



## Conference Ministry Summary

Southern Conference United Church of Christ

Rev. Dr. Edward Smith Davis, MBA - Conference Minister

### **Mission Statement:**

"Committed to building a stronger Southern Conference, by working together in faith, trust and love; And, being committed, to being a Mission-Minded Justice-Hearted Conference of the United Church of Christ".

### **WHAT WE HAVE DONE: past, present, future**

#### *Ministry Highlights- 2015/16*

- We heard the call for us to engage in "Mission-Minded Justice-Hearted" work. We made this declaration together that we would be a "Mission-Minded Justice-Hearted" Conference by putting on domestic violence ministry workshops and are currently focusing on building healthy churches. We have also begun the process of engaging justice issues on a global scale, including Environmental Justice, as collectively we seek theological rationale and strategies toward making our world a better place for all of us. To do so we developed mission priorities and have constantly sought to train and develop an effective staff in these areas.
- We continue to build relationships by building trust. We strengthened our local churches in specific areas of finance and budgeting; assisted congregation in Search and Call, Christian Education training, and helped congregations with conflict resolution and crisis oriented issues. We encouraged our youth and young adults to actively participate in the support of the Conference. We improved our communication through all the mediums necessary in order to create a higher visibility.
- We continue to support our churches who struggle on the margins, by developing local strategies to engage the communities. We help many of our congregations with constitution and bylaw revisions and accounting practices to make ministry relevant and effective.
- We have strengthened the work of our Board of Directors with reorientation and legal awareness. We challenged our Board to be more visible and active in creating stronger

bonds with our churches. We held a Church and Ministry Summit that helped the committees from each Association develop better techniques in authorizing ministry.

### **What's New?**

We are focusing our efforts on building and creating healthy churches. This initiative will be part of an overall strategic initiative in creating healthy environments for ministry. We will have as a focus the utilization of individuals and methods that will empower clergy and laity to live healthier lives from a spiritual, physical, psychological, and financial perspective. All of these will be on display at our 51st Annual Gathering of the Southern Conference.

We will initiate and participate in Healthy Dialogues that create mutual trust and respect among us, and to engage issues from a place of discernment and understanding; issues of the environment, climate change, race, politics, and other current concerns that we as a faith community can be called to act and put flesh on the Gospel.

We will have a more intentional reaction to the dwindling of OCWM resources, by having a strategy for resource development that reaches other potential donors.

### **Area of Concern:**

In this climate of declining membership and resources, the church has to adapt to the currents of change. Dr. Graham Standish states, "We must create a church that is more discerning to what God is calling for; struggling churches are defensive and resistant; all denominations are struggling; we don't know the rules of the future church; and we know that the rules of the past church are inadequate".

### **A Strategic Solution:**

The church must get back to its spiritual core. When our approach to church is no longer effective, we have to get back to basics. We must see church as a place where we can have an experience with Christ. And, an experience guided by the Holy Spirit, where we see God moving in and through our lives, creating health and wholeness.

This will require having spiritual leadership that seeks God's will. We must engage in discernment that produces results through prayer and other spiritual practices while seeking what our God will have us do. If we build on a solid foundation of faith, mutual trust and mutual love, we will have the rock by which to stand on in these challenging times.

Finally, we have to close our eyes and ears to the peddlers of pessimism and fear; we must get rid of those spectacles; and look at life through the lens of hope and faith and see a future where God is leading us towards.