

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT  
TO THE WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION  
OF THE SOUTHERN CONFERENCE  
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
OCTOBER 4, 2014**

*"I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."  
Philippians 4:13*

**Meetings**

The WNCA Board met three times since last year's Western NC Association Annual Meeting (January 4, May 3, and August 2). The board agreed to not meet on the day of our association's annual meeting (October 5) so that board members could be available to welcome and greet delegates. This worked well last year and we've adopted it for the 2014 meeting.

Our theme for the annual meeting of the association last October was "*We Are...Growing Vital Churches*" and the Rev. David Schoen led a two-part workshop equipping congregations with information and resources for intentional invitations. Hospice Chaplain, the Rev. Brenda Lewis, delivered the sermon for the day's worship. To the delegates' applause, we welcomed Wedgewood Church, Charlotte, NC into the Western NC Association, United Church of Christ! The Rev. Chris Ayers is the pastor of Wedgewood Church.

Our January 4, 2014 meeting was held at Corinth Reformed, Hickory, NC. Two of our UCC Partners brought personal greetings and presented information on their ministries: Catawba College and Black Lake Retreat Center, Rev. Dr. Ken Clapp; United Church Homes and Services, Lee Syria. Carol Williams-Swoope, Organizational Development Consultant for Delhaize America (Food Lion) led the board in a Visioning Process that revolved around four questions:

- What are our greatest strengths?
- What are our best opportunities?
- What is our preferred future?
- What are the measurable results that will tell us we've achieved that vision of the future?

Board members were each assigned 3 to 4 contacts to make with pastors/churches in the association to ask two questions: 1. How are things going? 2. What do you need from the Western NC Association? Contacts were also invited to send laypersons and clergy to our March 1 Spring Leadership Conference. These contacts were made.

The Spring Leadership Conference was the highlight of the association's year. Under Vice-president Elizabeth Schiemann's capable leadership and organization, and with Rev. Jerry Rhyne's persistent insistence that we move forward with the planned conference, it mushroomed into a gathering beyond anyone's expectation. Hosted by Hedrick's Grove UCC, Lexington (thanks to Rev. William Sowers!), 110 people registered and attended at least one of the four workshops: layperson boundary training, new music, local church life cycle, and online giving. This conference created a lot of energy among those who attended! Our plan going forward is to offer a leadership conference each year on the first Saturday in March.

At our May 3rd meeting of the board, we spent time discussing a lawsuit filed on April 28 in federal court in Charlotte, NC (*UCC v. Cooper*), that challenges North Carolina's marriage laws. The suit was filed by 3 WNCA clergy and other ecumenical partners, and the UCC, arguing that NC's Amendment One violates the U.S. First Amendment rights of clergy and laypersons by denying the right of marriage to some people in our congregations. The discussion was respectful and every person was given a chance to be heard. Dr. Edward Davis joined us via Webex for this discussion.

## **Southern Conference Annual Gathering**

The lawsuit (*UCC v. Cooper*) also became a topic for discussion at the Southern Conference (SOC) Annual Meeting in Portsmouth, Virginia. In the two discussion sessions Rev. Geoffrey Black, UCC General Minister and President, addressed the delegation via recorded videotape and UCC General Counsel, Don Clark, addressed the gathering prior to the discussions to explain the legal basis for the suit.

Two resolutions were passed at the SOC annual meeting. One was A Resolution To Expand Medicaid in North Carolina and Virginia and called on our board and delegates to make this a priority with legislators. The second resolution passed was entitled A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF PROMOTING RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION WHILE BANNING UNCONVENTIONAL SHALE GAS EXTRACTION TECHNOLOGIES REGIONALLY AND NATIONALLY. Both resolutions will be discussed at our Western NC Association Annual Meeting in October.

## **WNCA Board Appointments**

Of course we approved needed appointments to the boards of the Western NC Association and The Southern Conference, and to the WNCA Committee on Ministry. One of these appointments is worth naming. Due to a previous serious illness returning to our Treasurer, David Samson, at his request we appointed Doug Sink as interim treasurer. Later, David resigned from the board and Doug was appointed as treasurer for the remaining term. Our prayers for healing and recovery are offered on David's behalf and on behalf of his clergy spouse, the Rev. Colleen Samson, and on the congregation she serves.

