Joint Annual Meeting Report

On June 25-26, the Tri-Conference Ministry (South Dakota, Nebraska, & Iowa Conferences) held its Joint Annual Meeting (JAM). The meeting was held virtually to observe best practices during the ongoing pandemic. The theme for JAM was Creation Care, with Psalm 1 as the scripture – “Like a tree planted by streams of living water.” Delegates attended from all over the three Tri-Conference states and some from other locations (one even as far away as Hawai’i!). I was on the planning team for JAM and I attended as an authorized minister delegate.

The Joint Annual Meeting began Friday afternoon with an address from the Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ. Rev. Dorhauer greeted us with encouraging words and a blessing for our meeting. We were then greeted by our Executive Conference Minister, Rev. Brigit Stevens, and the other Tri-Conference Ministry staff were introduced. A time of worship was observed, then the two workshops were held, then there was a fun thematic trivia quiz competition. The evening concluded with a virtual dance party!

During the opening worship, we held the installations for our newly called associate conference ministers, the Revs. Kendy Miller and Sarah Rentzel-Jones. The 2020 5-for-5 churches were recognized (churches that had given to all five of the special UCC offerings). Recognition was also given to individuals who had given to the special offerings (anyone who would like to give to the special offerings can do so through the link: ucctcm.org/donate). The ministerial anniversaries of our TCM authorized ministers were celebrated; of note is the Rev. David Biebighauser who was recognized for the 50th anniversary of his ordination. Also celebrated were the lives of the churches who passed away during this past year; of note was the life of Rev. Richard Fylling. A moment of silence was also offered in recognition of the 10,200+ deaths in our three conferences from Covid-19.

The two workshops held at JAM this year were both on the theme of creation care. The other Both workshops were held Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. One workshop, “The Sustainable Church: Having the Courage to Create a Future Where everyone Thrives,” was co-led by Lori Myren-Manbeck and Myron Lowe. The other workshop, “Climate Change: Four Easy Pieces,” was led by the Rev. Penny Greer. In these workshops we learned:

* “Difference Is not the opposite of unity or oneness.”
* “What would be a healthy humanity environment you would like to offer to the world?”
* “What can you do right now as a church to improve your sustainability?”
* “You can save the world – in fact, you are the only one who can.”

Saturday morning began with coffee hour and an article discussion, followed by the two workshops. The discussion was based on a chapter from the book, *The Season of Creation: A Preaching Commentary*, by David Rhoads, et al. The discussion was led by me, and we looked at the features of our worship and how these worship elements can connect us to our desire to care for creation.

Following the workshops, we heard a presentation from the JAM keynote speaker Winona LaDuke, from the White Earth reservation in northern Minnesota. LaDuke is an internationally renowned activist working on issues of sustainable development, renewable energy, and food systems. Unfortunately, we were unable to connect online with Ms. LaDuke and watched a video of a presentation she had given a few years ago. LaDuke challenged us to be active from the grassroots level to do what we can to build sustainability within our communities.

After a lunch break, ECM Rev. Stevens provided a TCM update on the work of conferences. Following the TCM update, the three Conferences met to do their annual meeting business. The South Dakota Conference did not have a quorum of representative churches, so was unable to take any legal action on the agenda (the SD Board of Directors will need to approve the items). The reports were presented from various committees such as the Board of Directors, the Committee on Ministry, and Placerville.

The 2021 Tri-Conference Annual Meeting concluded with a gathering for worship. The closing worship celebrated God’s working in our conferences and the joy of our covenantal fellowship. As we celebrated God’s blessings, we were also challenged to continue the holy work of being good stewards of creation and sharing God’s grace in our communities.