



# CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE

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## UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

### 57<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL MEETING CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST CONFERENCE MINISTER REPORT

An unofficial ‘mantra’ that I believe has shaped our ministry together as the Central Atlantic Conference over the past year (and a half-truth be told) is being the church of Jesus Christ “at such a time as time as this.” This phrase is part of a message from Mordecai to Queen Esther when the Jewish exiles were at risk of being executed in Persia (Esther 4:14). Thinking back to this verse and the theme of this year’s Annual Meeting “Remember, Renew, Rejoice.” I could not help but reflect on our year together since our last Annual Meeting. What a year it has been. What a time it is - a tumultuous Presidential election still tarnished by lies of fraud, an attempted coup and attack not only on the Capitol but this country’s democratic principles, the dogged persistence of America’s original sin of racism and attempts to maintain white supremacy now through massive attempts at voter suppression, the threat to women rights posed by the essential overturning of the Roe vs. Wade decision in Texas, more disasters in more places brought on by climate change, and oh yes, there is now a resurgence of COVID-19 and its variants costing more and more lives thanks to those seeing the pandemic as a means to widen political divides rather than coming together to address the global health crisis that it is. This year, and the times in which we live, sometimes, in the words of Marvin Gaye’s classic *Inner-City Blues*, ‘make me want to holler, throw up both my hands.’”

But as tempting as it is at times to throw up my hands, I do not, Central Atlantic Conference because I continue to be inspired and frankly marvel at our ministry together - by our pastors who are steadfastly shepherding our churches through a multiplicity of pandemics - by our ministers serving as Chaplains, Seminary professors, and other specialized settings, some of who remain on the very front lines of COVID-19 - by our Church Councils or similar governing bodies, especially those in churches during pastoral transitions, who provide stability and leadership during anxious times - by our members, who faithfully show up and support the ministry of the United Church of Christ in the giving of their time, talent, and treasure - by our Association Councils who lead and connect our churches with one another - by our Committees on Ministry that perform the vital tasks of discerning calls to authorized ministry in the United Church of Christ and supporting the ministry of churches. I am deeply grateful for all who, in the words of my ancestors, are keeping ‘Their Hand on the Plow’ and are working in faith and courage to bring forth God’s reign in this branch of Zion that is the Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ. Thank you all for being the church of Jesus Christ ‘at such a time as this.’”

Although this writing is less than almost three quarters into 2021, at many levels it was felt like a full year already, particularly in staff transitions. We began 2021 by saying farewell to Rev. Dr. Audrey Price and beginning a search for a new Associate Conference Minister for Leadership

Development. In May we called the Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice to serve, and since beginning with us in August she has 'hit the ground running', already being a blessing in her call and providing ministerial support to the Catocin and Shenandoah Associations. The New Jersey Association and our churches in Eastern Maryland continue to be served proficiently by Rev. Nelson Murphy, a prayerful, prophetic, and pastoral presence to the churches, leadership, and members. Rev. Marvin Silver has just returned from a well-deserved sabbatical and continues to bless the Potomac and Shenandoah Associations and the Conference through his work with the Justice and Witness Action Network. During Marvin's sabbatical our Conference experienced the blessing of the spirituality, insight, and joyful presence of Rev. Aubra Love as Acting Conference Minister, and the passion for justice and vibrant spirit of Minister Kecia Munroe, a recent graduate of Lancaster Theological Seminary and a member in Discernment, as Social Justice Associate. At this writing I am pleased that say that after many months we are at full staffing, complemented by our Administrative staff of Tristan Battle, Angela Megna, Ginger Glasser, and Rev. Darryl Moch who not only serves as Dean of our Communities of Practice but convenes and directs the talented souls who come together as the CAC Mass Choir. I appreciate at several levels our Conference Ministry Team and Administrative Staff who continue to serve our Conference faithfully 'at such a time as this.'

It is vital to the health of any organization to have strong leadership at its' Board level. The Central Atlantic Conference has been blessed for the last two years to have had that in the person of Ms. Janese Murray. Janese has been a dedicated and Spirit-filled presence, and our Board has been both productive and prolific thanks to her strategic and diligent direction, leading the Board through a Strategic Planning process, improving governance and nominating processes, and in this year's Annual Meeting working with our Leadership and Governance Working Group to present long overdue changes to our Conference's Constitution and By-Laws. Our Board and our Conference owes a debt of gratitude to Janese for her good work, and here I would like to add my personal thanks and appreciation. I also thank here several stalwart members of our Board whose terms are coming to an end in this Annual Meeting: Rev. Dr. Rob Apgar-Taylor, Rev. Anne Holmes, Mr. Steve Matthias, and Ms. Maria Blair. Our Board of Directors will be blessed with the additions of Rev. Dr. Kirk Johnson, Rev. Jessica Townsley, Mr. David Nau, and Mr. Rod Chamberlain, as well as the leadership of Mr. Doug White and Rev. Cynthia Robinson and President and Vice-President respectively. I give thanks to our members of the Board of Directors – past, present, and future, who answered the call to leadership of our Conference 'at such a time as this.'

Thanks to the good work of the Board, we have made progress in the Strategic Plan adopted in our Annual Meeting last year. As customary in such matters, both internal and external changes created modifications in the timing of some action items, but we are largely on course with our action items and goals. Here I also thank you, Central Atlantic Conference for your support through your contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission ("OCWM") and the other '5 for 5' offerings that support ours and the national setting of the United Church of Christ. We cannot do the work we do for our congregations without you and ask for you for your continued support so that our Conference can bear witness as the United Church of Christ 'at such a time as this.'

In addition to implementing action items in our Strategic Plan, my goals in 2022 will be focused on: 1) equipping the ministry of existing and new congregations, particularly as we prayerfully move toward a post-pandemic world and capitalize on what it means to be the church both physically and virtually; 2) seeking and implementing ways to sustain and increase pastoral excellence and especially to provide support for our pastors who are weary from taking on additional roles because of COVID-19; 3) continuing to put in place an administrative and organizational structure that will best serve our churches and other settings, and 4) work in nurture not only our covenantal relationships but our spiritual relationships among our settings of the United Church of Christ. In addition to my calling with the Conference I continue to serve on the Board of the Church Building and Loan Fund, am Vice-Chair of the newly created Board of Trustees for Lancaster Theological Seminary, which voted earlier this year on a union with Moravian University, and continues to serve as Vice-Chair of the Nominating Committee for the Council of Conference Ministers, which places my colleagues on Boards, Committees and Task Forces throughout the UCC. It is a privilege to represent both the Conference and the United Church of Christ in these places 'at such a time as this.'

All things considered, and there is much, the ministry of this Conference over the past year has been a joy to behold. I am joyful for all the ways that all of you continue to Be the Church, specifically the United Church of Christ, 'blooming where you are planted (Jer. 29:4-7)' in all the places you are and serve. And it is my great joy to serve as your Conference Minister. I love you all and give thanks to God for you all for being the Central Atlantic Conference 'at such a time as this.'

Blessings and Shalom,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Freeman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rev. Freeman L. Palmer  
Conference Minister