## **Church and Ministry re-Organization**

As Rev. Jerry Rhyne has reported, the Church and Ministry Commission (CMC) was re-organized into 2 sub-committees to better serve the needs of clergy and congregations. We also approved that the Church and Ministry Commission serve as an "ecclesiastical council" when due notice is given to the association per our constitution and by-laws. This will help anxious ordinands be approved more quickly to begin ministry where called. Thanks to Rev. Mark Burns and Rev. Colleen Samson for sharing the chairperson responsibilities for the Committee on Ministry. Colleen resigned her seat on the CMC in June.

The board approved a request from Church and Ministry requiring boundary training for all active WNCA clergy. This became a topic of discussion via email and in person with a number of clergy. The board acted on the request of the Church and Ministry Commission to institute required boundary training as a best practice both for clergy and for the people served in WNCA congregations. It is a matter of ethical responsibility. The board has consulted UCC General Counsel regarding the process of making this decision with favorable acknowledgement that due process was followed setting this policy. The current fee for the training is \$50 and scholarships are available through the association office. The training is offered a number of times in the year.

## **Financial Support of Conference**

Looking ahead, our association will be called to greater and deeper support of the ministries from which it benefits as part of The Southern Conference. We are becoming A Mission Minded, Justice-Hearted conference. And we are becoming increasingly aware of the costs of ministry in our association. Much of these ministry costs are paid for by contributions to Our Church's Wider Mission with ministry provided by the conference. We will consider both increasing our per member contributions and offering immediate help to pay for these ministries - our leadership conference, clergy/congregation search and call, conflict resolution in local congregations, and equipping congregations with educational resources, to name a few. The Southern Conference constitution calls on our associations to work together to fully fund the ministries of the conference.

As president of the association, I also serve on the executive committee of The Southern Conference and the Finance Committee of the conference. The Finance Committee met at least 3 times this year. There

are two major concerns. One is the number of congregations that have not contributed to funding conference (and thereby association) ministries either through Our Church's Wider Mission or through the Conference Ministry Fund. Though the numbers will undoubtedly change some by the end of the year, as of August 31, 2014, only 45% of the Western NC Association churches have contributed to either of these two offerings. That's only 35 of 78 churches. For those who will say, "But some will give in December," I must ask you: What if you began a job January 1 and worked all year long, and your employer withheld your pay until December 31st? It just doesn't work well this way. So I challenge you - Pastors and delegates: Teach your consistory, your church council, your finance committee, your treasurer, your church secretary, and your church members to give to Our Church's Wider Mission on a MONTHLY basis. We are irresponsible stewards both to wait until later, and to not contribute at all.

At the conference board's nudging, we are organizing into teams to address better communication with all our congregations this coming year. Team members will be sent out in pairs to speak to congregations personally about ministries and services available through the Southern Conference. We will ask, "With what does your church need help?" And we will also ask church's to do their part in financial support of all these ministries. Brenda James is organizing teams in the WNCA.

### **Covenant Gratitude**

I want to say a personal word of thanks to our WNCA Board, its executive committee, the pastors, and the church members of this association for your dedication to this association's mission and wellbeing. In the midst of a turbulent year, we have continued to come to the table of fellowship and remain in covenant with one another in the face of serious disagreement, both about the parts of the lawsuit against the state of North Carolina, and the process followed for its filing and presentation in public. The conference board and minister responded by making discussion of the process and hearing all voices a priority. The UCC General Minister and President responded specifically to people in the WNCA who had legitimate concerns about the suit by coming in person to address those concerns and hear from all voices. Similarly, our own Minister for Church Affairs, the Rev. Jerry Rhyne, led us effectively and compassionately to voice concerns and stay in covenant amid our disagreements over process and prerogative. Under Jerry Rhyne's diligent and focused leadership, and the commitment of the faithful people of the Western NC Association, it has been a great year. It is my hope that going forward we can continue to focus on Missions and Ministries that serve our congregations, those in need, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

### **Questions for Consideration**

Going forward, we will have to revise our constitution so that it more closely reflects our values of ministry and mission, faith formation, church vitality and evangelism, and social justice ministries. Our committees must become active participants and partners in the ministry with the Southern Conference.

It is my pleasure to serve the great people of the Western NC Association. Going forward, I hope we can return to focusing once again on ministry and mission in service of others and our Lord Jesus Christ. So I return to these four questions with which our board began our calendar year:

- What are our greatest strengths?
- What are our best opportunities?
- What is our preferred future?
- What are the measurable results that will tell us we've achieved that vision of the future?

And I ask you to consider these questions and your own participation in the life and health of the Western NC Association, the Southern Conference, and the United Church of Christ.

Respectfully submitted,  
J. Nathan King  
WNCA Board President