



Wisconsin Conference United Church of Christ

Without OCWM

by Elizabeth Hazel, Chair, Northwest Association Division of the Mission of the Church in the World



Without OCWM, it would be like having the roof over our heads collapse. I know OCWM stands for Our Church's wider mission, and sometimes the sheer number of activities funded by our gifts to OCWM makes it hard for us to grasp what OCWM means for us. Just like a variety of structural elements are needed to hold up the roof over our heads, so the variety of activities funded by OCWM reinforces a shelter-like system of protection and opportunity for spiritual growth and development. That system makes it possible for us to conduct church life without having to "reinvent the wheel" every time life throws us a curve ball.

You see, 80% percent of our Wisconsin Conference budget of 2 million comes from our gifts to OCWM and 74 % of our contributions stay in our state. Now if you've ever called the Wisconsin Conference, chances are the first thing you hear is Susan Taylor's voice, always cheerful even if you are a pest like me. I have talked to just about everyone on the Wisconsin Conference staff on Northwest Association affairs, and the impression I get is that no matter how big a slice of the responsibility they've got, every one of them genuinely cares what happens to each of us and each of our churches. We are not just a faceless block of people to them. In 2018, Conference staff worshipped with or attended events in 125 churches, supported 52 searches, recommended 26 interim ministers. Clergy and Congregational support in 2018 was 26% of OCWM gifts, board and staff leadership 9%, programs, camps and technology another 22%.

The Wisconsin Conference is sensitive to the rapidly-changing times in which we live. We don't want to be a relic that has lost meaning for people looking for hope and belonging. So Associate Conference Minister for Faith Formation Tisha Brown and her committee provide "[Catalyst Grants](#)" for innovative projects that help churches connect with their communities or welcome in people in need. Maximum for these grants is \$5000 with free coaching. Six were awarded last year. Grants went to:

1. A teen cafe,
2. an arts and literacy and science camp for low or middle income families,

3. a {music} Composers Lab for high schoolers who wouldn't otherwise get a chance to share their gifts,
4. to provide "home away families" for cross-cultural college students,
5. to help one of our church take out pews in their sanctuary so that a church of different denomination to join them under one roof, and
6. to one of our own Northwest Churches-- Hope UCC, Cochrane-for a project called "Embracing all People," of all backgrounds and ages. Grant is to provide accessibility to church building.

Catalyst grants show us we can do amazing things and growth in numbers need not be the only criteria for success. For more information about applying for a grant, [click here](#). So the sheer variety of projects funded by OCWM translate the word "caring" into effective action because they deal with so many of the circumstances we or our churches have to face. It might be helping pastors better understand the life of the church they pastor (Communities of Practice). It might bringing out ministerial gifts (Lay Academy), showing kids that God created fun and wonder (our wilderness camps), helping us find ways to participate in the world and it's needs rather than just be pushed around by it (social action), fighting loneliness among clergy by fostering a network of relationships (COP and cluster groups), providing conflict training. Please give to OCWM through your church.

BULLETIN INSERT

A young pastor repeated the question asked by a member of her congregation, "Why should we give to OCWM?" The Associate Conference Minister answered, "Tell them, without OCWM you wouldn't be here and neither would I." There would be hardly anyone to help churches find ministers, for instance. 80% of our Wisconsin Conference Budget of 2 million comes from our gifts to OCWM and 74% of our contributions stay in our state. In 2018, Conference staff supported 52 searches, recommended 26 interim ministers, worshipped with or attended events in 125 churches. Clergy and Congregational support in 2018 was 26% of OCWM gifts, board and staff leadership, 9%, programs, camps and technology another 22%.

Does the variety of projects it funds make it hard to understand what OCWM is about? Actually it's the variety of those projects that make the word "caring" more than an overused word. The sheer number of projects is a concerted effect to deal with as many situations as possible that we or our churches come up against. It might be helping pastors understand the life of the church they pastor (Communities of Practice). It might be bringing out ministerial gifts (Lay Academy), showing kids that God created fun and wonder (our wilderness camps), helping us participate in the world and its needs rather than be pushed around by it (social action), fighting loneliness among clergy by fostering a network of relationships among colleagues (COP and cluster groups), providing conflict training. Please give to OCWM through your church.