



All [new creation] is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation... 2 Corinthians 5:18

Dear friends in Christ and in the Maine Conference,

We have been called into Christ's ministry of transformation and renewal, holding fast to the reconciliation of all that is to God. We are invited to be reconciled with God and with each other, and to show the world a more excellent way in love... to own our shortcomings, make confession, and to seek restoration and forgiveness. So, we write to you this day seeking that forgiveness and reconciliation.

At the beginning of this year, the Board of Directors wrote to share challenges in our common ministry as the Conference, to ask for your assistance and your prayers in addressing them, and to share the Board's commitments throughout that process. In the time since, the Board and the Conference Minister have been working in the following areas:

A major undertaking of this year has been a professional consultation with The Rev. Dr. Larry Peers. You will find his report to the Board attached beyond this letter. We share this with you out a sense of transparency, humility, and commitment to our common ministry. In this time of consultation, Dr. Peers engaged in listening sessions with the Board of Directors, the Conference Minister, staff, and clergy and delegates in the Conference at-large. All told, Dr. Peers was able to listen for the deep commitment and love of this Conference—and the deep hurts and disappointments—of over one hundred of our members and leaders.

Dr. Peers notes the “kaleidoscope” of unexpected shifts since the *Moving Forward Together* strategic plan was completed. The financial and human resources needed to implement the plan were not available. The landscape changed with the closing of seminaries, and changing economic realities. “A new pattern emerged that required some specific adaptations, shifting of commitments and expectations and commitments in order to stay true to the intentions of the *Moving Forward Together* plan and at the same time navigate your current realities, your real challenges.” We apologize that we did not do better at navigating these challenging waters. We apologize that we did not do all of the work necessary to respond to the changes the Conference experienced, and we look forward to making necessary course corrections and changes for a better future.

The report outlines a number of recommendations, both to the Conference Minister and to the Board of Directors to respond to those issues which may be worked towards more fruitful ministry. We recognize the several ways in which some people have been disappointed or hurt by failures of our leadership in the following ways, and we commit ourselves to mutual ministry and reconciliation in the steps we are already taking to address these failures.

There is a clear disappointment in the responsiveness of service and support to congregations, especially in the area of Search and Call of ministers, both structurally and systematically.

Structurally, both the *Moving Forward Together* strategic plan and later revisions of staffing expected more staff in this vital area than could be sustained. At the same time, the need is great, and unpredictable in terms of the geographic location, number, and characteristics of churches searching at any one time. The

Continued on reverse...

geographical division of labor we have been using, and overall lack of staff for this work has resulted in lack of service and responsiveness in crucial times. The Board has authorized an immediate change in creating a program for Search and Call consultations, using ministers in our midst who have the necessary gifts and skills to do work on a case by case basis supporting congregations in their search processes.

For her part, Rev. Blood recognizes that too often she failed to prioritize responding to requests, and that she did not organize the use of staff time in this area as effectively as she could. She has made changes already to adjust workloads so that she and our staff are as effective as possible.

Systemically, we recognize that we are in a critical moment of change and challenge for the wider church, experiencing a shortage in ministerial candidates for open positions in our churches. This is partly because of the rapidly changing patterns of ministry, i.e. a move to more part-time, bi-vocational, or multi-point calls, and partly a demographic challenge as many of our authorized ministers approach retirement age. We are committed to creating systems which can help identify, form, and equip leaders in our midst to meet the needs of congregations through programs like the Maine School of Ministry.

Conference staff and others have been impacted by staffing uncertainty, a lack of support structures, and challenges of workplace culture.

The Board has committed its Personnel Committee to oversee interventions to reduce uncertainty among our staff as to the basic functions, roles, and workloads they are expected to maintain, and to improve the culture of the staff as a body. The Personnel Committee has reached out to partners through the Maine Association of Non-Profits for outside support in both:

- A review of and consult for the HR structures and systems of the conference, and presenting recommendations for a staffing model going forward for vital ministries and work.
- Facilitating mediated conversations that may ease tensions or conflict within the staff.

It is necessary for the Board and Conference Minister to hold one another to mutual accountability.

It is true that the Conference Minister needs to do intensive work to build trust in her leadership, responsiveness, and care of the Conference. It is also true that the Conference Minister and Board must come to mutual agreement on goals and priorities, and the Board must provide support, time, and resources needed to complete those priorities. It must also hold her accountable. We will undertake an evaluation of our mutual ministry at both a mid-year and year period to assure there have been adequate improvements in these areas and take further action if there has not been.

At the same time, as Dr. Peers's consultation, the Board and Conference staff have been working on other issues in our ministry:

In response to a perceived lack of transparency, in Conference budgets, projections, and financial operations, the Board has listened to concerns about sustainability and reporting. We have overhauled our financial reporting to make it more readily understandable and created a budget that looks to be sustainable over a longer period of time. Feedback from the Budget Hearings of this fall has indicated we are moving in the right direction.

To help foster communication and transparency in our ministry the Conference has been undertaking a revision of its modes and methods of communication. The Board has created a quarterly newsletter, *Table Settings*, to share financial information, areas of particular focus for our efforts and

decisions, and share news of individual and their ministry throughout the conference. The All Conference Email (ACE) has been revised to allow for more helpful event and information sharing. In the near future you will see a much-anticipated update to the Conference website, including specific pages to share news from the Board, and regular updates from the Conference Minister.

To foster better connection between our core ministries, we have chartered the Pilgrim Lodge Leadership Team as a single entity to work alongside the Director of Outdoor Ministries and the Board of Directors. This new team is doing wonderful ministry together to support our camp, call a Settled Director of Outdoor Ministries, and work towards a sustainable future for Pilgrim Lodge.

We are proud of this work to create more transparency, communication, understanding, and connection and we know that there is more work to do. We have set a course for the changes that we feel are needed. As we offer our apologies, we celebrate all that is good, and Spirit-filled, and effective in our ministry with and in the many churches of our Conference.

Members of the Board and Rev. Blood will be available for conversation at Annual Meeting in Saco on October 26. Additionally, we will be offering opportunities to gather and talk around the Conference. The first of these will be held at Foreside Community Church in Falmouth on **Thursday, November 7 from 10-Noon**. More information will follow.


If you have questions or concerns about Dr. Peers's report, the issues contained within, or the processes to address them, please don't hesitate to reach out to us through (gparker@foresidechurch.org) or (djblood@maineucc.org).

For now, we wish you blessings.

God's peace,



The Rev. Geoff Parker
Chair – Board of Directors, Maine Conference
Foreside Community Church, Falmouth



The Rev. Deborah Blood
Conference Minister – Maine Conference
Winthrop Congregational Church

This Report and Recommendations has been prepared for the Board of the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ. It has been reviewed with the Board and the Conference Minister. The Board will determine how it wants to distribute the information contained here.

Report and Recommendations to the Maine Conference Board

Rev. Dr. Lawrence Peers
Consultant

September 30, 2019

**Report and Recommendations for the Board of the Maine Conference
of the United Church of Christ**

Submitted by Rev. Dr. Lawrence Peers, Consultant

I submit this report and recommendations to the Board of the Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ after inquiring into the experiences, aspirations and concerns of members of the board, the staff of the Conference, and the clergy and lay members of the Conference from various Associations. Clearly, there are specific concerns that need to be addressed proactively. Also, there is a need to clarify expectations. It is hoped that listening to these concerns and engaging in a process of re-setting and clarifying expectations may provide an opportunity for more intentional and mutual accountability between the Board and the Conference Minister, and the Board and the various constituents that comprise the Conference. Your covenants need deliberate tending.

I report here what was learned in the listening sessions and I make recommendations for those issues that I consider workable issues.

A. Listening to Congregational Leaders and Members

Each person's and congregation's current assessment of the Maine Conference is based upon their own current relationship with the Conference, its Associations, leaders and/or staff. As you know, there are some built in challenges to uniform connection and to service delivery, given the relatively large geographical area of the Conference, the various sizes of congregations and the diverse needs of your mix of urban and rural settings. Some services of the Conference are delivered by different conference staff or by different organizations within the Conference (e.g., Associations, Pilgrim Lodge,

Committees on Ministry, etc.). The actual experiences of people within the Conference are inevitably different and their assessment of those experiences will likewise vary.

Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to both the current satisfactions and complaints. Whether satisfied or disappointed, members of the Conference have definite aspirations for their Conference and for their relationship with the Conference. Not every issue raised is something that can be worked on, but some are able to be worked on in the present. The recommendations listed here may not change what has happened, but could point toward a different, more responsive future.

