continues its work of credentialing, overseeing and journeying with those in discernment. Our Discernment process per guidelines for UCC Ministerial Excellence Support and Authorization, (MESA) has been streamlined. The Committee has embraced a plan for multiple paths for ordination and a handbook describing the process for ordination can be found on our website. <https://livingwaterone.org/ordination-process-handbook/>. Currently we are walking the discernment path with 15 persons.

The Interim Ministry Network of Disciples of Christ in OH and Heartland Conference UCC to which I provide leadership along with David Long Higgins, Conference Minister; Allen Harris, Regional Minister Disciples of Christ in OH; and Ralph Wearstler, a DOC elder; continues to provide training to those who feel called to interim ministry among us. This year the curriculum was further updated as we continue to live into this new time of continued change and movement.

Collaboration with Heartland Conference UCC continues as the Associations share their unique gifts for the enrichment of all. Conference Networks continue to be formed with representatives from each Association in area of prophetic ministry as well as spiritual program development. The collaboration continues.

I continue to connect with congregations in transition, in Search and Call, in restructuring governance, in exploring new vision, as well as resolution of disagreement and conflict, etc... I continue to appreciate the vital ministry of our congregations and lay leaders as we minister in many different ways. And I thank our Committee on Ministry and their wisdom, involvement and support.

Deepest thanks to our Moderator, Charlene Smith, who is filling an unexpired term. Her Spirit filled leadership has been a gift. Deepest thanks also to our gifted staff whose diligent work and faithfulness makes the ministry of the Association possible: Michael Howard, Minister for Faith in Action; Machel Miller, Financial Administrator; Kellie Ramirez, Information Management and Media; Mike Bone, SPIRE Center Support. Thank you and thank you!

Deepest thanks also to you, all who by your ministry and participation make the Living Water Association what it is. And, thank you for the opportunity to serve as your General Minister.

Faithfully, Nayiri Karjian