

Conference Minister Annual Report 2026

Greetings to all the Beloved of the Maine Conference, Members and Friends,

During the past four years of tenure, I have been blessed in so many ways—from time with congregations and pastors, to meetings with Association members, to meetings with Conference committees, to heartfelt and earnest work with the Board of Directors. As I tell you my work and spirit this past year, I will base my writing here on my goals for 2026, developed in conjunction with the Personnel Committee and the Board of Directors. And I will end with my heart and spirit ponderings as we look forward to 2027.

Connections with Churches, Associations, Chaplaincy sites

- I have had the honor of being invited to preach at 20 churches and have consulted with 10 churches around various aspects of their congregational life and leadership. Several ministers have looked to me in my role as “pastor to the pastors” for support and guidance. Our Clergy Convocation (the first one ever!) was attended by 55 of our clergy, active and retired; and our Members in Discernment.
- I met once a month with the Chairs of the Committees on Ministry of our seven associations. Three of our Committees on Ministry are in my portfolio as staff support.
- I have met with the Moderators of the Associations once a quarter. I have attended all of the Executive Committees of Associations where I have been invited.
- I have been honored to attend ordinations, installations, and annual meetings of the Associations. Because of the time involved in attending all of these, I share this part of my portfolio with ACM John Fiscus.

Financial health of the conference

- In conjunction with the Development Committee, new and creative fundraising initiatives have been brought forward. This year the emphasis has been on inviting individuals, churches, and associations to contribute to the Capital Campaign. This coming year 2027 emphasis will be placed on other creative fundraising, including Friends of the Maine Conference and Legacy giving.
- The Board of Directors has continued to generate ideas about educating everyone about financial covenant, particularly in relation to Basic Support from Our Churches’ Wider Mission. OCWM giving is on par with 2025.
- I meet with the Trustees once per quarter who manage our large investments (Consolidated Trust). They are a gifted group of folks who understand investments on a complex level.
- Working with the Treasurer on the 2027 budget has been a joy, as our treasurer is especially knowledgeable about the financial health of a religious nonprofit.
- I have overseen and managed the renovation of the Farmhouse, including the build, construction, and outlay of financial expenditure. I am grateful to our Clerk of Works John Steelhammer.
- I am grateful that our Budget is again balanced.

Staff management

- I meet weekly with all staff; weekly with office staff: Office Manager/Exec; Treasury Coordinator; twice a month with ACM; once a month with program staff MESOM and Pilgrim Lodge.. Meetings focus on support of staff and empowering staff for autonomous execution of their duties. Staff evaluations are conducted May of every year.
- I meet with staff individually or in appropriate groups for job-related issues or relationship snafus between certain staff. I supervise the ACM.

Board team building

The Board of Directors is a growing, breathing group of dedicated volunteers who are continually stretching into the fiduciary role for governing the life and work of our Conference. This year I worked with the Directors on these specific areas:

- Empowering the Chair and Vice Chair to encourage communication among Board members for team building and generation of positive plans for the Conference.
- Encouraging and nudging Directors to become more visible to faith settings in the conference, to educate around what the BOD does and to engender trust for members and friends of the Conference.
- Presenting initiatives, encouraging discussion, and generating consensus around new or existing opportunities for growth in the Conference.

I know this is a long list of what is included in the portfolio of your Conference Minister. It is most (but not all) of the everyday duties I willingly and faithfully practice to contribute to the health and wellbeing of our Conference. One area not included in the goals is my work at the denominational level through the Council of Conference Ministers and as a Director on the United Church of Christ Board.

I would be remiss not to mention those sacred endeavors that go beyond the goals listed above. My largest endeavor this year has been to bring the message of unconditional love to each and every one—you are God's beloved—there is nothing you can do to push God's love away and there is nothing you can do to bring God's love closer. God loves you because God is love and you are God's child.

Included is the more difficult message that EVERYONE, no matter who, no matter where, is God's beloved—even those we don't think are worthy or those with whom we so strongly disagree.

Equally important is that Christians follow Jesus: as the head of the church and as the example and teacher of how to live. Most of us can probably agree on this, but the "how" of our acting is where we often disagree. As our head, we follow Jesus, and that means we love as Jesus loved, welcome as Jesus welcomed, include as Jesus included, care as Jesus cared: especially the shunned, the poor, the hungry, the stranger: all those that society may view as "not acceptable."

The Maine Conference is a large tent under which are Christians across the political and theological spectrum. How do we come together “as one as Jesus and God are one”, despite our differences? At the denominational level, the United Church of Christ is asking the same question, with the reminder that it is we who decide how our big tent looks, so that it is “a tent of our own making.” *

I leave you with these words and ask you to consider pondering them as you are poised to welcome 2027. We have much to celebrate, as we will at our Annual Meeting. We have a lot to ponder as we ask these questions for ourselves—individually, in our faith settings, in our Associations, in all gatherings—as we listen for how God is speaking and what God is saying to us into the 21st century.

Faithfully and gratefully,

Marisa

The Rev. Dr. Marisa Laviola, PhD

Conference Minister

*” A tent of our making” is a term coined by our General Minister and President Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia.