

**ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE**  
**CONFERENCE MINISTER REPORT**  
JULY 2021 – JUNE 2022

Dear Friends and Colleagues in the Rocky Mountain Conference,

I guess I should have understood that the COVID pandemic would drag on for at least a couple of years as we got on top of treatments and vaccinations – but in March 2020, I was hopeful that 4 months would see it pass. This week I understand the U.S. has seen over 1 million deaths with over 6 million worldwide. Our churches continue to wrestle with in-person service, some have taken to a permanent model of hybrid (in-person/video), and others are reassessing their ministries and what it means to be the very presence of Christ in the midst of such profound, widespread and enduring trauma.

To each of our lay leaders who have hung in there through thick and thin, to each of our clergy members who have continued their ministries through travails, to each of our members who have continued to give of their time, their talents, their treasure...I offer the Holy Spirit my most extreme gratitude. What a faithful cloud of witness are in our midst.

### **RMC Highlights**

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Any given year in the Conference's life involves more activities than can easily be digested in a short report; herewith are the highlights of the Conference this past year.

#### **Conference Staffing**

2021 saw the welcoming of Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott as our new Associate Conference Minister. In addition to the more traditional duties of an ACM – search and call, crisis assistance, and conflict mediation – Anthony has the special ministry of mounting an Anti-Racist Culture Shift throughout the Conference. He is a welcome addition to our staff, and you can read more of his activities in his report.

Rev. Erin Gilmore continues on in her ACM position, and now, after five years of contribution, is off on her well-earned sabbatical commencing May 22, 2022. We wish Erin well during this time of rest and rejuvenation. Anthony and I will cover Erin's projects while she is away.

In the fall of 2021, Daryl Schreiber who had been Director of Communications, left for another position. David Bristow of Vista Grande UCC in Colorado Springs has stepped forward to volunteer his time to manage our communications and data platforms. We are grateful for the time Daryl spent with us, and now to David who is bringing new skills and organizational talents to our shared ministries.

Melissa McCarl and Janice Travis round out our team – both part-time. Janice has been on medical leave for a good part of April and May, and we are looking forward to her return.

Melissa is the one who entertains us during roll call votes with her witty and charming delivery. In total the team we have assembled is nimble and fun and gets the work done. I'm grateful for each of these wonderful people.

### **RMC Conference Annual Celebration – June 2021**

For the second year, our Annual Celebration was held virtually due to concerns of COVID spread. Valerie Kaur was our keynoter and spoke about her Revolutionary Love work. The gathered delegation passed bylaw revisions, clergy compensation changes, voted in a new fiscal year (July – June instead of a calendar year), passed the 2021-2022 budget, and elected officers and committee members. Minutes of the meeting are available on the 2022 Annual Celebration link on [rmcucc.org](http://rmcucc.org).

### **General Synod – July 2021**

For the first time in the life of the denomination, our General Synod was held electronically, which provided benefits of being able to reach more people, and difficulties in managing what usually happens in breakout sessions around water coolers. Still, a good Synod all around, and we are grateful to our Synod delegation who attended.

### **Board Retreat – September 2021**

The 2021-2022 Board, led by Judy Baillie of Christ Congregational UCC in Pueblo, gathered for an in-person retreat in Laramie, Wyoming, hosted by St. John's UCC and their pastor, Rev. Ken Ingram. Discussions of key objectives for the 2021-2022 were discussed and undertaken.

### **Real Estate Matters**

Managing the liquidation of real estate was a central objective in 2021/2022. In October 2021 we sold the office parking lot on the northeast corner of 5<sup>th</sup> & Lipan for \$600,000. In late January 2022, we closed the sale of 2500 S Sheridan (the former Christ Congregational Church in Denver) for \$1,117,656 to the Denver Good News Church with net of roughly \$1,000,000 after all expenses of holding and maintaining the building are counted.

Some of the proceeds of these sales have been set aside for renewing and emerging ministries (see Tributary Fund comments); some funds have been used to underwrite the Anti-Racism Ministry, and continued funding of the Conference's shared ministries.

The Conference retains the office building at 1140 W 5<sup>th</sup> as it continues to grow in value in the fast-paced Denver market.

A policy for use of these God-send funds and for acceptance of real estate from churches are currently being worked on by the Conference's Finance Committee and Board of Directors.

