



CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

57th Annual Meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference Associate Conference Minister Report- Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice

October 2021

Philippians 1:3-11 I thank my God every time I remember you.

In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy.

As I sit to write these words to you- words of excitement and gratitude, busyness and challenge- I do so with the understanding that I have just undergone just a month in this role as ACM with support to Shenandoah and Catoclin associations. In that time, I have met multitudes of hard-working servants of God who are committed to a church that is vibrant and reflective of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The words that echo in my heart as I reflect on the meetings, churches, committees, and staff are simple: deep and wide. Deep faith and a wide sense of welcome & pride best articulate my experience. I cannot fully express how grateful I am to be working alongside you and contributing to the outstanding work this conference does in our corner of the world.

Search and Call - Catoclin & Shenandoah Associations Pastoral transitions remain steadily active in the Catoclin and Shenandoah associations. Pandemic, as well as other factors, have left us with challenges as pastors, especially interims, are in short supply. Likewise, the situation common in our associations' churches are limited financial resources and an aging/shrinking membership. For that reason, I am trying to work alongside churches to promote resource sharing. That isn't the same as a charge or a merger. It is utilizing the covenant we share to tackle limitations like very part-time work and youth education. I have dedicated my unscheduled Sundays to visiting churches on my search and call roster, and I will continue to do so as I connect with search committees and transition teams both virtually and (safely) in person.

I have been grateful to share in the ordination and installation of Kinley Summers, pastor at Trinity UCC in Timberville, VA on September 25th and the reception of Rick Bishop into the community of faith at Christ Reformed in Sharpsburg, MD on September 26th.

Communities of Practice- I am very proud to be tasked, along with Dean Darryl Moch, with the ongoing building and sustainment of this very important program for clergy support and growth. These facilitated groups create a measurable impact in both the professional and personal life balance of clergy. The work of pastoring- whether it be within the walls of a church or another ministry setting- can often be a solitary affair. This program creates a web of support, a well for educational learning, and an opportunity for engagement in the common struggles of our professional life as well as team approach in examining such challenges.

As we enter our fourth year this October, the program continues to attract participants. Our existing ten groups: Bivocational/Multiracial, Catoctin Association CoP, Chesapeake Association CoP, Delaware CoP, New Jersey CoP #1 &2, Pastors/Clergy with Children, Retirees CoP, Transitions CoP, Members In Discernment CoP, and (Assist/Assoc/Interim/etc) Clergy have been joined by five new groups: African American Women in Ministry, LGBTQA+/SGL Clergy, Chaplain/Chaplain Educators, New to UCC/New Church Starts CoP, and Shenandoah CoP. The intentional creation of communities of practice centered in underrepresented groups keeps us centered in the awareness of our diverse clergy and the challenges facing them that are often invisible to many. I encourage you to register for one of these groups, at a very affordable \$250 for 10 months or \$25.00 per month or encourage your pastor to participate by offering to underwrite this cost. The return on your investment will be tenfold- if not more!

UCC Polity/UCC Polity Teachers' Network I have been impressed by the gifts of the talented people who lend their time and talent to this educational program. Rev. Daniel Sack, Rev. Amber Neuroth, and Francis Smith facilitate UCC Theology, History and Ministry, Governance. This essential program is designed for candidates seeking authorization or ordination in the CAC. These institutes provide a low-cost, content-rich training that fulfills the UCC Polity requirement necessary for ordination. In the spirit of living in an ever-changing world, the facilitators of this program are currently in the process of evaluating and updating the curricula of these courses. Look for communications advertising their Fall session to be released soon.

Chairs of CoM- I am humbled to gather the chairs of each association's Committee (or Commission) on Ministry each month for conversation, communication, and dedication to the ongoing spiritual development and maintenance of our churches. This year we are turning our eye to the Manual on Ministry and examining each section of the second chapter. In doing so, I pray our conversation will reveal the similarities and unique approaches the committed CoM committees utilize in the care and development of ministry connections. This shared focus will elevate the covenant of care that we strive for in the Central Atlantic Conference.

As I noted at the beginning of my report, my excitement and gratitude for this work of collaboration and leadership cannot be adequately expressed in mere words. Whether we are in meetings or worshipping, celebrating or struggling, problem solving or showing up- this conference takes seriously the call to justice, care for one another, and the work of Christ in our world. It is a delight to serve God through you and alongside you. May we be blessed in our work, and may we be a blessing wherever we are.

With grace and joy,

Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice

Associate Conference Minister for Leadership Development

Staff support to Western Region (Shenandoah and Catoctin assn.)

