

## **57th Annual Meeting Central Atlantic Conference**

### **Associate Conference Minister Report**

aka *“Let me tell you what I did over the summer...”*

**Rev. Aubra Love**

**Acting Associate Conference Minister**

**Third Quarter, June-September 2021**

Some of us can likely recall the excitement and enthusiasm of the report-outs during the first days of school when the class was asked, “What Did You Do Over Summer Vacation?” In the blessings of this second summer of the global pandemic, I have been privileged to serve as your Acting Associate Conference Minister with the Central Atlantic Conference. During the sabbatical of the Rev. Marvin Silver, my areas of responsibility are the Potomac Association and Chesapeake Association.

Immediately prior to accepting this call to serve as ACM, my 20+ year colleague (and spiritual daughter in ministry), the Rev. Amanda Hendler Voss, graciously extended the invitation of her pulpit at First Congregational UCC in downtown DC. Among the CAC congregations, I had only preached at my church-home of Christ Congregational in Silver Spring, at the invitation of our pastor, the Rev. Dr. Matthew Braddock, affectionately known to our membership as Pastor Matt.

I have been afforded the opportunity to participate with the Rev. Freeman L. Palmer, Conference Minister, in the Litany of Farewell for Pastor Ryan Sirmons, of the Chesapeake Association, as he relocates to the UK. More recently, I represented the Conference at the Service of Release for the Rev. Alexis Kassim, Associate Pastor at Little River UCC in Arlington; co-officiated by Potomac Association Committee on Ministry Chair, the Rev. Drew Nettinga, who also chairs the Board of Deacons at this local congregation.

We welcomed the Rev. Joseph Medlin, who comes to us from Hawaii to pastor First Congregational Christian Church, and to also work as a chaplain at Chippenham and Johnston Willis Hospitals in Richmond, VA.

A highpoint of the summer was the gathering of clergy and lay delegates from across the Central Atlantic Conference for the sacred justice work of General Synod 33. I was graced to work with the United Church of Christ at Annapolis to plan liturgy and bring the preached word. Our CAC Board Chair, Ms. Janese Murray, along with the Rev. Roberto Fois of the New Jersey Association opened the sacred moment with the Call to Worship. Rev. Freeman Palmer lead us in the Prayers of Confession and offered an engaging “call and response” Assurance of Pardon. Rev. Darryl Moch, CAC Dean of Communities of Practice, blessed us with a sermonic hymn and presided over Holy Communion with the Rev. Andrea Vassell of the New Jersey Association. Rev. Nelson Murphy lead us in the Offering and why we, as the church, cheerfully give.

Freeman introduced me as speaker of the hour. We were each filled with God-confidence! My magnificently supportive daughter, Tahira, delivered the scripture readings, as the Revs. Shillingburg (Rebecca and John), were called away early on a family matter. And my granddaughter, Dylan, basked in the warmth of seeing the General Synod33 delegates and CAC

pastors collectively leading a culturally blended worship with the lay leaders and music ministry at UCC-Annapolis. Our UCC Annapolis congregation testified to the healing balm of hosting this CAC-- General Synod 33, worship the week after bidding farewell to their beloved pastor and his family.

A significant checkpoint for my healthy work/life balance can be partially attributed to my Community of Practice folks and our able facilitator, the Rev. Sid Fowler. Thank you, small circle of compassionate clergy colleagues in transition. Highly recommended!

I worshipped at New Covenant UCC where Pastor Brian Murray and Ms. Janese Murray, First Lady Extraordinaire, lead a hospitable and welcoming congregation in Baltimore. Also, visited a slew of faithful congregations to include Pastor Holly Jackson's UCC of Seneca Valley, with the Rev. Dr. Suzanne Adele Schmidt preaching with her husband, Dan, serving as liturgist. Also, worshipped at Bethel UCC with Rev. Carolyn Richar, preaching after the farewell of our pioneering woman, the Rev. Anne Holmes.

