



October 23, 2016

### Thoughts on the 4 Association Mergers...

**“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah 43).**

Four of our seven Conference Associations (East Berks, Heidelberg, Reading, and Schuylkill) have spent the last five years discerning and dreaming about the possibility of consolidating into one Association. And now, on October 30th, Reformation Sunday, they gather to vote on this possibility. While the Conference generally, and the Conference Minister specifically, has not had an active role in these conversations, the Conference Minister does have a perspective to share on behalf of our Conference which will be affected.

First, regardless of the outcome, the merger process has provoked important deliberation around the purpose of Associations (which many don't know), our pastors' and lay leaders' commitment to Association work (which many don't make) and the possibilities that lie in stronger Associations (which most can't see--yet) which make for a stronger Conference.

Second, consolidating Associations has the potential to make an exciting connection with the Vision, Mission and Objectives of the PSEC 2020 Vision Plan even though it was not conceived as part of that plan. It has the potential to create a “unified portion of the Body of Christ moving in a collaborative direction” (vision). It has the potential to make the “Association...agencies of connection and accountability” (mission) and it has the potential to “create an ethos of expectation, experimentation and transformation” (objective).

Finally, it does mean change. Some changes can be anticipated while others cannot. Therein lies cause for anxiety. But the leaders of each Association have given time and space for all voices to inform this process. They understand that as the religious landscape around us changes and UCC ministries near and far continue to decline, business as usual will not lead us into the future. There are new and different ways to structure our connections, share resources, support one another and inspire each other as we live out the truth of being Christ's body and our call to take the gospel into the world. I firmly believe that in this process God may be doing a new thing. That is something of which I want to be part and for which I would beg your prayers.

Blessings, *Bill Worley, Conference Minister*

*Getting to Know :*

**Chestnut Hill UCC**

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Who doesn't love kids? We love having them in our midst – squirming and talking and exploring. Because our congregation is seated in the round, we face one another. Our

kids often move around the space, stretching out on the carpet, visiting a friendly face across the sanctuary, or splashing in the fountain. Sometimes they just start dancing! Our kids have been known to ask a question of the preacher during a sermon. (You might call it an interruption, we call it the movement of the Spirit!) Our children have things to learn from the church, it's true. But we also have so much to learn from them.

While we embrace and affirm our own children, we also feel called to stand for all children across our state. Pennsylvania has the largest gap in the quality of education provided to higher-income and low-income children in the country. Many children in our state are not afforded what the Pennsylvania constitution promises, “a thorough and efficient” system of education. We invite you to pray with us, not only for the children in each of our congregations and communities, but for those who teach, administer, and make decisions about education in our state. All our children, regardless of race, zip code, or class, deserve an education which helps them to be the person



Prayers are requested for Chestnut Hill United Church in Philadelphia and Rev. Linda Noonan.