



# Southern New England Conference

United Church of Christ

*Living the Love & Justice of Jesus*

## Annual Report 2022

Rev. Angela Menke Ballou

To all God's beloved in the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, who are called to be saints.

Grace to you and peace from God our Creator and the Savior Jesus Christ.

First, I thank my God in all my remembrances of you. Remembering how you set out with faith, believing as our ancestors in faith that behold, God is doing a new thing among us, and that with pilgrim faith there was still more light and truth to break forth from God's holy word. So we, as three Conferences, decided that we might allow ourselves to release what was in order to become a new Conference. We carry the wisdom of our historic Conferences, into our new becoming, so that the great cloud of witnesses might cheer us on as we discern way of being that will allow us to make this faith our own and to best serve our God, churches and communities.

This adaptive change was chosen before we as individuals, churches and the world were thrust into these past two years of responding to a global pandemic. These years have required adaptability and courage in all levels of church leadership as pastors, staff, and lay readers have found new ways to serve God, our churches, and our communities. We commend the tremendous amount of effort and creativity that have been required. We have found ourselves more deeply reliant on the grace of God to guide us into days of change and loss.

As my opening words reflect, I am spending time reading the letters that were written to the first Christian communities. The early apostles and evangelists wrote letters of encouragement, guidance, theology, and hope. These letters and decisions shaped the newly forming Christian communities; we have inherited these testaments to their struggles and attempts at embodying a living faith. That faith has passed through the generations into our hands. What follows is an accounting of ways we are making the love and justice of Jesus real in this newly organized manifestation of the Body of Christ.

### **A Time of Learning –**

This has been a time of learning for our fledgling Conference. New members are voted onto this Board every Annual Meeting; the SNEUCC is still a very new organization; and our world keeps changing. To lead well, those of us who serve as your Board need to keep learning. In the past year, we have focused on three general areas:

1. **Our responsibilities as Board members** of a nonprofit corporation, and how our governance role complements and interacts with the management role of staff. Our Conference General Counsel Elizabeth Reinhardt has been a great resource in this regard.
2. **The programmatic work of our Conference**, by which we carry out the Vision. We have met with staff about the Center for Transformational Leadership, Faith Formation ministries, Silver Lake Camp and Retreat Center, and Pilgrim Day Camp, with other visits scheduled for later this year.
3. **The impact of racism** on individuals and our institutions, and how we can best build the SNEUCC as an anti-racist organization. The Rev. Dr. Diane Schmitz, Theologian-in-Virtual-Residence, provided valuable training on racial socialization, and we have adopted a simple tool to watch for aspects of “white supremacy culture” during Board meetings.

### **Oversight and Support of Executive Leadership –**

In January of 2021, the Board rejoiced to welcome our new Executive Conference Minister Rev. Darrell Goodwin, and our new Executive Minister for Strategic Operations, Rev. Dr. Audrey Price. Together with Dawn Hammond, Executive Minister for Policy and Finance, they began to put shape and substance to the Vision that had guided the Board's decisions for the past several years. This involved a lot of hiring, as wider staff transitions continued through much of 2021, with a full ACM team in place by October.

All three key staff leaders attend all our Board meetings, to keep us closely connected and well-informed in our decision-making. The Executive Committee carries out the Board's responsibility to supervise the Executive Conference Minister, while the ECM Pastoral Relations Committee supports him in his professional development and wellness.

#### **Finance and Governance –**

The full Board has engaged regularly with its Treasurer and Finance Committee, as we seek to ensure sufficient resources to carry out key ministries of the Conference, and to discern which of these should take precedence. Despite having an abundance of resources, our new Conference faces some significant challenges in carrying out all the ministries that were envisioned a few years ago. The Board is therefore gathering information and beginning a discernment process to close a budget gap of about 10%. For more details, please see the Treasurer's Report by Calvin Price.

To help meet its budgetary responsibilities, the Board formed two new committees during the past program year. The Stewardship and Fundraising Committee is charged with maximizing revenue from gifts and contributions. The Properties Committee has begun a review of all properties owned by the historic Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island Conferences, in order to make recommendations to the historic Boards regarding their best use in support of the Vision.

#### **Policy –**

Any new organization has a lot of policies to write! After 18 months of work by our Human Resources Committee and our Director of HR, Irma Reyes, a full set of HR policies is now under review by legal counsel. Staff are working on implementation of our Written Information Security Policies. Our Finance Committee has begun work on policies related to investments, and the Stewardship and Development Committee is considering gift acceptance and fundraising policies.

#### **COVID Response –**

As in local churches, our staff leadership team has watched evolving data and public health recommendations, seeking Board support for many policies and procedures. We have wrestled with decisions regarding staff travel; re-opening of offices; whether and when to meet in person; and vaccination requirements for staff and guests. In March, your Board had its first in-person meeting in two years, with the option for members to attend remotely. This was the occasion of great joy for some members and anxiety for others, as we – like you – learn what it means to be loving and thoughtful of one another in this constantly-changing landscape.

#### **Adaptive Change –**

Four months into its third year of existence, our Southern New England Conference is still very much in formation. Our new leaders have been with us for 15 months. Our human resource, financial and policy infrastructure is largely in place, but we are still hard at work to figure out how we live into our Vision of living the love and justice of Jesus together.

Rev. Goodwin has challenged all of us – Board, staff, and local church leaders – to be **prophetic, relevant and transformational** in everything we do. Those of us you have elected as your Board pray that our work, and yours, might meet this challenge.

Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. May you know this peace in your lives and in your churches. May you be an embodiment of the love and justice of Jesus that our communities and world might find true healing and a just and lasting peace.

Abundant Blessings,

Rev. Angela Menke Ballou  
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