

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

REFRESH RENEW RESTORE

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

2020 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ASSOCIATION'S GENERAL MINISTER

I lack words to describe or name the year of 2020! Indeed, it has been a year of grief and anxiety, confusion and confinement, as well as a year of creativity and innovation, flexibility and opportunity.

Our Easter faith continually remind us that in every calamity there is opportunity, in every mess a hidden gift, in every crucifixion a resurrection or two. We often find God in the messes of our lives. COVID has disrupted and upended our lives but it cannot upend the One whom we know as Love especially in the toughest moments of our lives.

In spite of COVID restrictions our ministries have continued mostly on ZOOM. Our congregations have adapted to new ways of worshiping online, in parking lots, or in other forms. Our gatherings have taken place electronically. Although we miss in-person gatherings and incarnational community we are aware that the reality of COVID does not allow for such assemblies at this time.

We continue to provide resources and guidance to our congregations and pastors about COVID 19, worship and congregational life. We also host a zoom opportunity for conversation and connecting to our authorized ministers and lay people on Tuesday mornings – 10 am for Authorized Ministers, 11 am for anyone.

Our Inspiring Generosity and Stewardship Festival led by Michael Piazza, scheduled for April 25 eventually took place on August 22. With over 100 persons in attendance we discussed nurturing generosity as a spiritual practice, and learning how to acknowledge money as a sacred and as a gift.

The Generosity Festival was followed by a recorded worship service where the Association Ministers shared the Word and the Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay, the Rev. Veronica Jefferson and the Rev. Melody Ward participated. Our gratitude is expressed to First Congregational UCC, Hudson who welcomed us in their sanctuary, shared their staff and recorded the service, assisting us with every detail.

A Technology Grant from Church Vitality fund continues to be provided for our congregations that have technological needs to continue their ministries during these days of COVID. Applications and guidelines can be found on our website: <https://livingwaterone.org/grants-applications/>

Four Healthy Practices in Ministry for Authorized Ministers were presented in 2020 via zoom. These are events for professional and vocational development. Attendance every other year is required for good ministerial standing. This year these events welcomed authorized ministers from our sibling Associations in the Heartland Conference UCC, as well as some from other denominations.

Communities of Practice continue to nurture 50 of our authorized ministers as they participate in these support groups for the purpose of sharing, learning and growing spiritually and vocationally.

Church Vitality and Development is being reimagined. Our Vitality and Development grants continue to be available as we continue to explore where the Spirit is calling us and how our congregations should envision their future. The possibility of a church planning team is being explored to assist our congregations in discerning their call for the future.

Committee on Ministry continues its work of credentialing, overseeing and journeying with those in discernment. We continue to discuss lay authorized ministry and multiple paths to ordination.

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.

The Interim Ministry Network of Disciples of Christ in OH and Heartland Conference UCC continue to provide training to those who feel called to interim ministry among us. I am glad to be part of this working group as we continue to lead this endeavor.

Collaboration with Heartland Conference UCC and our sibling Associations is enriching our common life even as I write this. Not only are we recognizing the unique gifts of each Association and Conference, we are also sharing them for the benefit of all. We are networking as the conference forms specific networks for ministry and prophetic witness. A complete report will be shared by Rev. Dr. Cheryl Lindsay, Chair of the One Heart Working Group that has been guiding this effort forward.

What's next? Where is the Spirit guiding us? As the landscape of ministry continues to change in the local setting, especially during these COVID times, new ways of being church are emerging and God is calling us to creativity, flexibility and Innovation. I believe this is a time to Explore possibilities, Experiment with opportunities, Experience God in the unexpected, and Excite our spirits for prophetic ministry. I will address this during our Annual Meeting.

Deepest thanks to our Moderator, Steven Savides for his Spirit centered leadership, and to our whole Council for their service. 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; Mabelle Miller, Financial Administrator; Dan Roland, Registrar and Search and Call Coordinator; Gene McAfee, Dean North East Ohio School of Ministry; Don Hill, Financial Development Consultant; and Cheryl Lindsay, Communications Consultant.

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