

Our Church's Wider Mission in a World in Flux

By Rev. Elizabeth Hazel

When I think of the purpose behind Our Church's Wider Mission, I can't help think of my conversion experience. Oh, yes, UCCers can have conversion stories. I came from a scientifically orientated family, so after 3 years of questioning brought on by campus life and my most fervent prayers not being answered, I decided to turn my back on God and concentrate on other things. I was particularly contemptuous of songs about "God's loving arms." But little by little God turned me right around until one day, I felt God coming in at me from all sides, opening my eyes to all the little miracles occurring all around me despite steep odds. In that moment I felt surrounded by God's care. That's when I knew what those songs meant about "God's loving arms."

The things that the Wisconsin Conference, which receives around 75 % of our gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission basic support, has done for us in the face of the Covid and climate crises has left a powerful impact on me because it reminds me of that conversion experience. Why? Because of the ways the Wisconsin Conference has tried to shield our churches and help them survive the worst effects of Covid 19. Every possible direction that Covid could impact us was carefully worked out, starting with early warnings, guidelines to protect us, grants to afford the technology needed to achieve worship and fellowship needs, help reorienting ourselves to the technology, as well as dealing with loss and grief and changes in the people around us. To top it off, our Conference gave practical advice on the ins-and-outs of keeping up finances, finding the most affordable grants and loans, gave pastors a chance for respite with online worship services that were not cookie-cutter but could be shaped into the needs and personality of many different types of churches. The ultimate effect to me was honest, uplifting love and care coming in from all sides no matter who we are. What better way to show that the Church does care in a way that reminds me of the open arms of God. That's what makes me give to OCWM. How about you?

But our personal world up close is not the only one that needs to be held together. We are tucked into a womb that is bigger than Covid and very fragile. Our gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission helps the Conference and national offices reach out to protect that womb so it doesn't eject us. That womb is what we call "the environment." We are surrounded by all we need to survive, earth to stand on, air to breathe, atmosphere that protects us and brings us rain for the food we eat. God gave us the responsibility to take care of it—to be co-managers with God and, in doing so, make alliance with people who are different from us, who suffer when there is poor management. Co-managers with God! When you think of it, what an honor! If we wound it or poison it, our world will shift and shake and flood and get too warm and we're stuck inside it. Already, last year had a record number of billion-dollar climate disasters. The Conference's Creation Care Team is providing us with concrete opportunities to lower our carbon footprint and other damage we do to our environment before we get stuck in an earthly home too dangerous to live in and that can happen in less than 10 years. In addition, Wisconsin Conference Creation Care Grants of \$9585 were awarded to 10 churches for practical solutions--solar panels, environmentally beneficial planting, replacing carbon based fuel guzzlers with energy efficient equipment, LED lighting, reducing the use of plastics by offering reduced cost renewable options.

Help protect us from a world in flux with a 2021 gift to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM). The next OCWM offering is One Great Hour of Sharing on March 21.