

From Kelly Shiflett, President York Association

We had a fellowship after the evening session that was an information sharing session concerning the long-term plans for the Conference and the eight Associations; presented by the Strategic (Missional) Committee. First, there are 188 Churches, there are over 400 authorized ministers and there are approximately 40,000 members in the Penn Central Conference. We are the 7th largest Conference in the United Church of Christ and are in good shape, more or less.

Ok, all that said and done; the Strategic Committee is proposing that we consolidate the eight associations into 4. Each association would consist of somewhere around 45-50 churches and the hope is that this would help with the filling of committee positions and provide more support for the local churches. The idea is also to try and cross-pollinate large churches with small churches; in an effort to help both groups to grow. This is about the same for us in the York Association. We already are already configured as described.

The four proposed associations would be North, Central, Southwest and Southeast. We would be the Southeast (York Association and Lancaster Association would be combined). The most important part of this configuration is that Hallam would become the center of the proposed association and not the extreme right of the formation. All kidding aside, there would be more travel involved, and there would be more use of technology. That said, our proposed association would be the smallest of the proposed associations.

The idea is that we would have considerable conversations over the next three years and the entire conference would vote (most likely multiple times) on the various issues that are presented. There is far more to the proposal; there are four key focus points for the Conference (goals) and there is a new proposed vision statement; the previous vision statement would become the Conference Mission Statement. There are moneys that are being proposed for each facet, not all in this year's budget, since we are not that far along.

The four goals for the Conference are:

- 1) Overall church revitalization, including emphasis on small and rural churches.
- 2) Clergy and lay leadership development
- 3) Fund and donor development
- 4) Leadership to address community needs and justice issues

Each of these goals have objectives, time-lines and proposed investments for the coming three years. Each are well laid out in a PDF file on the Conference webpage and each of our churches should read the information. Also, as these meetings begin to take place, we should all invest time and energy to this endeavor. There is much more to say, but we are limited in space, so I'll stop here.

Peace,

Rev. Kelly Shiflett

President York Association

From David Downer, President Northern Association...

As we move into the summer months at Trinity UCC, I'd like to update you on some of the news from across our Association and the Penn Central Conference. When I first came to Trinity, one of the responsibilities I was tasked with was to be active in our community, in our local UCC Association, and with the Penn Central Conference. It has been a great privilege working with my colleagues in both the Conference and the Association to further our church's wider mission, and I was honored to be elected as the Northern Association President in April at our Annual Meeting. I will be serving in this position for the next two years and look forward to helping continue the work and successful ministries of the those that came before me.

In addition, our new Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Monica Dawkins-Smith, a former member of the Northern Association, asked me to serve as part of our Conference Task Force on developing a Conference Strategic Plan for the next 3-5 years. I agreed to do so and was excited to be a part of helping define some of the goals and objectives of our Conference. There is much to be excited about. While it is true that some of our rural churches are struggling and seeking new ways to appeal to younger generations, there is also evidence of growth and new-found energy in many of our congregations in rural, small town, suburban and urban settings. We have even added a statement to the new strategic plan about starting some new churches in under-served areas in the coming years.

When I arrived in 2014, the Conference was in the midst of a self-initiated study to examine all aspects of how the Conference and its Associations functioned, and how we could best serve the many constituent members. A consultant was hired to perform the study and present the findings. Each of the churches had an opportunity to respond to a detailed survey and several members of Trinity's Consistory did so at the time. Following the conclusion of the study and the compilation of over 800 surveys, the Penn Central Conference created a new staffing approach with detailed job descriptions for each position at the Conference level. Several changes were made and the qualifications for the next Conference Minister came out of that. I am pleased to say that after interviewing many candidates, each of the Conference positions have now been filled. Each staff member is ideally suited to the established criteria and people here at Trinity have already had the opportunity to meet and hear from a couple of these folks. The new full-time staff members are as follows:

Rev. Dr. Monica Dawkins-Smith, Conference Minister and President (former Pastor of Faith UCC, State College)

Rev. Dr. Laurene Bowers, Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Vitality

Rev. Betsy Bruaw, Associate Conference Minister for Congregational Discernment

Rev. Nora Foust, Associate Conference Minister for Ministerial and Congregational Excellence

Stephanie Rader-Titzel, Generosity and Communications Director

Wendy Hepler, Administrative Assistant

Part-time staff members include:

Rev. Patty Dodds, Coordinator of Camps, Retreats, and Youth Ministries

Rev. Richard Luciotti, Facilitator of Care to Clergy and Clergy Families

Janice Mountain, Receptionist/Profile Assistant

I am excited to be working with these people as we move forward in the coming years. The new Strategic Plan has been completed and presented to the Conference Board of Directors. The Board endorsed this plan at their May meeting and Rev. Dawkins-Smith has asked us to share it with our congregations. There are four key initiatives that have been proposed, each with its own set of specific objectives and actions. The four priorities are: 1) Overall church revitalization, with emphasis on small and rural churches; 2) Clergy and lay leadership development; 3) Fund and donor development; and 4) Developing leadership to address community needs and justice issues. To more effectively meet the needs of our member churches and more efficiently serve our people, the plan also proposes consolidating from eight regional Associations into four larger Associations. The proposed realignment is:

Proposed Associations

Upper (50 churches)

Central (50 churches)

South East (48 churches)

South West (40 churches)

Regions Former Associations

Northern and Central

Harrisburg, Lebanon, Mercersburg

York and Lancaster

Gettysburg, parts of Mercersburg

Rev. Dawkins-Smith and the Board of Directors envision moving toward this realignment over a period of three years. During this time, each of the Associations will have the opportunity to participate and contribute to how the new structure will look and operate.

I am excited about this vision for our future and look forward to working with the other Associations to implement it. I would like to encourage all of you to ask questions and offer suggestions as we seek to make Christ's church more relevant and responsive to our members and communities in the years to come.

Many Blessings,

Pastor Dave