

Interview with Dena Holland Neal on her role with the Northwest Association Committee on Ministry

How long have you been the COM chair for the Northwest Association and what does the committee do?

I have had the honor of serving as the Chair of the Northwest Association Committee on Ministry for five years. The position involves interaction with our churches, providing them with support in many different situations. We are also involved with the very rewarding work of guiding those currently in ministry and those considering ministry.

What have been the challenges?

As the COM Chair I have tried to overcome an earlier stigma that those coming before the COM were coming as punishment or to be chastised. As a result we often had difficulty getting people to attend our meetings. I have tried to stress to our clergy and congregations that our first desire is to provide support for them and to offer guidance when they are faced with difficult decisions within their churches. There have been times while serving our the COM when the Manual On Ministry does not directly address a particular situation, sometimes making it difficult to determine the best advice to offer.

Do you still struggle?

One year ago this month, in January 2019, that changed. Thanks to the vision of Rev. Dr. Toni Hawkins, the IKC Associate Conference Minister for Leadership Formation and Discernment, the Chairs of the COMs now have COMCast. One of the duties of COMCast is to be a resource that directly addresses difficult situations that arise in our Associations. We now have a venue that allows us to discuss those issues that arise. During our monthly meetings we have the expertise of Rev. Dr. Hawkins, as well our peers on the COMs. We now have an avenue to discuss those difficult situations. Sometimes it's just a matter of hearing that we are all on one accord with our decisions. Other times we are able to get a different perspective after our discussions.