

Greetings!

This year has been extraordinary—marked by large gatherings, essential decisions, and significant work within the Conference Consistory. It has been a busy year that seems to have flown by!

From the Spring Meeting at Penn State, where about 500 people gathered from across our four Pennsylvania Conferences, to the Fall Meeting in November, where you, Pennsylvania Southeast Conference, filled Good Shepherd UCC in Tuckerton (and joined online) for the historic Keystone Conference vote—this Conference has remained deeply engaged. These gatherings have been powerful moments of connection and vision, offering us a glimpse into the future of shared ministry in Pennsylvania.

Serving as your Moderator has been both a joy and a challenge. I am deeply grateful for the guidance and support of our Conference Staff during my first year and for the dedication of the elected pastors and laypeople who faithfully serve as your Conference Consistory. Our shared commitment to service, collaboration, and discernment has remained strong as members transition on and off the board. Together, we have engaged in vital decisions around finance, received and heard reports, and supported the ministries of our churches, Associations, Conference Staff, committees, and stewardship efforts. The work these members provide often exceeds the time that consists of Consistory as they serve on separate committees and teams. For their commitment, we are grateful.

Heartfelt thanks go to the Personnel Committee, led by Vice Moderator Robert Ames, whose role has become increasingly important during the Keystone Conference transition. Their thoughtful leadership continues to support our Conference Staff and navigate changes. Giving thanks for the highly gifted and dedicated Conference Staff we are blessed to have among us, who give their valued time and energy for the betterment of our ministries and the greater United Church of Christ, please join me in thanking Mrs. Brea Rarick, Mrs. Kim Kulesa, Mrs. Susan Creswell, Rev. Cean James, Rev. Kevin McLemore and Rev. William Worley. Additionally, we sincerely thank Rev. Tammie Wisniewski for her years of faithful service as Financial Operations Manager. As of early 2025, she continues to support our Conference's financial needs as a subcontractor, and her ongoing commitment blesses us.

I also wish to recognize the Conference Worship Team for our Fall and Spring meetings, whose creative and pastoral leadership shapes meaningful worship for our meetings – worship that reflects this transitional time's emotional and spiritual depth. Deep thanks to our host churches, Good Shepherd UCC Tuckerton (Rev. Koslowski) and Zwingli UCC (Rev. Kuykendall), for their generous hospitality and support, enabling our conference work to happen both in person and online.

Vice Moderator Ames and I had the opportunity to attend Moderator Training, via Zoom, hosted by the UCC Council of Conference Ministers. We learned alongside moderators and board chairs

from across the country. We are thankful to Conference Minister Rev. William Worley for encouraging our participation. We came away with a deeper appreciation for the variety of ways Conferences live into leadership across the UCC and for the sacred role that spirituality and prayerful discernment play in facilitating meetings and guiding the Conference.

This past year, several Consistory members served alongside our Conference staff as part of the Keystone Working Group: Vice Moderator Robert Ames, Treasurer Rev. Ken McDowell, former Treasurer Rev. Bob Fogle, and me, together with ACM Rev. Kevin McLemore, ACM Rev. Cean James, and Conference Minister Rev. William Worley. Mr. Ames, as Chair of Personnel, continues to represent our Conference in coordination with Personnel Chairs across the state. Rev. McDowell has taken on a key role in managing the many moving parts of this complex and meaningful transition. I am also deeply grateful to the many others in our Conference who have stepped into committee roles to support and advance this historic work. Thank you for your time, wisdom, and faithful service!

While I have not had the opportunity to visit churches as some of my predecessors, I remain consistently inspired by how you—our churches and leaders—have embodied the hands and feet of Christ. Your work in Associations and teams like Generosity Mission, Disaster Recovery, the Addiction and Recovery Taskforce, the Environmental Justice Team, the Zachariah Walker Racial Justice Initiative, Lay Leadership Training, Member in Discernment Retreats, welcoming all four Conferences into shared retreats and ministries, embracing shared ministry opportunities, you are living out the call to faithful, collaborative leadership in the name of Jesus.

As we enter this final chapter in the life of the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference and continue forming the Keystone Conference, we do so with a deep commitment to the health and well-being of our Conference staff, volunteers, pastors, lay leaders, and church members. We are filled with hope for the future, knowing that we have a strong and dedicated community supporting us. Several of our Consistory members will be serving on the Keystone Conference Transition and Historical Boards, representing the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference. Thank you for your prayers, partnership, and continued trust in this Conference's ministry. Many members of our current Consistory have also committed to serving through our final November meeting, and we thank them for their steady leadership during this sacred season of change.

Finally, I express my sincere gratitude to Conference Minister Rev. William Worley and Mrs. Susan Creswell, Executive Assistant to the Conference Minister. Your unwavering support, wise counsel, and faithful service have been invaluable this past year. It is an honor to serve in the Pennsylvania Southeast Conference's work for such a time as this! Thanks to God, we do this together!

In gratitude and hope,
Rev. Melissa Burkhart, Conference Moderator