The Maine Conference of the United Church of Christ, as any contemporary judicatory (Conference) in our time, is faced with challenges on how to best engage, support and resource its member congregations, Associations, clergy and members. In a time of declining membership in many congregations, diminishing financial resources, less certainty about volunteer availability, and oftentimes reduced staff, it is inevitable that there will be some shifts in what member congregations and members might expect from their Conference and from one another. Yet, there are some essentials that only a Conference organization can do, and these deserve utmost attention, even if it requires doing what a Conference does, differently than it did in the past.

The aspirations and expectations of the Maine Conference through its staff and others will endeavor to:

1. Help congregations to survive (when possible), and/or to change as congregations in a time of dwindling membership and/or finances for some and uncertain times for all.

2. Foster meaningful and effective connections between congregations and their leaders in order to access resourcefulness from others' lived experiences, successes and failures, and to help build a sense of a broader faith community and mutual support (in Conference activities, Associations and other ways).
3. Join their voices and actions with the prophetic and compassionate voices and actions of the others in the United Church of Christ in order to feel their impact as a church can be amplified.
4. Feel companioned and cared for in those critical moments in the life of a congregation when it is seeking new pastoral leadership. At these times, congregations need practical support, spiritual support and resourcing that they cannot find on their own. They depend upon their Conference to help.
5. Feel known and understood by their Conference leadership including the Senior and Associate Conference Ministers, the staff and the Conference Board and to feel truly served.
6. Participate in setting the direction and priorities of the Conference.
7. Have communication from the Conference Minister(s) and the Board that fosters actual connection, communication, resourcefulness and support.

These aspirations have most likely not changed much over time. However, with the significant changes in governance, change in Conference staff and uncertainties following the dissolution of some of the Moving Forward Together initiatives, these needs may have become more pronounced. Moreover, given the overall climate of our social, economic and political worlds there is a need to feel some anchoring support, continuing resourcefulness, and ongoing connections among clergy, lay leaders and

member congregations. It is hoped that as a Conference you can be that anchoring support to one another.

The restructuring plan, “Moving Forward Together” was decided upon during the interim period prior to the arrival of your Conference Minister. The plan was intended to be a way to evoke the resources of more people (such as some designated Conference Deacons), Resource Teams and programing. Since several key leaders in the Conference were involved in designing this Moving Forward Together plan, significant thought and effort were put in this. It held hopes for new ways to be a Conference “together.” Your new Conference Minister, Rev. Deborah Blood, was called to lead you as you began to enact Moving Forward Together.

Designing a plan is much different than implementing a plan. From what I understand, some aspects of the “Moving Forward Together” restructuring plan could not be implemented evenly across the Conference. I also understand that the financial resources needed to enact the plan fully were not there. Funding for the staffing imagined was not available. The volunteer human resourcing required to enact the plan were not as readily available in all Associations. Moreover, no one could fully anticipate how what happened to the economy and the world of seminaries (e.g., Bangor, Andover Newton Theological School) would also come to impact the Conference’s and congregational leadership’s capacities. The image that I have for these unanticipated changes is that of a kaleidoscope that was unexpectedly shifted. A new pattern emerged that required some specific adaptations, shifting of commitments and expectations and commitments in order to stay true to the intentions of the Moving Forward Together plan and at the same time navigate your current realities, your real challenges.

As a Conference, you need to openly communicate what was learned from the “Moving Forward Together” implementation, take joint responsibility in what could be implemented and what could not be implemented. In the process of “moving forward” with your bold plan, the world changed around the Conference, unanticipated challenges arose, and ongoing, deliberate course corrections may have been necessary. Some would say that as a Conference you had to “build the bridge as you walked upon it.” This created uncertainty and anxiety; and an irregular path forward.

There are still varied interpretations of what happened in the implementation of “Moving Forward Together.”

1. Some felt that the Conference Deacons program served them or gave them, as a Deacon, an outlet for service as a Christian leader. It felt like a promising and useful resources. Others felt that the Conference Deacon program was ambitious, required volunteer resources that were not evenly distributed across the Conference or was unsustainable.
2. Some grieve the former way of doing the “business” of the Conference with Association representation and a designated personal link between the congregation, Association and the governing body. Others felt that a smaller Board was a more efficient way to do the work of the Conference and it considered the reality of the volunteers and the possibility of broader generational participation.
3. When the Annual Meeting was reduced to one day, some felt that the meeting had “just become business.” People expressed a longing for the opportunities that the longer annual meeting gave for connections and relationships across

the Conference. Others realize that the expense of a longer meeting may pose challenges. limit participation or a strain resources that could be used in other ways. I understand that you are returning to more than a one-day Annual Meeting this year.

