



October 27, 2023

## Dear Rocky Mountain Conference,

It's hard to know where to begin so I will simply start with this: my heart is heavy with many emotions. This has been incredibly painful year in the Rocky Mountain Conference. I know through conversation with many of you the reasons for the pain are varied. I know there are still open wounds that have not healed and now there may be new wounds that have not yet been named. I know the grief that continues to live in me and I have no doubt that lives in you as well. I know relationships are still broken and the work of mending them is ongoing. I know some of you have had to step away from all that is happening to maintain your capacity to continue to show up well in your setting. I know many of you still have questions about what has happened and now may have new questions about where we go from here.



As I step into this role of Acting Conference Minister there are a few of things I want to share in this continued season of transition.

1. As Acting Conference Minister my role does not include being an Interim. That said, I believe there are necessary interim tasks for this conference to work through: coming to terms with our history, both recent and past, discovering and claiming a new identity, and developing a shared vision of our future as a conference. As one who has been part of this setting for most of my ministry, I know that it would not be wise for me to be the one to lead this work. I also know from working with congregations in transition that finding trained intentional interims is becoming increasingly difficult. Just as I helped congregations find creative and new ways to ensure the interim tasks are accomplished, I am committed to helping the RMC Board do the same, including identifying people from outside the system with expertise who can accompany the conference in carrying out these interim tasks.

2. As Acting Conference Minister my role is to further the ongoing ministry of the conference. That said, in one year we have gone from 3 full time Conference Ministry positions to 1 full time position. I know that I cannot and should not try do all the work of a Conference Minister and two Associate Conference Ministers. As I said in my original letter to you as I was stepping down from the ACM position, even if we had the resources to continue with 3 full time staff, I don't believe that model is the most effective or faithful way to carry out our ministry together. In 2014 at the Annual Celebration in Grand Junction we talked about moving from a "hub" model in which the conference office/staff was at the center of our structure and spokes went out to individual churches, to a "network" model in which leadership came from multiple centers with connections between various settings within the conference. As is true of every setting of the church, I believe we are being called to reimagine what

ministry is most essential and vital within the setting of the conference and how to most faithfully carryout that ministry.

As we seek identify and live into a different model of leadership, I will necessarily need to prioritize what gets my attention in the next few months. With help from the RMC Board the immediate priorities are going to be continued support for the Conference Committee on Ministry, working with churches currently in transition, supervising staff, and beginning to explore different models for carrying out traditional tasks of conference staff. As needs arise I will be working with the RMC Board to identify people within our conference who can help in this time of transition.

3. I do not find it a coincidence that the very first thing I did as Acting Conference Minister was to participate in a retreat with the Anti-Racism Ministry Team. As you will read in their report included in this newsletter, we must recognize and own that in the last 3 years we, as a conference, have hired and fired two African American clergy. As I think back to the work of the task force that was formed as a result of the murder of George Floyd, and the 8 point plan that we developed, and the subsequent approval of the funding for an anti-racism ministry which included the creation of a new staff position, I remember how excited I was for us to be embarking on this new ministry. 3 years later, in the wake of all the harm that has been done, it is my fervent hope that we will not abandon this work, but rather, that we will commit to deeper examination of the racial trauma that resides within each of us and to identifying and dismantling the racism that exists in each of our particular contexts.

In all that transpired since last November I have continually gone back to these words that a member of our conference shared with me and a few others many months ago, "...When we choose to address white supremacy (or patriarchal values or heteronormativity and more) we step into a maelstrom of raging feelings, few models of success, and all the foibles of being human. No wonder we fail so frequently. We will have to endure many more failures before we develop systems that bring about our values and vision." And so it is my hope that we do not let this failure cause us to fear failing again. We must continue to fail forward if we are to be the church the carpenter from Nazareth calls us to be.

I said at the beginning of this letter, my heart is heavy with many emotions. It is also full of trust in the God whose best work is often done amidst the broken pieces of individual and communal lives. For whatever time I am in this position, it is my prayer that my gifts and my presence can help accomplish what God seeks to do in and through us as the Rocky Mountain Conference. I ask for your continued prayers, your patience, and your participation as we seek to be faithful together.

In gratitude,  
Rev Erin Gilmore Acting Conference Minister  
Rocky Mountain conference, UCC

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## Called Special Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Conference

November 28, 2023 at 6:30pm, via Zoom  
Register [HERE](#)

### Our reason for gathering

At our business meeting of the Annual Celebration in Grand Junction June 15-17, 2023, the gathered body asked the Finance Committee and the RMC Board to rework the 23-24 Budget and to bring back for approval at this Special Conference Meeting in November. In addition, November marks the end of 2-year period for the Provisional Committee on Ministry of the Conference, and is now coming before the conference to be considered a standing committee of the Conference.

