



## WISCONSIN CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

### Gracious Welcoming

*by Rev. Lorraine Cenicerros*

As most of you have heard, or will hear, on August 1st I began serving as the newly called Associate Conference Minister. When I applied for this ACM position I knew Wisconsin was the place I was called to serve and was happy and grateful when the Conference search committee affirmed that call. As many of us have experienced, even as we recognize what or where we are called, it often takes a community of others who are listening to the still small voice of the Holy to move that call into action.



My call was moved into action and my 26 year old daughter and I packed up our home in Southern California, shipping everything we needed, plus lots of stuff we discovered we didn't need, to begin our new life in Wisconsin. We drove two cars with six animals across five states in four days. Driving with animals in the middle of summer meant we had to arrive as soon as possible. What we were able to see of the states we passed through came by way of our car windows as we flew by.

Nothing could have prepared me for the beauty of the land of Wisconsin and the warmth of her people! The gracious handing over of the ministry baton from Joanne Thomson, the vast amount of beautiful green landscape, the gracious welcoming from clergy and church leadership I've met, and the supportive embrace of Conference staff and colleagues has confirmed the rightness of my call to ministry among you.

In the hustle and bustle of unpacking while starting a new job it took me a while to actually attend church, to worship the Holy presence that brought me to this place in my life and who will accompany me in the days to come. I attended Community Church UCC in Middleton this morning by an invitation from church leadership. I found a welcoming congregation and a poignant message reminding me of the call to follow from Jesus to Simon and his fishing partners James and John, sons of Zebedee. Before and after Rev. Iliff's message, the congregation sang Will You Come and Follow Me? Will you come and follow me . . . will you leave yourself behind . . . will you love the "you" you hide if I but call your name? Will you go where you don't know . . . will you care for cruel and kind . . . will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?

The message touched me deeply. Not because I followed a call in ministry to another state but because I was reminded of Christ's love for us that is the foundation of a call to

discipleship. Discipleship, as Rev. Iliff explained, is a way of life. Often, the way of life following Jesus' teachings can take us to new and uncomfortable places.

Often in answering this call we ask "what are we supposed to do?" The clearest answer begins with gathering together as communities of faith. We follow in Jesus' teachings to love others as ourselves and to love God.

In my call to serve I know I am supposed to serve the church I love and work to support our clergy in their work. As our society changes and our churches are affected by those changes, the question of what we are supposed to do becomes more difficult to answer for both you and me.

In conversation with a trusted mentor, I was led to comedian Michael Jr.'s YouTube video "[Know Your Why](#)." Yes, we clergy can find our inspiration in surprising places! In the video, and I urge you to watch it, Michael Jr. demonstrates the importance of asking what your why is, rather than your what. Knowing your why will inspire you and provide you with purpose.

Why am I called to serve the church at large? Because even as it appears the old church is falling away, I deeply believe the Holy Spirit is calling us to something new and exciting, something we have not yet imagined! Why do I work to support the leadership of our churches? Because our clergy and lay leaders are serving at the front lines of the growing pains the church is experiencing. I profoundly believe in their work and have dedicated myself to supporting them as we move to a new embodiment of our lives with Christ.

As I seek to provide support in your work with the church, you are invited to join me in asking the question of why we gather together for the work of God.

Join with me in discovering what gives us purpose and inspiration as we walk together in the love of Christ.

In gratefulness,

Rev. Lorraine Cenicerros