4. When the Conference Annual Meeting voted to not increase the Fellowship Dues at one of its meetings this had consequences and impacted services and staffing. For example, some miss the Resource Center and the personal contact with a staff person who could guide and provide them with a “hands-on” resource. Others recognized that many resources are now available on-line (e.g., UCC.org), but realize that this is not known by everyone and not adequately communicated to congregational leaders.
5. Many mentioned Pilgrim Lodge as a central place for spiritual renewal and for connecting with others across the Conference. Changing in the staffing of Pilgrim Lodge has also occurred during this time. All of this created more uncertainty among some in the Conference who felt that concerns about Pilgrim Lodge’s financial sustainability may mean another loss. Pilgrim Lodge is valued by those across the Conference and across generations. It is a place of connection to those across the Conference-as-a-whole and it also requires financial resources.
6. A new Conference Minister began her work with you in a time of great promise around the “Moving Forward Together” plan, and at a time when the finances of the conference soon became uncertain. The Conference Minister’s style of management and leadership during this time was perceived by some as disconnected, self-reliant and less collaborative. The Conference Minister

- may have tended to “hunker down” to the challenges at hand rather than reach out for more support and communicate what was happening.
7. There was considerable disappointment among those congregational leaders who expressed that the Conference Minister did not respond to their communications in a timely manner or did not respond at all. Former moderators {one year ago) addressed their concerns directly to the Board and the Conference Minister. Some of those past moderators participated in these listening sessions and offered their perspectives, their aspirations and their care for the directions of their Conference and the performance of the Conference Minister.
 8. The change in the governing structure meant that the Board had to determine its role and its work while they were still forming themselves in this new structure. For those who valued the former Associational representation, this also led to a concern of disconnection and feelings that they did not know what the Board or the Conference was doing or feel important to the Conference leadership or Conference Minister.
 9. “Communication” was a resonant issue that several people expressed as problematic. I personally don’t know how effective the Association delegates informing their Associations and their local congregation about the Conference was in actual practice. Some feel that the communications from the Board or from the Conference Minister have not (as yet) filled in the gap. Others recognized that the new All Conference email was beginning to fill some of that gap. Beyond that, it meant a loss of meaningful connection with

the Conference and some feeling that their commitment and gifts were not being utilized or honored.

The result of all these experiences enumerated here is that for some in the Conference they felt more absence than presence from their Conference Board and Conference Minister. They feel that decision making has become more centralized. They felt that there is less resourcing rather than more resourcing. Moreover, some felt that their care for the directions of the Conference could not be channeled in helpful ways.

Given all of this, it seems to me that there is a significant issue of trust. Although “trust” can seem ephemeral, there are ways in which trust can be a workable issue. Restoring trust will require a concerted effort of the Board, the Conference Minister, and congregational leaders. Trust means explicit and implicit agreements or expectations have a chance to be fulfilled. Deliberately and intentionally clarifying expectations and developing some agreed upon processes of holding each other accountable seem essential to being able to restore trust—not as a feeling—but as a workable, doable task.

Oftentimes, we may want to simplify what is complex for the situation to feel more manageable. The path ahead requires a concerted and intentional effort from the Board, Conference Minister, and congregational leaders. Although assigning blame in one direction is understandable given the concurrence of several changes in the Conference, there is a need for each to own their own part in what has occurred and to clarify expectations and to hold each other to some mutual agreements and a renewed covenant on the path ahead.

B. Recommendations to the Conference Minister

The Conference Minister has been praised for amplifying a prophetic UCC voice within the Conference, for her recognition of the challenges of the “doing church” in new ways within our times, and for her pastoral care. She has also helped to move the Conference office, to make the budget more transparent for planning purposes, and for working to implement the “Moving Forward Together” in her work with the Conference Deacons early in her ministry with you.

The changes in governing, resourcing, reduced staffing and financing have provided some significant challenges in the Maine Conference, the Board and the Conference Minister in recent years. Such a leadership task requires skills and qualities that can withstand the challenges but also uphold the deeper values and expectations that the constituencies of the Maine Conference have for their Conference (as outlined on pages 1-2). It is not easy to be the one charged, as a Conference Minister, with helping a Conference and its culture make some significant transitions. Being able to lead these changes, make necessary course corrections, communicate to the Conference along the way were essential tasks in this process for both the Conference Minister and the Board.

