

Associate Conference Minister for Clergy and Congregations

Rev. Barbara Toll

I joined the ministry team of the NY Conference at the end of October, 2023. I have been an active member of the NY Conference for most of my ministry and am delighted to have the opportunity to serve in this new role. I have made a point in these first months of visiting as many churches as possible. It has truly been a joy to experience how God is working locally in different corners of our Conference, and I look forward continuing to listen to local churches in the coming year.

One of my first major tasks has been to convene this year's Continuing Education Institute. This continuing education event has become an annual gathering of its own preceding Annual Meeting each year. We have so many talented facilitators and teachers within the NY Conference who are able to bring us quality continuing education. Though the Institute has not happened yet at the time of my writing this report, I look forward to your responses to this year's courses so that I can take them into account as I plan next year's continuing education offerings.

As I am sure many of you are aware, the first module of Culturally Responsive Ministry Training (CRMT) has been completed. This module, dealing with culture and race, has been available to our pastors for two years. The response has been overwhelmingly positive. I was actually part of the team beginning to develop the second CRMT module before joining the conference staff. Since stepping into this ACM role, Rev. Gary Smith and I have worked closely with a dedicated team to develop the second module. CRMT Module Two: Culture, Gender, and Sexuality will be offered for the first time late this summer and will run for two years.

I also provide staff support to the Commission on Ministry. I worked closely with this talented group to plan this year's Consultation on Ministry, which immediately precedes this year's Continuing Education Institute. It is a blessing to work with this commission as they resource and connect our COMs.

Working with churches during pastoral transitions is a significant part of my work. At this time, I am working with ten churches who are at some stage of pastoral transition. Though I know that pastoral transitions are a challenging time in the life of any congregation, I am impressed by how many congregations engage the self-reflection and visioning work of a pastoral search wholeheartedly. It is a privilege to be able to walk alongside congregations during such an important part of their journey.

As I look ahead to the coming year, I wonder if we need more ways in which to gather as members of NY Conference. I am beginning to dream of ways churches can gather around shared mission, demographics, or challenges. I sense that in this post-pandemic world many of us are anxious to rebuild connections. I also look forward to continuing to visit churches and meet new people throughout the Conference. My goal is to listen to the needs and concerns of our clergy and congregations so that we can continue building a shared ministry throughout the state that brings God's love to a world that needs it more than ever.

Grace and peace,

Rev. Barbara Toll