

## 2019 Report from MidAmerica Regional Lead

I write this report after coming to work for you, first in the Central MidWest District and then in our MidAmerica Region. This period of service has been deeply satisfying to me, and I feel deep gratitude to all of you. We have shared the challenge of discerning the small details of our life together—metaphorically how to arrange the furniture of our congregational lives—and the large questions of a deep economic recession followed by increasing calls for justice and reexamination of how we do things—both internal and external. This has been the movement for marriage equality. I can recall standing with many of you at the Illinois State capitol on a very rainy day in Springfield. And I can recall also standing with many of you in the rotunda of the Minnesota State capitol in St Paul as Standing on the Side of Love banners were unfurled (or that would now be Side with Love). I remember equally marching with many of you in St. Louis on the first anniversary of Michael Brown's shooting. And that amazingly warm clear day two years ago in Cannonball, North Dakota, at one of the Dakota Access Pipeline witness.

I am struck by how much MidAmerica has been ground zero for the larger social movements of our time, whether this be Ferguson for Black Lives Matter, anti-Islamic and anti-Semitic hate crimes in many of our MidAmerica cities, the water crisis in Flint, in North Dakota for the new awakening of the indigenous movement for sovereignty and protection of the earth, or—in a very different way—the reaction which led to the election of Donald Trump.

I know that this has been a hard decade for the congregations and leaders of our region. I thank you for the devotion you have shown through all of this. This has been a hard decade for you—first restructuring financially in the face of the 2007 recession and then more recently with the grim social political situation in our country and the hard questions we have had to ask ourselves about our own structures, in the denomination and in our congregations, and how we can dismantle those structures that lead to white supremacist results in our institutions often contrary to our best intentions.

Beyond you, the congregational leaders, there are many others I wish to thank.

You, the district and regional team of program and administrative staff, have been amazing: Peggy Bocard, Kathy Charles, Nancy Combs-Morgan, Sharon Dittmar, Phil Lund, Gretchen Ohmann, Katie Phillips, Lisa Presley, and Andrew Zallar.

Through a time of unrelenting budget cuts and great institutional stress you have faced each new challenge with amazing spirit and with unfailing support of each other on the team and of me as team leader. You have done more than sustain the services to our congregations through these times. You have taken each new stress as an occasion to reinvent the work. I can remember this from the first year of the recession when Dori Davenport Thexton, Peggy Bocard, Gretchen Ohmann and our office of assistant of the time—David Pyle—used the occasion of the fall in income from congregation in 2008 as a challenge to give up our brick and mortar office and create a virtual office. I think especially of Peg Bocard whose years of service and whose retirement we celebrate at this Regional Assembly. This same spirit of reinvention in the face of challenge has continued down to the present when the MidAmerica team under the leadership of Nancy Combs-Morgan and Kathy Charles has begun to extend to the Southern Region a package of online faith development offerings. This same partnership with the Southern Region and support from our national office has also allowed us to create a new shared Congregational Life Consultant with youth portfolio and we have been joined by new colleague Cameron Young.

I wish to thank David Lauth, our current MidAmerica Board President, as well as all the other current regional board members, past regional board members, and members of our the three predecessor district boards: Heartland, Central MidWest, and Prairie Star. Your constant leadership, your support, and the reference point you have regarded concerning the needs and challenges of those we serve has been wonderful. We live in a time of questioning regarding how we do governance in our country as well as our association. It is not for us as staff to determine the evolution of these forms. But what we can say is that given all the things you have helped us deal with month by month and the larger perspective that you have given us at crucial points, I do not know how we could have accomplished without you what we have accomplished in this past decade.

I would like also to thank our nominating committees. We know from our congregations that nominating committees always have a very important and important task that tends to be invisible. The same is true for our region. And I fear to say one place that the structure of new region had crucial gaps and inconsistencies has regarded the functioning of our nominating committee. Some of these issues are only now being ironed out. In spite of struggling under this disadvantage, our nominating committee has served us well and in good spirit. For this I say thank you. For similarly invisible service I would also thank the MidWest UU Conference and MidWest UU Foundation who give our work crucial financial support.

One power trend in our work has been that our partners have become increasingly central to our work. I would like to lift up here our UU State Action Networks, as well as our UU religious professional groups, and also Black Lives UU, Diverse & Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries, TRUUST, and Internānāional Initiative for Transformative Collaboration (follow-up to the Standing Rock Witness).

I also thank our staff colleagues from our larger association. It may seem like an obvious thing that the staff of our larger association would support each other. What is not visible and what I want to recognize is that the congregations of MidAmerica have been especially challenged in maintaining their financial support of the region. In the face of this, other regions and our national association have stepped up quietly to give a variety of kinds of support to us as a regional staff and directly to you in congregations. Without this we absolutely would not have been able to maintain the level of services that we continue to provide. And, we thank all of you congregations who continue to be Honor level supporters of our work and all of you who are working to increase your support.

As I retire, which I will shortly after our Regional Assembly, I am excited about what lies ahead for our religious movement. I see us going through a fundamental rethinking of many of what my generation—the baby-boomers—have felt to be their greatest contributions in thinking regarding how to do church, beginning with a general question of the hierarchy, and focus on written policies and reports of policy governance. This will be exciting work. As to what I myself will be doing after retirement, I plan to work that out piece by piece. I can tell you that part of it will be spending a lot of time with our first grandchild, Helen, in California. That sounds especially inviting when in January and February the temperature hovers near zero in the upper Midwest. One passion project is going to be support of our five indigenous Water Protector Partners who have been made political prisoners after Standing Rock. I am determined that they will not be forgotten. Those who have already joined me in this effort I thank you. Any more who would like to become involved, let me know.

Again, and for everything, I thank you.

-- Ian Evison