“I attend meetings” was the most common way that participants expressed their participation in their Association or Conference. Others have more engaging roles as members of the Committee on Ministry, the Board, Association leadership, Conference Committees, task forces or ministries of the Conference. Some cherished former roles that they had in the Conference that no longer exist or exist in the same way. Each participant understands and assesses the current situation from their own lens.

At a time when so much change has been happening in the Conference, some perceived that the Conference Minister lacks some of the qualities needed to reassure them of the significance, resourcefulness and responsiveness of the Maine Conference. Of course, there are many who don't make this assessment either because their location meant that they work primarily with the Associate Conference Minister serving their Association, or because their experience, participation and/or expectation of the Conference varies. Consequently, the constituencies of the Conference don't speak with one voice, because their experiences are different. Yet, this does not diminish the necessity to hear the aspirations and disappointments that are being expressed. This does mean that a different response is needed in the future.

It is tempting to classify all dissatisfactions as a personnel issue. In some cases, there are indeed questions of performance. In addition, there are also structural issues (e.g., job descriptions, staffing, current procedures around search and call, etc.). There are also political issues (e.g., how decision making, participation, representation and power is shared.). There are also symbolic issues (e.g., the meaning that persons feel when connected to the work of the Church and to their own vocation as lay or clergy person, what it means to be a Body of Christ.). Consequently, responses must be addressed in the frame in which they fall.

My recommendations for the Conference Minister (which I have already shared with her and with the Board) include:

1. The Conference Minister must find ways to be responsive in a timely way to the requests and needs for service particularly for those congregations facing Search and Call or some other needs for resourcing. An uneven or lack of response in

some cases has led some congregations to feel underserved, not important or neglected. These may be a combination of performance issues (e.g., time management, priority setting, etc.), human resource issues (e.g., staffing) and structural issues (e.g., how Search and Call cases are distributed.) Still it is the role of the Conference Minister to design other ways to increase responsiveness, collaborate with the Associate Conference minister and use supplemental approaches to meet the need (e.g., I understand that the new budget will provide for some funds to hire consultants for Search and Call).

2. The Conference Minister must acknowledge personal responsibility for not being responsive. In the estimation of some I have spoken to, restoring trust means that the Conference Minister needs to acknowledge and apologize upfront that she has not been as responsive as she could be. In cases where she cannot meet the specific request of a congregation (e.g., in Search and Call) still she must communicate clearly and directly with the congregation and, perhaps, suggest what a congregation may need to do to be ready to call a new minister. Sure, there have been successful Search and Call support from the Conference Minister. However, in those cases when she has failed to respond to this particular need or other requests, it has not built trust between the Conference Minister and the congregational leaders, or trust between the congregation and the Maine Conference. They can legitimately ask, “What are paying Fellowship Dues for anyway.”
3. Since the Conference Minister has now been in the Maine Conference for four years, has been able to observe her work and the responsibilities that she has taken on, and has heard critical feedback from others, it is time for her priorities

for her ministry in consultation with the Board. Some wonder how her involvements in the national setting of the UCC might distract her attention and energy to her role in the Maine Conference. Others value this connection that she has. Some wonder if she is spending her time on the right things. Others value her availability for pastoral care, and others wonder if this is a good use of her time given the current needs and staffing within the Conference. This requires a resetting of expectations and clear priorities for the Conference Minister's work in the year ahead, with objective criteria for assessing the fulfillment of these expectations and the progress on these priorities.

4. The Conference Minister tends to take on too much. Given the staffing reduction and given her taking on responsibilities that were once held by other staff, this is not sustainable. Being overextended can also lead to implicit overpromising and/or to the inability to respond to requests. An adjustment is needed. The Conference Minister must ask for help and work with the Board. A Human Resource consult for all Conference Staff must occur (as mentioned later in this report).
5. Once the Board and the Conference Minister determine priorities (e.g., for this year), then the Board and the Conference Minister need to establish some practices for mutual accountability to review progress. These should occur at a specified time of year (most likely, at this point mid-year and end of the year.) Ideally, those priorities can: (a) build upon the Conference Minister's gifts and strengths (b) incorporate her current sense of call to Conference Ministry, (c) respond to the existing and emerging needs of the Conference and (d) incorporate the learning from the feedback that she has received, and (e) include

some learning and developmental goals. (This is a recommendation for the Conference Minister and the Board.)

