

Edition 1 March 2, 2023

Dear members and friends of Rocky Mountain Conference,

It has been a most difficult and painful season for us in the Rocky Mountain Conference. This letter to you, originally meant to be a response to the February 9 special meeting, has been revised and revised and revised yet again as the circumstances have continued to change.

After a long and arduous few months, we now find ourselves on the other side of losing two beloved staff members in Rev. Sue Artt and Rev. Dr. Anthony Scott. We want to acknowledge the grief and pain that you have shared with us surrounding the termination of Dr. Scott. We want to acknowledge the grief and pain that surrounds Rev. Artt's last weeks among us and the difficulty of not getting to say goodbye and of not getting to celebrate the many lasting gifts of her time among us. We recognize that we as a conference have much to learn and much to repair.

The first acknowledgement is that we know we need to work on communication. This has been repeated in every session we have had as we have reflected on, not just the February 9 meeting, but on our Conference-wide communications about everything. We know that the structure of the February 9 meeting was communicated in two different ways and there was confusion. We are sorry and we have pledged to do better, beginning with the creation of this newsletter, Together.

While today's newsletter contains only this letter from us to you, we plan to publish Together every week as a way to share pastoral reflection, Board and Association news, event notifications, CWCOM updates and other information that will help us be better connected and informed as a Conference.

Second, we want to share that this past Monday, the Board met for a heartfelt conversation that started with listening to one another express the many feelings we each are experiencing as well as our vision for what is the next, best right step for us as a Board and for the Conference as a whole. We recognize that knowing what we know today there are things we may have done differently. And, there are things that even if we had wanted to, we could not have done differently. We share in your pain because we are feeling it too. We share in your desire for us to do better going forward because we know that is what you want as well for our Conference.

As a Board we have discerned our next meeting needs to be in person so we can expand relationships with one another after three years of COVID restrictions. This will offer spaciousness for further reflection, prayer and learning. As a right next step for the conference, we recognized quickly that we do not have the answers, nor would it be our place to try to provide answers without deeply listening to the members of this Conference and from there creating additional steps into the future together. And so prior to our own gathering in April, we want to open up space for all of us to listen to one another. Some of these will be in person and, for logistics sake in order to hear as many voices as possible, some of these listening circles will be on Zoom. Our hope is that these circles will be filled with generous listening with one another and with God.

While not an extensive list, we do want to acknowledge what we have heard so far:

- We have heard from many different perspectives that trust is broken.
- We have heard that we need to examine the structures of our conference and how they are complicit in institutional racism
- We have heard that clear, intentional and frequent communication is necessary for a healthy sense of community and to avoid a perception of secrecy.

- We have heard there are discrepancies and confusion around how we interpret our bylaws
- We have heard surprise in learning the power of the Conference Minister to terminate other ministerial staff
- We have heard that there is a lack of communication and perception of secrecy in board dealings.
- We have heard there is a need for more frequent communication

Having reflected on all that we have heard from one another and from you, we can honestly say we don't know the whole path forward, but we believe the right next step is to continue to listen to one another and to the Spirit as we seek to define what is next.

And so we come to you today, less with statements and more with mutual curiosity:

- What does trust look like going forward?
- How do we repair what has been broken?
- What is each of ours to take responsibility for?
- What would we do differently?
- How do we as the board and as a conference become more transparent and inclusive of all partners in this covenant?
- How can we learn from the impact of the separation and how can we avert a similar event and reaction in the future?
- What do we need to do to promote self care of our staff and encourage the same throughout the conference?
- What changes need to be made to our policies and procedures?
- What does the path forward look like? What are the steps?
- What do we want to be able to say about the conference in three months? In a year?

We know that in the United Church of Christ, we hold dear the covenant that has brought us together. We don't take it lightly and we pray that you will join us as we seek to walk in covenant, to repair, rebuild and be made stronger to respond to the needs in our communities and in the world to which God is needing us to show up—Together. We also invite you to forward this to others of the Rocky Mountain Conference who may not have received this email so they know they can read this letter and sign up for Together by completing the form on <https://rmcucc.org/connect/> or sending an email to connect@rmcucc.org

Praying for grace,

Rev. Ken Ingram
 Mark Dutell
 Mark Long
 Rev. Wendy Kidd
 Rev. James Foucher
 Eleanor Downey
 Adam McCoy
 David Bristow
 Rev. Daniel Haas
 Rev. Gail McDougale
 Rev. Erin Gilmore
 Rev. Dr. Diane Weible