

Report from Acting Conference Minister Rev. Kris Bergstrom



BRING YOU WARM GREETINGS from your Conference staff.

Let me begin by thanking you all for your continued partnership. Your willingness to remain in covenant throughout the challenging pandemic years, as well as the countless subsequent changes, continues to sustain our Conference in meaningful ways. Despite all we've been through, we believe God is leading us into a bright future.

During the last years of challenge and transition, your Conference staff has redoubled their efforts to strengthen essential Conference core functions as we continue to support search and call, Associations and Committees on Ministry, clergy and congregations, the administration and stewardship of Conference resources, and the work of the Board of Directors. In these efforts we have witnessed the promise of Isaiah 43:19: "See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

We are grateful to have witnessed so many of those "new things" happening across our Conference...

- Church search committees selected new pastors (35 clergy changes in the last two years)
- Church councils created new ways of hosting worship services and doing the business of church.
- Church congregations have created greater access to services and programming while also widening their welcome to a more diverse community.

The SCNC Board of Directors named racial equity, inclusion, and diversity as a primary area of focus in the Conference. To support this commitment, the Board took the following steps:

- Engaged the services of Rev. Chad Tanaka Pack as the Consulting Minister for racial justice, equity, and inclusion to support the Board, clergy, and congregations.
- Dedicated time in their monthly meetings to engage in related training and discussion to guide decision-making
- Hosted a variety of conversations around racial equity, inclusion and diversity.

We learned that the operational health and sustainability of the Conference needed attention. To that end the following steps have been taken or are in process:

- Engaged an outside accounting firm to work with staff on financial oversight procedures, reporting, and management of operations; demystified the Conference balance sheet with greater transparency and use of standard accounting practices.
- Working with the Board of Directors, processes continue to clarify the ownership of property and actions are being taken to assure that deeds reflect the appropriate owner.
- Working with the Board Committee to assure good stewardship of property as a resource and to develop consistent processes for decision making on how to best utilize this potential resource for mission.
- Supported the Board of Directors in mission clarification around Conference ownership of property. The Board recognizes that property management is not the mission of the Conference and has agreed to discontinue the practice of the Conference as loan or lease agent for properties.
- Remediating past practice of deficit spending by increasing internal controls as well as re-engaging member churches to encourage faithful per capita giving and contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM).
- Increased communication with and support for clergy and congregations.
- Providing opportunities for clergy and congregations to participate in a variety of topics (reimagining the future of the church, church mergers, church membership, small churches, anti-racism.)

In a denomination that is centered on covenant, relationships matter. Significant time has been spent on reconnecting and reengaging relationships with SCNC clergy and congregations.

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We are concluding a season of preparation as we anticipate the election and transition of a new, settled Conference Minister.

- The Conference Minister Search Committee will present their recommendation on June 10, 2023 at the Annual Gathering.
- It is anticipated that the new Conference Minister will begin their call in the fall of 2023.

ANNUAL GATHERING & THE SEARCH FOR A SETTLED CONFERENCE MINISTER

This year's theme emerged as staff, board members, and the Annual Gathering Planning Team has been encouraged by the countless stories of challenge, resilience, and transformation throughout the Conference. Those stories will be shared when we gather in June, and we pray that you, too, will see the new things God is doing. As we prepare for this year's Annual Gathering and all that it entails for those attending either in-person or via Zoom, (worship, workshops, speakers, and the business of the Conference), we also anticipate **the Conference Minister Search Committee will be presenting their recommendation for our new, settled Conference Minister**, which means you'll have an opportunity to participate in that important election.

MANY THANKS TO THE CONFERENCE TEAM

Your Conference team continues to focus on providing service and support to our members in Las Vegas and Southern California. This Conference is the beneficiary of their countless efforts.

Virginia Arroyo (she, her) This year marks Virginia's 36th year of service and support in our Conference. She continues to be a source of wisdom and institutional memory as she manages a broad scope of administrative and search and call functions. Virginia is a full-time employee.

Stella Perez (she, her) Stella's role as account clerk has proven to be a critical component of a larger effort to organize and demystify Conference finances and realign related functions. She coordinates our income and expenses with a part-time accountant and the Conference Treasurer. Stella is a part-time employee.

Edith Guffey (she, her) After serving the United Church of Christ for over 30 years, Edith brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to our team as she serves as the Project Manager for Administration (which supports the stewardship of property and financial resources, as well as Annual Gathering and General Synod). Her previous roles include Conference Minister for the Kansas Oklahoma Conference, Associate Conference Minister for the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, and Chief Operating Officer for the United Church of Christ National Setting. Edith is a half-time employee, working remotely from her home in Kansas, and traveling to our region as needed.

Rev. Ellis Arnold (they/them) Rev. Ellis Arnold joined our team to serve as our Associate Conference Minister (designated-term) and brings their heart and experience as a chaplain, renewing church pastor, curriculum writer, community organizer, and all-around church nerd. With a desire to serve the Wider Church, Ellis served as one of the Associate Conference Ministers for the Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota Conferences of the UCC, where their energy was channeled into collaboration with Committees on Ministry and congregations who were striving to transform not just the three feet around them, but also their communities and the world into a more just, generous, liberated place. Ellis is now supporting our Associations, Committees on Ministry, the Conference

Ethics Team, as well as general office data management. Ellis is a half-time employee, working remotely from their home in Iowa, and traveling to our region as needed.

Chad Tanaka Pack (he/him) Chad serves the Conference as the Consulting Minister for Racial Justice, Equity, and Inclusion for about 10 hours each week. In the past he served on boards of directors of several faith-based organizations striving for racial justice and LGBTQ equality. While in New York City, Chad worked as a minister at Middle Collegiate Church and an associate minister at Marble Collegiate Church. In Los Angeles, he now works with the Homeless Veterans Project at Inner City Law Center. Chad consults with SCNC ministers, lay leaders, and the Board of Directors to offer resources and support for anti-racism efforts in the Church.