

*From the Rev. Rick Wagner, Associate Conference Minister*

The Minnesota Conference strives to identify and nurture the gifts and leadership abilities of clergy and laity. If *vocation* (one's sense of calling) is the place where one's gifts and the world's needs meet, then the more we can help people live out their vocation, the better. We offer people the opportunity to use their gifts and grow in their leadership abilities through the work of our teams, committees, task forces and occasional specialized training. There are too many examples to list here, but if you are passionate about some type of prophetic witness (immigration reform, anti-racism work, LGBT advocacy, etc.) or about strengthening local churches or starting new communities of ministry and mission, we invite you to speak with a member of the Conference staff.

When it comes to pastoral ministry, we note that some congregations have a "culture of call," continually inviting and nurturing people toward some form of authorized ministry. These tend to be vital congregations, encouraging their members, in the words of a hymn, to "set the dream that hardens into deed." Although the Roman Catholic Church has lost 26,000 priests in recent years, it has trained 24,000 lay workers to take over many of the priests' responsibilities. Out of necessity, but with great intentionality, they have been "equipping the saints for the work of ministry" (Ephesians 4:12). The UCC needs to do the same, but for a slightly different reason. We have a growing number of congregations that can no longer support full-time ordained pastors.

Fortunately, we have two lay ministry training programs in Minnesota. One is the [Academy for Vital Christianity](#), offered by United Theological Seminary in partnership with the Minnesota Conferences of the UCC and United Methodist Church. Its classes meet in different locations around the state. The other program is [LDM \(Leadership Development for Ministry\)](#), jointly sponsored by the Minnesota Conference UCC and the Presbytery of Minnesota Valleys. LDM's classes meet in Willmar at the Presbytery office, and are on a two-year cycle.

We have pastors serving congregations around the state who are graduates of lay ministry training programs, but we will need more. Some serve their congregations full-time, others part-time. Some are the sole pastor for their congregation. Others work as part of a team. If you've ever thought about becoming a pastor, or about gaining new skills or knowledge for some area of ministry, contact us or look at the offerings of LDM and the Academy for Vital Christianity. We may be able to help you discern a calling.

**Past *Mission Bites* can be found at [www.uccmn.org](http://www.uccmn.org)**