I was honored with a Meet & Greet, hosted by the Rev. Francine Vinson and the beautiful and sacred ensemble of the African American Women in Ministry. I collaborated with the CAC Conference Staff whose super-powers reside in allowing God's grace to manifest despite our human imperfection. My unspeakable gratitude to Tristan, Rev. Darryl!, Angie, Ginger, Nelson, Kecia and Freeman Palmer. While my time was limited with Potomac Association ACM, the Rev. Marvin Silver and the Rev. Sheresa Simpson Rice, ACM Shenandoah and Catoclin Associations, I am very hopeful about the directions that their ministries are taking.

I have been enriched by the insightful conversations with our young, brilliant leadership of Peoples Congregational Church, Pastor Brandon Harris and the Rev. Mahogany Thomas, Executive Minister. I was beseeched to bring my nonprofit finance experience and counsel on a budget process, with The Rev. Lindsay Franklin who sought to affirm the mutuality of our experiences of being "new" to CAC Conference leadership. I commend Lindsay on her recent ordination and enthusiasm about making a difference!

Thanks be to God, for all the dedicated Moderators of our local Church Councils, too numerous to mention in this report, but not too many to hold in prayer, (they know who they are). And surely, God knows and "is not unrighteous to forget their work and labor of love..." (Hebrews 6:10)

Thursday mornings found me at the throne of Grace with my siblings of the New Jersey Association, breaking the isolation that can sometimes define pastoral leadership...even for our married and partnered leaders. Many of these prayer partners live well into identities within the scope of BIPOC, LGBTQIA2S+; often sharing health challenges, aspirations, and even permanent disabilities, while thriving fully in ministry. The Rev. Ron Verblaauw hosts this weekly prayer vigil and Rev. Nelson Murphy, ACM New Jersey Association, lends wisdom and depth, as Rev. Roberto Fois fills in often with the Chat function while other participants come and go. This time buoyed me as I was attending my church-home less frequently to worship with Association congregations, as a means of staying in touch with each of our CAC pastors.

Finally, I am well-satisfied (overjoyed, in fact) with the entire slate of my Presenters and Speakers, selected for the Annual Meeting 57 Workshops. At-a-glance, below:

- 1) *Bishop Yao k. Rainey Cheeks “Good Grief” --- What is grief and how do we handle it?*
- 2) *Rev. Dr. Sherry Molock and Rev. Dr. Christine Wiley—African American Women in Ministry-- “Who are We Fighting?”*
- 3) *Rev. Bruce G. Epperly, Ph.D.—Keynote Presentation*
- 4) *Miko Peled Rev. Graylan Hagler, with Anne Weissenborn and Maryn Goodson—Central Atlantic Conference Palestine/Israel Network*
- 5) *Jill White, “Being Church Differently” ---Lead Regional Mission Interpreter, Church Building & Loan Fund*
- 6) *Min. Kecia M. Munroe, Acting Justice and Witness Ministries Associate*
- 7) *Vivian Jackson, Rev. Amanda Hendler Voss, Rev. Marty Kuchma, Rev. Gerry Hanberry and Rev. Marvin Silver-- “Anti-Racism Audit Tool for Congregations”*
- 8) *Lucy Brady-- “Stories of Remembrance, Renewal, and Rejoicing in Four Quarter Time”*
- 9) *Rev. Dr. Matthew Braddock--“Evening Renewal” and “Restore and Rejoice” Yoga Sessions*
- 10) *Rev. Roberto Fois---“ Radical Hospitality”*
- 11) *Rev. Dr. Suzanne Adele Schmidt—“Soft Landings in Retirement: Lessons Learned from Retired UCC Clergy Women”*

I am encouraged by the range of gifts and skills represented in those who responded as the call went out in an RFP with weekly circulation to **“Remember, Renew and Rejoice!”** It won’t be long, now, until the Annual Meeting. So, if you haven’t, please go ahead and register for this hybrid event. Mid-October is only weeks away.

What an indescribable journey and opportunity to pour out the gifts that Spirit has poured into me! For me, ministry reports are about people, community-building, God’s transcendent love and co-creating justice-making spaces. My heartfelt thanks to all who prayed with me, listened well, cried when needed and shared in moments of laughter. The Almighty graced me with an unforgettable summer in the Central Atlantic Conference. I pray that I have served well and eagerly anticipate the unfolding of the vision set by the Central Atlantic Conference through its Strategic Plan. I remain,  
Faithfully yours,  
Rev. Aubra Love