

Conference Minister Annual Report 2025

The Rev. Dr. Marisa Laviola, Ph.D.

Beloved Members and Friends of our Conference,

It has been an entire year since you heard from me last, and O what a blessed year it has been! With joy, I share my comings and goings with you during 2025. I thought I would do something different and organize this report to align with the goals that I set for 2025, in partnership with and with support from the Personnel Committee and the Board of Directors. My goals are arranged in three segments: 1) the Vision and Mission of our Conference (“the why and how”), 2) the Financial health of our conference, and 3) the Health and vitality of our churches and other faith settings.

1. Vision and Mission of our Conference (“The why and how”)

The BOD and I decided that this would be the year that BOD joins me in the message of the vitality of churches, with an emphasis on “Why are we the Maine Conference? What does that mean?” And, “How do we actively participate to ensure that the Conference and its faith settings are making a positive difference in the lives of those we serve?”

During our BOD meetings we have contemplated and discussed the vision and mission of the conference for the next 5-10 years. No one had a memory of recent history of a detailed dive into “why are we and how are we”. This past summer I led the BOD through a brainstorming activity which resulted in 5 focus words for each question. I will not share those here because we will be doing brainstorming sessions and generating focus words from everyone gathered at the Annual Meeting, as we engage together in this vital and blessed process. We hope that 5 or so words will sift to the top as pastors and laity participate in this vital brainstorming and discussion.

In every church I visited, in association meetings, and in some of my Midweek News articles, I have highlighted the “why and how,” encouraging everyone to wonder, to pray, and to contemplate our purpose as an entire conference with a variety of ministries. I pray that all who have heard will eagerly and joyfully enter into holy and sacred discussions.

2. Financial health of the Conference

This year the BOD and I put into action the Development Committee (DC) that had been discussed over the years and not implemented. The DC is a subcommittee of the BOD that is charged with assessing, developing, and supporting creative fundraising. The first task of the DC was to make a “financial covenant” video, featuring our BOD members explaining the covenant of giving through OCWM basic support (for our conference ministers), dues (for our brick and mortar and office workings), and Friends of the Maine Conference (for individuals who wish to give). This video has been shown on the Midweek News, the Facebook page, and on the web site. I have encouraged the BOD to reach out to churches so that churches know the BOD is dedicated to their health and growth. They have also begun the task of having conversations around covenantal giving. The DC also developed the Farmhouse renovation Capital Campaign.

When I first arrived in 2022, I heard loud and clear that our income was beginning to sag under the weight of our expenses. I heard clearly the concern and began to advocate for the practice of reducing things rather than people in the conference operations. About a year and a half ago, I helped to revive the idea for the conference offices to move to the Farmhouse. The BOD researched, prayed, and approved this move. Such a move will save us \$33k per year in rent. Funding for the move will be from a combination of sources, including the final sale of the Sebago wood plot and a Capital Campaign that is publicized on our social media and our web site. Our Treasury Coordinator has worked hard and creatively to revamp some of our investments so that they are yielding considerably more revenue than in past years. OCWM basic support is holding steady, as we have reached out to churches that haven't contributed in awhile.

3. Health and vitality of our churches and other faith settings

In all encounters with our authorized ministers and faith settings, I have brought the message of support and celebration, as well as a pastoral presence of prayer and thanksgiving. Many churches learned for the first time what a conference minister is and does. I routinely introduce myself and my ministry, offering my words of appreciation and celebration for each faith community. Here is a summary of my activities:

Visited 28 churches on Sunday mornings, including preaching, welcoming new pastors, ordinations/installations, and saying goodbye to pastors;

Provided consultations in 10 churches for topics such as leadership struggles, bylaws and governance, developing vision and mission, churches coming together, and discernment for the future;

Welcomed 40 ministers to the conference office for discussion. Educational needs were discussed and some are being implemented in workshops at Annual Meeting;

Welcomed 45 retired ministers to two in-person gatherings and two Zoom gatherings for support and fellowship;

Attended Executive Committee meetings of our Associations;

Met with Association Moderators quarterly;

Met with the Committee on Ministry Chairs monthly.

Beloved, I am honored to be your Conference Minister, partnering with you to continue the vital ministry of Jesus whom we follow for peace and justice in the Maine Conference and in the State of Maine. I celebrate our unity under Christ alone as head of our life and ministry through the Conference, and affirm that each of us, in all of our diversity, is unconditionally beloved of God, whoever we are and wherever our faith journey has brought us thus far.

With deep blessings and prayers,

Marisa

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