

Report of the Associate Conference Minister for Clergy and Congregations
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It has been a humbling exercise this morning to look back on all the things the NY Conference has empowered me to do in my ministry over the past year. I suspect that many of us have a similar habit. We get so caught up in the day-to-day tasks that we forget to appreciate all the good things we have been a part of. Writing this report has brought a smile to my face because it has allowed me that time to reflect.

I have visited 14 different churches on 19 individual Sundays. I have met new people and worked alongside folks I have known for years. I have been blessed to preach, fellowship, and share ministry with churches across this state, and I have worked to support and resource congregations during this unique time.

Programming:

- **Continuing Education Institute (CEI):** Last year's CEI, supported by a generous grant from the Brown Endowment of United Church Funds, preceded our Annual Meeting in Binghamton, NY. We offered three five-hour classes:
 - Culturally Responsive Ministry Training (Module Two)
 - Renewing the Gospel of Freedom in the US Today
 - Congregational Conflict and Political Polarization: Managing Private Selves, Public Ministries, and Purple Congregations.
 We offered one two-hour workshop: Improving Clergy Wellness in Turbulent Times. Seventy-four people attended last year's CEI.
- **Culturally Responsive Ministry Training (CRMT):** This has been the second year in which CRMT (Module Two): Culture, Sexuality, and Gender has been offered. Sessions have been offered every other month online and have been open to both clergy and laity. This year's CEI is the last time Module Two will be offered in-person during this cycle. I am currently facilitating a small team that is crafting Module Three: Understanding Disability and Ablism. My goal is to begin offering this module to clergy by the end of the summer.
- **Communities of Practice:** Our communities of practice program remains small, with four active groups. We have two groups for Members in Discernment and two groups for active clergy.
- **Countering White Christian Nationalism:** We hosted a second online workshop on countering white Christian nationalism and organizing basics for churches. This, too, was supported by a generous grant from the Brown Endowment of United Church Funds. I was grateful to be able to offer both workshops on countering white Christian nationalism free of charge to participants. I, personally, believe that countering the narrative of white Christian nationalism is vital and urgent. This second workshop was attended by close to 30 people, which allowed for interactive time and fostered small-group discussion.
- **Table-Talk in Troubled Times:** Another program supported by the Brown Endowment of United Church Funds was a series of virtual facilitated gatherings for Clergy of Color to support one another and discuss the unique issues they may face in a predominantly white denomination amid political division.
- **Boundaries for Congregations:** We offered the first boundary training for lay leadership in congregations in September. We had over 70 unique logins for this training, with some leadership teams sharing a single login.
- **This year's CEI:** While I will report on it in next year's annual report, I am excited to offer course content I believe is geared toward strengthening our local churches. In addition to offering Module Two of the CRMT, we have five-hour courses on improving our worship experiences and managing our time and resources as pastors. We also have a two-hour

workshop on improving digital ministry. Though the final numbers may change by the time you read this, we currently have 62 people registered for this year's CEI.

- **Our Whole Lives:** We trained nine people to facilitate adult Our Whole Lives (OWL) programming. They can facilitate OWL material for young and older adults. Multiple facilitators presented at Spring association meetings to spread the word that the NY Conference offers an adult OWL program, with facilitators available to teach at a church near you.
- **This Year:** Here are some of the things I'm hoping to accomplish in the coming year.
 - **Boundaries for Congregations:** This program will be offered again in the Fall. It will remain free of charge because we see it as a way to strengthen our lay leadership and support relationships between pastors and their congregations.
 - **Our Whole Lives (OWL):** Our first program will likely take place in New York City this Fall, in partnership with Union Theological Seminary.
 - **Clergy Wellness Cohorts:** Table Talk in Troubled Times will continue with quarterly meetings, and I hope to add one or two cohorts, each focused on a particular wellness topic.
 - **Retreats:** We keep hearing from clergy in the NY Conference about a desire for connection and renewal. In response, I am looking into regional retreats to strengthen connections while minimizing travel costs.
 - **Culturally Responsive Ministry Training:** Module Three: Understanding Disability and Abilism should be available to clergy by the end of the summer.

Committee on Ministry (COM) Support:

I am truly privileged to work with three of our NY Conference COMs as well as our Commission on Ministry. The committees with whom I work are currently guiding a combined total of eight Members in Discernment in addition to supporting existing clergy in their associations. In this past year, I have been able to celebrate one ecclesiastical council, one ordination/installation, and one installation.

The Commission on Ministry welcomed many new members at the beginning of 2026. Committed to providing the best training and resources possible for our COMs, we had an online training in the Spring and plan to host another in the Fall. These times are in addition to the annual Consultation on Ministry, which is also taking a new form in 2026. Because of declining in-person attendance at the Consultation, the Commission decided to offer this event virtually in 2026. Instead of a full day of training, this year's Consultation will consist of three two-hour modules at the start of June. We will closely track whether or not this format increases attendance.

Search & Call:

I find it truly rewarding to work with churches in transition, as they reflect upon who they are and who they want to be. This past year, I have worked with about 11 churches in some part of their search and call process. Nine of those churches will continue their searches into the coming year. One has installed a new pastor. The paths each church takes in its search are unique, but they all lead to good places when churches embrace the work ahead.

Looking forward:

Much of my focus in recent months has been on developing programming to improve clergy and congregational wellness. "Wellness" in this sense can take many forms. I am convinced that any focus on clergy wellness should be holistic, addressing spiritual, physical, and mental health. Similarly, congregational wellness can be improved by thinking holistically about good governance, leadership training, the launch of innovative ministries, and fostering collaboration among churches.

As the NY Conference focuses on moving Together in Love, I keep asking myself how we can work together across boundaries to improve our collective wellness. I am struck by the need to collaborate across congregational and association lines. I'm wondering if it is possible for our COMs to work together as teams. Likewise, how can churches on different sides of the state collaborate to meet a single ministry need? Can thriving churches provide coaching to revitalizing churches so that the Church thrives throughout the conference, Together in Love? I think we will find new ways to be together and share God's love throughout the coming year and beyond, and I look forward to what God will enable us to go together.