

## **Annual Meeting Report – June 2022**

**Rev. Cindy Mueller**, *Steward of Search & Call and Congregational Legacy Planning*

I began in this part-time position (25 hrs. a week) in April 2021. My portfolio covers two areas: supporting and resourcing churches in transition as well as those facing uncertain futures. I will speak to each area here.

### **Search and Call** during times of transition

This aspect of my portfolio involves work with congregational leadership in locating Bridge, Interim, Designated and Settled pastors. I also have assisted four congregations seeking sabbatical supply.

The MN Conference supported and resourced 18 completed searches since our last annual meeting – June 2021. Currently there are 14 congregations at various stages in the search process.

### **Congregational Legacy Planning** – for congregations facing uncertainty and or have decided to celebrate the completion of their ministry/closure

**All churches** face times when they need to consider their next most faithful steps. Ministry in these threshold moments calls for faithful and honest conversation. These conversations include examining the faith community's capabilities, their core values, their community relationships, their facilities and their finances. These conversations, if not begun too late (when the congregation is already exhausted), can birth new opportunities for their future – re-visioning/re-missioning/re-purposing, sharing their building with another church, merging/yoking/consolidating/adoption, re-location/selling their building and renting space, part-time clergy/lay licensed pastor, or closure. But no matter which option is chosen, all require a depth of organizational strength, leadership assets and willpower.

Experience shows that who face their future well, no matter *what* the outcome, do so when congregational leaders, pastors and congregational members are all involved in discussing their church's future and making the necessary decisions. Which is why it so important for all congregations to be doing this sort of work now, rather than waiting until its time to close the church/congregation.

If a church, after having done an honest assessment of its own human capacity and financial assets, determines it is at a point that it can no longer continue forward, it begins a process of “completing” its ministry; doing the legacy work necessary to ensure the mission of their church continues in a new way.

*Communication is critical at such a threshold moment.* Now is the time for all people who are invested in their church's future to get involved in the important conversations that need to take place. The result of such significant conversations can help birth something new as the church's mission continues on through its legacy, no matter if that takes place this year or 100 years from now.

Congregational Legacy Planning is a ministry that seeks to address an uncertain future that MAY result in the closure of a congregation. Critical assessment of a congregation's vitality and sustainability can lead to a time of discernment about the various paths a congregation may choose to take. We have some congregations that have faithfully chosen to merge with another congregation while others are seeking to determine what their next most faithful steps might be. The conference supports our congregations in these challenging times as they seek to discern what God is calling them too be in the next 3-5 years. As of this report, I am working with 11 congregations each at various stages of their discernment.

Since our last Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting, we have grieved the closure of three of our congregations. And yet, we also celebrate these congregations' faithful service in the communities of Hancock, New Ulm and Glencoe for numerous generations.

**Hancock, First Congregational Church** (organized 1873) made the difficult decision of completing their ministry on November 14, 2021.

**New Ulm, New Ulm UCC** (organized 1968) held its last service on Christmas Eve in 2021. Their church building was sold to another church in the community. They generously gifted the MN Conference UCC with a living legacy donation to support our ongoing ministry in Minnesota.

**Glencoe Church of Peace** (organized in 1896) held its last service in February of this year. They gifted their building to another church in the community.

Upon invitation from the leadership of these churches, our Conference Minister and Steward of Congregational Legacy Planning participated in their final worship services and celebrated the legacy that remains alive because of these faith servants.

With the Greatest of Hope,

*Rev. Cindy Mueller*