

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

**EXPLORE EXPERIMENT EXCITE**

*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*

**2022 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.

2022 has continued to unfold with transitions in many of our congregations. The great resignation is being experienced in churches also. Many pastors close to retirement age are choosing to retire. Many younger pastors are unwilling to serve local churches, choosing chaplaincy and justice ministry. Others are seeking urban placements only, and so on...

Nevertheless, the Ministries of the Association continue as we resource our congregations toward healthy congregational life and impactful ministry. I continue, with the help of Michael A. Howard, Minister of Faith in Action, to visit our congregations preaching, officiating ordinations, installations, farewell liturgies, etc...

**Our Spring Vitality Festival *Anxiety in the Church and its Possibilities*** with Dr. Erica Dollhopf, the Director of the Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data at the United Church of Christ boasted 140 participants. We learned, among other things, that church vitality did not correlate with size but with health and impact.

**Church Vitality, Health and Closure** continues to be reimaged. A Generative Circle is in process of forming. This circle will think together, discuss and advise providing guidance and resources as it futures and explores possibilities for our congregations. The way we do vitality is changing as we discover that the issue is really about the health and wellbeing of the congregation. Healthy churches are usually vital churches. Church size does not matter. Churches engaged in their communities and churches that network make greater impact and feel more vital.

**2022 Merging congregations:**

- Faith UCC Richmond Heights merged with Lyndhurst Presbyterian church creating the Lyndhurst Community of Faith church, dually aligned with UCC and Presbyterian.

**2022 Yoking/sharing a pastor congregations:**

- St. John, UCC, Massillon and Trinity UCC Canal Fulton.
- Litchfield UCC and Chatham Community, UCC and Methodist.

**Completing their ministry and closing congregations in process:**

- 89 Hartford UCC, closed in 2022
- Solon community UCC, in process
- Trinity, Canal Fulton UCC, in process

**SPIRE CENTER: School of Possibility, Inspiration, Reimagining and Exploration** was the rebirth and reforming of NEOSOM, North East Ohio School of Ministry. In the Spring of 2022, The SPIRE Center offered its first season of learning opportunities followed by a season in the fall. The learning opportunities offered included - War and Peace, Church Future, Restructuring Church Governance, Discovering Vision and Mission, Lay Leader Burnout, Adaptive Leadership, Effective Annual Evaluation,

Treasurer's Workshop, A Theology of Abundance, Reproductive Justice in Scripture. 321 persons form our congregations and conference registered; over 225 attended representing over 50 of our congregations.

The learning opportunities presenting practical issues in congregational life were especially well attended. We will continue offering opportunities to nurture leadership development, practical steps in developing healthy congregations who engage within and without to do ministry. A Generative Circle is formed to continue 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 one for retired Ministers were presented in 2022 via zoom. 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 50 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](#). Currently we are walking the discernment path with 15 persons.

**The Interim Ministry Network of Disciples of Christ in OH and Heartland Conference UCC** 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.

**Deepest thanks** to our Moderator, Cheryl Lindsay who filled in for one year term. Her Spirit-centered leadership was a gift as we partnered in ministry. Deepest thanks also to our gifted staff whose diligent work and faithfulness makes the ministry of the Association possible: Michael Howard, Minister of Faith in Action; Machel Miller, Financial Administrator; Kellie Ramirez, Information Management and Media; Mike Bone, SPIRE Center Support. Don Hill, Financial Consultant, who will continue in 2023 on a case to case basis. 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, Rev. Nayiri Karjian