

Report of the President

To the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference of the United Church of Christ

Bobbie Henderson, Fellowship Congregational UCC



Warmest greetings from the K-O Conference Council. Having the opportunity to serve the church I love in partnership with Edith Guffey, our Conference Minister, the staff, and other members of the Council has been an experience I will always remember fondly and with deepest appreciation.

A year ago, we were moving toward what we feared would be the height of the Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, we were becoming cautiously optimistic that community-wide prevention measures and ultimately a vaccine would bring a measure of resolution to the public health crisis. By summer, in spite of increasing mask resistance, case numbers dropped to the point where many of our congregations felt safe in returning to in-person worship and other activities. What a joy it was to be in the physical presence of our church families!

And now we find ourselves back to COVID rates similar to pre-vaccine circumstances, but with fewer public prevention measures in place. Could there be a better time for The Church to declare ourselves “UNAFRAID”?

As we approach an Annual Meeting with UNAFRAID as our overarching theme we can take inspiration from the accomplishments achieved over the last year that include building Conference capacity by adding four part-time staff positions, launching an ambitious conference-wide leadership development effort, and identifying and electing a successor Conference Minister.

Staff Support

With unanimous endorsement from the Council, Edith introduced part-time staff positions that increased our capacity for communications, fund development, social justice, and ministerial support. With these reinforcements the Conference’s impact potential advanced, especially in terms of laying the groundwork for the introduction of a new Conference Minister following Edith’s retirement at the end of the year.

Leadership Development

A Transformation Grant from the Kansas Leadership Center (KLC) made it possible for fifty K-O lay and clergy members to participate in a leadership development experience called "Your Leadership Edge." KLC's research-based programs support the belief that "anyone can lead, anytime, and anywhere" by introducing course participants to skills and proven practices that improve problem solving and decision making. As we look to the future of the UCC in Kansas and Oklahoma, it's imperative that we work together to effectively lead our congregations and communities to respond to the challenges we face in today's world.

Conference Minister Transition

The search for Edith's successor dominated much of the Council's work during 2021. With the Search Committee established by the end of 2020, the Council turned its attention to developing a Conference Profile and the Conference Minister position description. Once completed and approved, these two documents became the announcement of the available position distributed throughout the UCC. From comments made by Search Committee Chair Rev. Rachael Pryor, and other members of the Committee, the process felt dominated by the presence of the Holy Spirit and for all concerned, resulted in a blessed outcome.

Following interviews and prayerful discernment, the Committee recommended Rev. Lorraine Cenicerros to the Council as the candidate for the position. After meeting and getting acquainted with Rev. Cenicerros, the Council agreed and put forth her nomination to the Conference. In a Special Meeting of the Conference held on August 21, Rev. Cenicerros was elected, and she will begin December 1, in order to work with Edith for a few weeks of orientation.

A busy, eventful year, one still dominated by the challenges of uncertainty, but also filled with hopeful anticipation and the knowledge that we are among God's people and that we have the assurance promised by Jesus: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27).

With deepest gratitude,

Bobbie Henderson, President

Rich Bireta, Treasurer, Plymouth Congregational UCC, Lawrence, KS

Kayla Bonewell, Committee on Ministry Representative, Cathedral of Hope and Church of the Open Arms, Oklahoma City, OK

Mandy Cook, Secretary, Evangelical United Church of Christ, Marysville, KS
Julia Gaughan, Ex-officio, Member of UCC Board of Directors, Plymouth
Congregational UCC, Lawrence, KS
Edith Guffey, Conference Minister, Plymouth Congregational UCC, Lawrence, KS
Bobbie Henderson, President, Fellowship Congregational UCC, Tulsa, OK
Sheridan Irick, Ecumenical and Interfaith Liaison, Community UCC, Partridge, KS
Eve Kendall, Justice and Witness Liaison, Central Congregational UCC, Topeka, KS
Jacqueline (Jackie) Kropp, At Large Member, Federated UCC, Weatherford, OK
John Lord, Past President, Plymouth Congregational UCC, Lawrence, KS
Joe Perkins, At Large Member, Wichita UCC, Wichita, KS
Dennis Ureche, Kansas Local Church Representative, St Peter's UCC, Inman, KS
David Wheeler, Oklahoma Local Church Representative, First Congregational Church
of Norman, UCC, Norman, OK, and Federated, Weatherford, OK
Caela Simmons Wood, Vice President, First Congregational UCC, Manhattan, KS