6. The Conference Minister needs to take more responsibility for organizing the staff and recognizing what is needed for them to be clear about their expectations, for their own morale and their own capacities for learning together and for support. From all reports, it seems that the staff have navigated these various changes with very little support or understanding of their revised job descriptions and expectations from the Conference Minister. This is a key responsibility for the Conference Minister. This would be helped by a Human Resource consult (as mentioned in the recommendations for the Board.)
7. The Conference Minister and the Associate Conference Minister would benefit from a facilitated conversation to clarify their working agreements and how they might best design their work in order to serve the congregations and leaders, particularly around Search and Call. There may be ways in which their varied styles can complement one another. Following this meeting, they can recommend structural and or process changes in the Search and Call procedures to the Conference Board.
8. There is a desire for the Conference Minister to communicate more substantially with the members of the Conference so that they can feel connected to the Conference Minister and to the Conference. Particularly, there is a desire to know the Conference Minister's vision, her message, and her guidance for the churches. Moreover, congregations want to be linked to resources that can serve them and their leadership. I know that some of these efforts have or soon will begin.

9. Conference Minister must with the Board take a lead in engaging the Personnel Committee in reviewing the current job descriptions considering the priorities of the Conference. This may lead to some revising of job descriptions and to the clarifying of realistic expectations for what can be done with the current staff structure. Over time, it may help clarify where more support is needed (either in part-time or volunteer resourcing.) (This is a recommendation for the Conference Minister and the Board.)

C. Recommendations to the Board

The Board has most likely determined, following my meeting with them, some of the implications of this report already for their work. Some of those recommendations are included in the previous section related to the Conference Minister.

1. Meet with the Conference Minister to clarify expectations and to set up some follow-up review of these expectations mid-year and at the end of the year. There may have been some different perceptions of the role of the Board in the past. Some felt that the major role was to support the Conference Minister. Others felt it was to challenge, when needed. The truth is, that in order to fulfill your responsibility as a Board and what you have been entrusted to do, you need to support, challenge and to adopt clear practices of mutual accountability with the Conference Minister.
2. The Board should consider a human resource consult to assist in determining the current and future staffing of the Conference. The Conference Minister has apparently taken on too much responsibility to respond to staff reductions. This is not sustainable and most likely will not be aligned with clarified expectations and priorities that will be defined by the Board and the Conference Minister. You need a

realistic understanding of your staffing capacity and needs. Such a consult would do an assessment of job descriptions and clarify the staff team's RACI Chart

(responsibilities, accountabilities, who to consult and who to inform) in the future.

Moreover, in this time of re-setting expectations and working agreements, it is also a time to help the staff to determine its staff behavioral covenant.

3. The Board must deliberately address situations that require adjustments or response. It seems that this Consultation is a start in that direction. The constituencies of the Conference need some reassurance that you are addressing concerns and communicating about your responses as an integral part of your delivering this report to the Conference.
4. In particular, the Board may need to review the "Moving Forward Together" in a transparent way. This review (of the Board and other stakeholders in the Conference) could include learning from what happened and determining what may be doable, not doable and what ways you can respond to the aspirations of the member congregations and leaders in a way that is within the constraints of your current and future staffing and finances. Some feel that the "Moving Forward Together" plan was not given a chance, some felt it was not implementable from the start. You may be able to devise ways to carry forward some of the intentions and aspiration of the MFT plan, even if you do this in a less financially and human resource intense way.
5. There are those who attended the Listening Sessions or who were interviewed that were critical of the current governing structure of the Conference Board, since they felt (a) there is not enough representation from the Associations (b) there is no longer a communication link from the Associations to the Board, and no clear liaison

to their congregations and leaders of Association. The aspiration is to feel connected and to feel part of a common enterprise of the Spirit. How will and can the Board respond to the aspiration that underlies this critique.

Conclusion

Many of the prayers that participants offered at the end of our listening sessions included the words, “That we may be one.” The question and the challenge for you as members of the Conference with various roles (Board, Conference Ministers and Staff, Member Congregations and Leaders) is: “What can we together, as a conference do, to create more opportunities for connection, for learning from each other, for sharing our own resourcefulness with one another, to respond to our distinct and common needs and aspirations. How can we be a Body of Christ that still feels connected and in which each part feels connected to and accountable to the whole. Together you can “Be Church” in some new ways as you work on some of the insights and recommendations that you find in this report.