

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity!"

Greetings of God's grace and mercy! I am always grateful and extend my thanks to you and God for allowing me to be a part of this branch of God's Kin-dom called the Chicago Metropolitan Association of the Illinois Conference.

"Change is situational. Transition is psychological...Without transition change is just a rearrangement of the furniture. Unless transition happens, change won't work." William Bridges

As I out and about in our Association and the rest of the Conference I come in contact with our people who are excited about the church in general and the IL Conference of the United Church of Christ in particular. I also meet folk who are afraid and angry about the church. Church, as we know it and have known it is fading away and we just cannot hold on to it. That makes us uncomfortable and this causes pain and anger. We have a new vision and mission we will continue to be the Church that God called into being. We have done that and now we are working so that all can share in what it means to be the church of today. We are continuing to be transformed even as we lament the loss of the familiar.

I continue to give thanks for the opportunity to serve the people of God, known as the Chicago Metropolitan Association. God continues to work through the people of God to bring the good news and to make that news manifest in our care for the least of these, our brothers and sisters. We care through our social justice advocacy of health care, jobs training/retraining, food and clothing programs, ending the violence, fair and equitable treatment through our criminal justice system, abolishing the tier structure of citizenship, honoring the rights of all of our citizens in the United States in their pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness. I ask today as Rodney King asked all those many years ago, "can't we all just get along?" As the people of God we work towards making that a reality and that is the beauty of the good news. The good news of Jesus Christ; he is not dead; he is risen just as he said. New life can still rise out of the chaos. God is still able to bring about the miracles that we so desperately need in these days. That is why the celebrations of Ordinations and Installations bring such great joy. In those celebrations there is new life. Even as some congregational ministries are closed, they are able to represent new life by the Legacies they are able to leave. And that is cause for great joy. Throughout our Chicago Metropolitan Association new life is blossoming. We are an Easter people. We are a resurrected people.

"The Lord said to Moses, 'Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him. They are to perform duties for him and the whole community at the Tent of Meeting by doing the work of the tabernacle...In this way you are to set the Levites apart from the other Israelites, and the Levites will be mine, says the Lord.'"

The Member In Discernment Journey continues to challenge all of us. We have said that ministry is relational. "The journey that we continue to adjust to is designed to undergird a person's discernment for authorized ministry by building a support network comprised of the local

church, the Chicago Metropolitan Association, the Church and Ministry Team, and the individual.” God calls, the individual accepts, however it is the Church, the body of God’s people, that affirms, nurtures and authorizes that person to be set apart for a particular ministry. This is what we have agreed to and said in the introduction to this journey. In addition, we are continuing to use the Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers of the United Church of Christ as our guide, with some adaptation, in discerning scholastic competencies and skills and spiritual growth of our MID’s.

“May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. May the Lord send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion.”

The Justice and Witness Ministry Team has renewed enthusiasm and energy for their work. They are working on several projects that they are involving the whole Association in. The crucial issues that our Justice and Witness Ministry Team need support are: Healthcare, Police Brutality/Black Lives Matter, Mass Incarceration, and Building Capacity. There are ways that your local church can help and be involved. Be sure that you seek one of the Justice and Witness Team members out so they can begin to have your church involved and working along side of them.

“All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.”

The Congregational Life Ministry Team continues to lift up and provide that much needed help to congregations and clergy as they seek to bring vitality and vibrancy to the congregational life of our local churches and ministries. We continue to gift congregations with grants that will move them closer to what God is calling them to be. We are able to give because of other local churches generous gifts to the Illinois Conference as a legacy to the ministries that once were but are no longer.

The Nominating Ministry Team continues to seek individuals who will make a difference in the life of the Association. They seek men and women as well as young people to do the work that God is calling forth from all of us in the Chicago Metropolitan Association. When you are asked to become involved in the wider church please take the request to God in prayer and do as God has called and laid upon your heart to do. There are still a number of positions open in the Association and the IL Conference.

During the past year I was fortunate to attend and participate in:

- five Ecclesiastical Councils in CMA,
- one hundred and eight meetings and events in CMA and the Illinois Conference,
- forty three face to face meetings with MID’s, clergy, and lay leadership,
- thirty six visits to local churches for worship and special occasions,
- nine Ordinations,

- seven Installations,
- four Search and Call processes with local congregations, and
- celebrated the life's journey of four persons, some of whom were clergy and others that were laity.

"I am confident of this, that the One who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ."

Again, thank you, Illinois Conference for the opportunity to be God's servant in service to the Chicago Metropolitan Association. I thank you, the Chicago Metropolitan Association for allowing me to serve.

Reverend Vertie Powers
Associate Conference Minister
serving the Chicago Metropolitan Association
IL Conference of the United Church of Christ
May, 2016