### **Tributary Funds for New Churches, New Ministries and Church Renewal**

The first class of Tributary Fund awards received their grants in 2021: an initial award of \$60,000 with additional awards of \$17,000 in early 2022. Awardees: Juniper Formation – a new church start; Rock Center – a youth ministry outgrowth of Parkview UCC; Makerspace – a facilitation of new ideas and processes for Church 3.0; "Jesus Has Left the Building" – a podcast

for “nones and dones” and a new ministry outgrowth of Black Forest UCC; Midvale EFKS New Jerusalem UCC program for Pacific/Asian youth -- a youth ministry outgrowth of New Jerusalem in Salt Lake City. Reports from the Tributary Fund awardees will be made on Friday night of Annual Celebration Business Meeting, June 10<sup>th</sup>.

The new class of Tributary grantees will be announced at Annual Celebration 2022; applications were due at the end of April 2022.

## **Strategic Initiatives**

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- **Anti-Racism Culture Shift**

The only sustainable way to end the racism woven into the fabric of our communities is through a culture shift, which incorporates an inspection of one’s own values, the shared community values, and the alignment of those with the intentions of a loving God. There is not a map which outlines this uncharted territory, and we are underway learning how to do this difficult and critical work for our shared wellbeing. Anthony heads this work.

- **Conference-Wide Committee on Ministry**

In late 2021, bylaw changes were made at a special all-RMC meeting to build the Provisional Conference-Wide Committee on Ministry. The work is not simply to consolidate the authorization of ministry work done by the five associations, but to bring new practices and approaches of deep discernment to this work which is critical to the life of the ministry of the United Church of Christ. The CWCOM started its work in early 2022, and is quickly building new practices and approaches to ensure best practices in ministry authorization and accountability. Erin heads this work.

- **Rural Church Support**

COVID has taken a toll on many of our churches and perhaps nowhere more harshly than in our rural churches. Keeping in mind both our call to care for the disenfranchised and vulnerable, and the reality that abandoning the rural church often leaves the community to the gospel of hate (Bishop Mark MacDonald – United Church of Canada), in 2022/2023 we are taking on the work of determining how best to reinforce these churches that hold open a space of love and belonging in our frontier regions.

- **Generosity and Funding Matter**

The ministries we share collectively across the Conference matter – the work that we do to support one another matters. All of this needs funding, and we believe that funders are seeking well-heeled partners to nurture healthy communities of justice. In the fall of 2022, given passage of the 2022-2023 Budget, a position will be added to the RMC staff to write grants for the important community-shaping ministries we do in our localities, and to run campaigns of generosity for the Conference. These funding initiatives will translate into greater support for all of our local churches.

- **In the Mud Grants**

Our “In The Mud” grants continue to provide exciting avenues for churches to explore new ministries outside their own church walls. For 2022, the application will commence after the Annual Celebration. Watch mcucc.org for details.

## **UCC Covenant**

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- Connections with fellow conference ministers and with our wider church bodies – National setting and UCC Financial Ministries – continue to be strong.
- I concluded a 3-year term as Treasurer of the Council of Conference Ministers and the CCM Cabinet. I also stepped off the Cornerstone Fund Board and the CUE Board of Directors (Chicago, United and Eden – a funding consortium). In part, these departures allow a new generation of leaders the opportunities to serve, and in part I simply want to focus my attention on the priorities of the Rocky Mountain Conference.
- I continue to serve on the Board of Trustees for Eden Theological Seminary.

## **Looking Forward**

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I have heard nay-sayers proclaim that the toss and tumble of the past few years may be the death of the church. I hold no such notion; in fact, I believe the greatest opportunities for the church are ahead of us. We are being called to re-think and re-vision church right now – there is no “going back” to what was our way of being church before March 2020 – our opportunity is to seize new ways to do meaningful mission work together even when apart; our opportunity is to reach new hearts that we might never meet in person, and open those hearts to a new future. In what new way will you start doing ministry? How will you reach out in ways never tried before? This is a day of new beginnings...how will you seize the day?

This year the Conference embraced the theme “Church Anew 2”, continuing the work we started in 2021. I believe the capacity for our churches to reach new communities has never been greater -- I believe people are yearning for ways to connect both in person and virtually – and I believe no one is more deft and gifted at providing safe and loving containers for people to gather and learn to love one another than the local church. Dear ones, we were made and called for a time such as this, and as we continue forward to find the new ways to spread Christ’s gospel of love, I know that the Spirit will not let us down.

Thank you for entrusting me with this sacred work.

In the Spirit of the Living Christ,

Rev. Sue Artt  
Conference Minister  
Rocky Mountain Conference, United Church of Christ  
May 5, 2022