

## **MODERATOR'S REPORT**

### **Western Association**

It has been a very unique and challenging year. And, because it was such a unique and challenging year, this report will be longer and different than past reports.

My term, as Moderator, began at the conclusion of the March 30, 2019 Spring Meeting of the Western Association. At that meeting, we also actively started the process of the Rev. Tom Norwalk retiring as one of our two Associate Conference Ministers and the Rev. Kimberly Wood becoming Tom's successor as the Associate Conference Minister assigned to ALL of Eastern Association and PART of Western Association. Tom's retirement was effective May 31, 2019. Kim began her duties on June 1, 2019. The Rev. Kathy Lawes is our other Associate Conference Minister. When I began my term as Moderator, Kathy was responsible for ALL of the Prairie Association and PART of Western Association.

Near the end of August, there was an unexpected staff resignation impacting Fox Valley Association. Kim Wood was reassigned to cover ALL of Eastern Association and ALL of Fox Valley Association. Rev. Kathy Lawes was reassigned to cover ALL of Prairie Association and ALL of Western Association. Kim Wood served the Western Association for less than 60 days. Rev. Kathy Lawes has been our SOLE Associate Conference Minister since the end of August (and has done an excellent job).

Thus, during my first five months as Moderator, we had three different professional staffing configurations for the Western Association. This was in addition to the Illinois Conference having an INTERIM Conference Minister (who was away on sick leave for approximately three months between July and January). As I noted in my opening sentence, this has been a unique and challenging year.

Overall, the Western Association Council did an excellent job of dealing with all of the "curveballs" and unexpected changes during this past year. The Association Council started their year with a day-long planning session in May 2019. Many great ideas were generated. In the next 2-3 months, planning (and initial implementation) started on some of those ideas. We had a great year planned and underway. Then, numerous changes and challenges started to happen in our personal lives and in the Western Association, the Illinois Conference—and the nation. These situations essentially derailed most of the Western Association Council's "best laid plans".

We had a good Association Council meeting on September 15, 2019. However, instead of being able to do extensive planning for future projects, much of that September Association Council meeting was devoted to addressing the challenges created by the sudden (and unexpected) change in the Associate Conference Minister assignments (which had happened during the last days of August).

We had no meeting of the Association Council scheduled for October. We felt there was no need for an October Council meeting, because we held the joint Fall meeting of the entire Western and Eastern Associations (in Decatur) on October 19th.

During the next three months, illnesses, schedule conflicts, weather issues, and holidays kept the Association Council from meeting again until January 20, 2020. The next day, the U.S. had its first confirmed COVID-19 case. The rest is history.

On March 19th, the Association Council voted to not have an “in-person” Spring meeting of the Western Association due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was decided that our Association elections would be conducted through email (and the U.S. Mail). Annual reports would be posted online. The newly elected persons will begin their time in office on May 13th. (This means that my “year” as moderator will actually be 13.5 months in duration).

As Association Moderator, I also serve on the Illinois Conference Council and the Illinois Conference Executive Committee. The tremendous changes and challenges (occurring within the Illinois Conference) have required me (as Association Moderator) to be more involved in Illinois Conference responsibilities than many of my predecessors. During my term, there were always one or two Illinois Conference meetings each month. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have had 1-3 Illinois Conference meetings PER WEEK (almost all of them being held electronically).

In a roughly 18 month period, the Illinois Conference had three Associate Conference Ministers (ACM) retire and a fourth ACM resigned. This was in addition to the Illinois Conference having an Interim Conference Minister. Thus, we have had four different pastoral search committees (including the search committee for a new Conference Minister). Such a significant change in staff is pretty much unprecedented.

The Interim Conference Minister had two different periods of major health problems within the past year. He was away on medical leave for a total of approximately three months between July and January. Thus, the rest of the Conference staff (and the Conference Executive Committee) had additional challenges and duties during his illnesses and absences.

The Illinois Conference Business Manager/“Controller” is retiring May 31, 2020. That means that another search and hiring process is getting underway.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the Illinois Conference to close both camps for the season (Pilgrim Park and Tower Hill). There have had to be layoffs of camp staff and of Illinois Conference office and support staff. The pandemic has caused us to cancel (or postpone) the in-person Conference Annual Celebration (Annual Meeting).

My term, as Western Association Moderator, has not only been busy and “unique” in regard to my Association duties. As Moderator, I have also been extremely busy with my duties on Conference Council and the Conference Executive Committee.

In closing, I extend my deepest gratitude to Kathy Lawes, Connie Owens, the elected officers of the Association, the Association Council, and the Association Church and Ministry Committee for all of their hard work during this unique and challenging year.

**—Rev. Jon Prain, Moderator**