

*from Rev. Elena Larssen, Associate Conference Minister, 24 March 2010*

This evening, I will roll my suitcase down to the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport, pull out my ancient passport, and board a flight to Edinburgh, Scotland. From there, I will camp out with a Presbyterian pastor friend and her husband before heading to the Isle of Iona, to spend Holy Week and Easter on retreat with the [Celtic Christian community of Iona](#).

And I keep asking myself, "Who gets to do this?!"

As a pastor, I never expected to lead a "jet-setting" lifestyle, but as a recipient of a United Church of Christ Presidential Fellowship for Transformational Leadership\*, I am getting the opportunity to spend some time in peace and prayer on a tiny island in the Hebrides. Seriously?! Who gets to do that?! How could I possibly accept such a huge gift?!

And yet, here in the Minnesota Conference, we know that developing and sustaining powerful and profoundly faithful leaders is an essential task of the wider church. As our Conference mission priorities say, part of being a faithful and transformational region of the UCC means being "Directed toward identifying and nurturing the gifts and leadership abilities of clergy and laity." Sometimes this means...

- Hosting continuing education events, like the Fall Leadership Convocation for laity and clergy (9/30-10/1/2010 at [Christ the King Retreat Center](#))
- Sometimes this means asking folks to [serve on committees and teams](#), where they get a chance to stretch their executive and programmatic abilities;
- Sometimes we focus on a segment of the Conference, like finding funding to aid young adult clergy in attending the [2030 Clergy Network Conference](#) in Chicago this June;
- Sometimes we launch a new program, like the [Vitality Initiative Program](#), to develop leadership in new areas;
- Sometimes this means coaching and close involvement with a congregation or an individual, like a Pastoral Transition or the [In-Care/Member in Discernment process](#).

As a staff, we work to connect people with opportunities to lead and learn, because we know that often the greatest factor in the faithful success of a congregation - or a denomination, or a movement! - is the presence of incredible lay and clergy leadership.

And leadership is both about giving and receiving. As we are called to give and lead in Christ's church for the good of the world, we are also called to follow and receive in humility the gifts that God grants to empower us for the work of ministry.

And so, as I pack up my hiking boots and the stack of microwavable Indian food from Trader Joe's my expatriate Presbyterian friends are craving, I know that part of the Christian journey is to take time from the giving and leading, to receive and follow. And who gets to do that?! We all do, when we accept the gift of God's love.

Blessings, Elena Larssen

\*The Fellowship is a 'test program' designed to boost the leadership abilities of clergy for institutional leadership. For more on strategy behind building leaders, [check this out](#).