

Dear friends,

My heart continues to sing after your vote to call me as your fourth settled Conference Minister. I cannot tell you how grateful I am for the faith you have placed in me. The whole day on Saturday was meaningful, collegial, educational, and spirit-filled.

Someone recently said that not many people like meetings, and especially on Saturday, but if that's what it takes to get us together for fellowship and relationship building, Saturday meetings just might be worth it. I would concur. Getting together for fun and fellowship might be harder to plan for and to get people to attend, but let's see if we cannot do some of that as well. Maybe an all-Conference picnic next summer? Maybe an all-Conference worship service – just because? You tell me what would mean the most to you and we'll see if we can't get something planned.

As I reflect more on the scripture from Isaiah 43, I think that God really is doing new things in Penn Northeast. We have forged some more positive relationships. We are learning to agree to disagree and move forward. We have begun to vision in the longer term, based on our core identity as a Conference – building relationships between churches, as reflected in Area Mission Councils; providing support for authorized ministers, through conversations and pastoral care; focusing on mission, through our Disaster Response Team and the Amigos de Guatemala. That is what I have learned about our core identity in Penn Northeast – relationships, support, and mission are important to us here. No matter what else we do, that is not going to change.

How we implement and nurture those core values may change, will change, as we explore new things together. More connections with the local church involves offering training, workshops, and activities around the conference. Sometimes we can do this face-to-face and sometimes we will have to rely on technology to make that happen. Forging some new partnerships with universities, colleges and community organizations will allow us to do that. Supporting authorized ministers' transitions as well as we offer more continuing education, more education for laity and members in discernment, conversations to determine needs and supports which will make it easier for our ministers to serve in our midst. Mission improves how our communities and the world see the church. It is vital that our actions in the public sphere reflect our love of God and our neighbors, all our neighbors. Issues of justice and mercy abound for us, as they did for Jesus. It is our call to love one another and impact the world in which we live. We may disagree about how to do that, but it is our call to **BE THE CHURCH** in the world.

I want you to know, if you don't already, that I really listen to the issues that matter to you, to the desires of your hearts, and to the joys and concerns you share. We will not always agree, but I will always listen. I pledge to you that I will serve this Conference to the best of my ability, now and in the days to come.

Blessings,
Bonnie