Conference Annual Celebration | November 6-7, 2026 | Covenant UCC, South Holland

Report to the Illinois Conference United Church of Christ
Rev. Kathy Lawes | Associate Conference Minister (ACM)

What's old is new again.[1]

Grace and peace, siblings in Christ of the Illinois Conference! May the risen Christ guide our days and ways, our thoughts and actions, our hearts and minds and spirits.

A year ago, I started this report with, "A lot can change in a year!", citing the addition of Rev. Michelle Hughes to our staff and identifying anticipated changes to my job description. Now we have bid Michelle farewell with our thanks, and my assortment of tasks and priorities again shifted. My responsibilities are:

- Staffing the Committees on Ministry (CoMs) of the Eastern, Fox Valley, Prairie, and Western Associations (my staffing of the Chicago Metropolitan Association's CoM concluded in September with ACM Rev. Shernell Edney stepping into the role). Among my tasks associated with the CoMs are providing support to Members in Discernment (MID); supporting the authorization process of persons called to ministry; supporting Fitness Review processes; participating in services of pastoral installations and leave-taking, Ecclesiastical Councils, and ordinations; offering pastoral care to *some* congregations and pastors in transition (primarily those in smaller communities seeking part-time pastors and/or considering yoking, sharing a pastor, and other imaginative means of identifying pastoral leadership in their tightly-knit smaller membership worshiping congregations (notably, this task includes the idea of "raising up" pastoral leadership from within a congregation, a process which our Committees on Ministry wholeheartedly support with their time, presence, mentoring, financial resources, and educational/training opportunities);

- Staffing the Association Councils of the Eastern, Prairie, and Western Associations; and,

- Providing pastoral care to pastors and congregations of our five (5) Associations, focusing primarily on ministers whose pastorates have been curtailed by health issues and/or family challenges; maintaining contact, albeit limited, with retired pastors and surviving spouses; and being as supportive as possible of key lay leaders facing difficult decisions (such as selling a parsonage, considering closure, moving to part-time ministry, financial concerns, insurance questions, and evaluating the pastor, etc.).

Few, if any, of these tasks can be completed by an individual, and I am very grateful to the chairs of the CoMs who have skillfully and adeptly carried multi-faceted responsibilities with grace: Rev. Dan Sather (CMA), Rev. Eric Quinney-Burnard (Eastern), Rev. Ruth Farrell (FVA), Rev. Jennifer Amy-Dressler (Prairie), and Rev. Tim White (Western); I'm also very thankful for the faithful and effective leadership of our very fine Association moderators: Mr. Shawn Hillman (Eastern), Revs. Hank Fairman and Muriel Jahn (acting on behalf of the Prairie Association), and Ms Ursula Webster (Western). Additionally, I thank Mr. Bob Tallitsch, member of Moline: Hope UCC, who has provided invaluable support and insights in coordinating the Fitness Review process across the entire Conference, including driving hours across our Associations to meet in person with CoMs and people involved in the adjudication of Fitness Reviews.

I'm grateful for colleagues in Conference ministry: Interim Conference Minister Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, ACM Rev. Shernell Edney, Ms Naomi Else, Rev. Sarah Lohrbach, Ms Lauran Smith, Outdoor Ministry Site Directors Rev. Tracy Heilman and Mr. Mitch Kloster, and staff persons Ms Tara Cade, Ms Jeri Edelberg, Mr. Matt Martinkus, and their marvelous summer staffs. Join me, please, in a hearty shout-out to Tara Cade who retired as the Pilgrim Park Administrator after **32 years** of service. Thank you, Tara!

I also offer heartfelt thanks to Illinois Conference siblings who provide me with support, insight, and presence; and, to the congregations whose consistent support of Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) makes possible the ministries of our Conference staff – your generosity is deeply appreciated and <u>never</u> taken for granted. Thank you.

Finally, I must acknowledge that this past year has been…well, difficult. A lot of changes and time pressures. I've risen to the challenge in some settings and totally bombed in others. I'm aware of the grace and understanding shown me when I've fallen short of your expectations and my own good intentions. I look forward to the year ahead with hope – and to strengthening our ministries *with* and *for* you in supporting our congregations and pastors. I also anticipate a time of renewal and reconnection at the Conference Annual Celebration at Covenant UCC in South Holland when I can share my gratitude with you in person. Or on Zoom at some point. Or the phone. Those work, too.

With love and gratitude,

Rev. Kathy Lawes

[1]This phrase has been attributed to Winston "Churchill, Mark Twain, and cited as a Chinese proverb. (T)he oldest source for the sentiment itself was the English author/satirist/essayist Jonathan Swift (who) rooted his exposition in the works of Ovid (43 BCE-18 CE)". [Source: @wesmorgan1 at DailyKos.com]