As with an Annual Meeting of the Conference, voting members include all persons holding authorized ministerial standing in an Association of the Conference, lay delegates from each church within the

Rocky Mountain Conference, and members of the Rocky Mountain Conference Board of Directors.

The agenda for the meeting is as follows:

- Opening Prayer
- Establish a Quorum
- Proposed FY '23-'24 Budget (linked [HERE](#)) along with a brief explanation ([HERE](#)). To further assist with your review, find the June 2023 balance sheet [HERE](#), and the June 2023 Financial Report [HERE](#).
- Conference-Wide Committee on Ministry/Proposed Bylaw Amendments (available [HERE](#))
- Establishing a Member-at-Large position on the Nominating Committee
- Roll Call Vote
- Update on Transition
- Blessing
- Adjourn

We look forward to seeing everyone on Tuesday

Thank you,

Rev. Dr. Sarah Linn  
Moderator, Rocky Mountain Conference Board of Directors

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## **Update from the Anti-Racism Ministry Team**

Dearly Beloved,

I'm writing to you on behalf of the Anti-Racism Ministry Team of the Conference. Many of us were able to gather this past week at La Foret for a time of retreat and discernment. Our 2023-24 team includes Amanda Newsome, Rev. Karen Winkel, Rev. Chris Gilmore, Rev. Ian Wrisley, Phylis Boyd, Eleanor Downey, Pat Dolin, and myself Rev. Thandiwe Dale-Ferguson.

In many ways, it feels like we are starting afresh. We realize that our team was formed in a top-down manner, with decisions made by the former Board and Staff rather than arising out of the expressed concerns, hopes, and priorities of the Conference -- all of you. In light of this, one of our priorities is to spend time listening and being in conversation with you at the beginning of the new year. How are you and your congregation living into God's call in our wider world? What are the needs and hurts of your community to which your congregation is responding or wanting to respond? Where and how does racism fit into the larger picture of justice and love of neighbor? Please be on the lookout for dates and times for these focused conversations. Clergy, you can expect a phone call from one of us inviting you and several of your church leaders into these conversations. Thank you for helping us discern where and how we fit into the needs and hopes of our large, diverse Conference.

We have also been wrestling with our name. How might we best articulate with transparency the work to which we feel called--work that acknowledges the reality of individual and institutional racism within our Conference, while also humbly holding that we are in many different places on this journey?

We also feel we would be remiss if we did not address with some directness the reality that over the last three years, we, as a Conference have hired and fired two African American clergy. We confess that racism has been at play (in very different ways) in both these situations and that we have caused

harm. We also want to name that the circumstances of Rev. Dr. Scott's departure and Rev. Dr. Wooten's departure have been very very different. We grieve with and ask your prayers for Rev. Dr. Doug Wooten who has recently been asked to leave the leadership of our Conference. We give thanks for the prayerful discernment of our Board in seeking to lead us in faithfulness and courage. And we hold with great humility and tenderness the reality of racism within our Conference and wider world.

We look forward to being in conversation and continuing discernment with you. Please keep our team and our shared work with your setting in your personal and congregational prayers.

In hope and peace,

Your Anti-Racism Ministry Team

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## Resources & Wisdom Sharing for Moderators

Church Moderators (and co- and vice- and -elect, etc!) are invited to join us for our monthly Moderators gatherings on Zoom! This is an excellent time to connect with other lay leaders to share resources, wisdom, and brainstorm together. For more information or to be added to the Moderators email list, please reach out to Lay Leader Liaison, Laura Gurney ([laura@firstconggreeley.com](mailto:laura@firstconggreeley.com)).

Our next meeting will be Thursday, November 30 from 6:30-8pm and will be an open conversation. Please bring your questions for other lay leaders and join us as we share ideas, questions, and solutions from across the conference! (<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82491627642>)

**PLYMOUTH**  
CONGREGATIONAL UCC

Save the Date!

*Gathering at the  
Threshold*

Honoring the passageways, conduits, connectors,  
and space between what was and what could be.

**Installation Service**

*The Rev. Dr. Marta Fioriti*  
*Associate Minister*

**Sunday, November 12 at 11 a.m.**  
Clergy robe \* Reception following

preachers:  
Rev. Dr. Mandy Todd  
Rev. Erin Gilmore  
Rev. Thandiwe  
Dale-Ferguson

plymouthucc.org

## Christ Congregational in Pueblo

Christ Congregational in Pueblo is giving away the pictured objects. If you are interested in obtaining them, please contact Sharon Gilbert, co-moderator, [sharon879@comcast.com](mailto:sharon879@comcast.com). Please arrange for pickup or delivery.



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Previous versions of the Together Newsletter can be found [here](#).