Life in the Wisconsin Conference is full of energy and anticipation! In just two months we will host General Synod 32 in Milwaukee, June 21-25! We are very grateful for our Local Arrangements Leadership Team and the diverse cadre of volunteers preparing to serve, for the financial gifts from so many churches and leaders, and for this opportunity to provide warm midwestern hospitality.

For those who want to experience a “sampling” of General Synod, we invite you to consider visiting on Sunday, June 23. For just the cost of parking, guests are welcome to peruse the main exhibit hall and attend the afternoon worship service, featuring the dynamic preaching of Justice and Local Church Ministries Executive, the Rev. Traci Blackmon. Following worship, the Wisconsin Conference is sponsoring an outdoor festival at nearby Zeidler Union Square. There will be food trucks surrounding the park, live music and art, and ample social time!

As for the ongoing work of the Conference, our essential mission remains—to equip, guide and care for our Congregations and Clergy. Throughout the past year our Field Staff has guided over 60 pastoral searches, launched several new “shared” ministries, and offered the “ministry of presence” in times of grief, challenge and change. Board and staff leaders continue to cultivate relationships of support and trust across the Conference. Cohort learning opportunities abound, connecting pastors and educators through Mentoring, Coaching, and Communities of Practice.

This summer we will celebrate the retirement of Associate Conference Minister, The Rev. Joanne Thomson, who has served diligently over many years, gifting us with an exceptional skillset in church vitality and judicatory work and a wonderful sense of humor! In February, we launched the search for our future settled Associate Conference Minister, and we look forward to a smooth transition this summer.

Our Church and Ministry Teams faithfully carry out the ecclesiastical work of the Church, guiding Members in Discernment (MIDs) and managing matters of ministerial standing. Last fall we launched a new formative track toward authorized ministry. The Damascus Project is a shared initiative with the Minnesota Conference, also intended for the purpose of providing continuing education coursework for clergy and Biblical foundations for lay people.

The Conference Faith Formation efforts continue with a thriving Lay Academy and several youth retreats. Last summer many participated in a Regional Youth Event held at Elmhurst College. One of our current goals is to better equip local congregations with curriculum resources, a wide array of spiritual practices, and emerging models for children and youth ministries.

Our beautiful Outdoor Ministry settings—Moon Beach Camp and Pilgrim Center—provide ideal opportunities for multi-generational spiritual formation. We are blessed to work collaboratively with Executive Director Glenn Svetnicka and the talented staff of our sister organization, United Church Camps, Inc.

An exciting new Conference initiative is coming to fruition, as we recognize the need to resource local congregations in ongoing stewardship efforts and, ultimately, in cultivating Legacy Gifts. We are preparing resource materials and are excited to launch programming and staffing support this fall.
The Conference Catalyst Team offers grants for new initiatives around church vitality. Many of these ministries are community based, serving a wide network of people, often in partnership with other congregations or non-profits. This collaborative approach expands our reach and allows the Church to be a relevant social agency that helps meet the needs of those beyond our doors.

In 2018, the Wisconsin Conference Board of Directors prioritized the work of our Justice Ministries; thus we have worked diligently to improve our resource materials aimed at equipping congregations to engage more fully in the pursuit of our UCC shared mission—A Just World for All. Amidst the groundswell of “social movements,” God is at work empowering us to demand equality and dignity for those who have been marginalized and oppressed. Many of our congregations are engaged in studies on the Doctrine of Discovery and Conversations on Race. During this crucial time of border conversations, our Immigration Working Group continues to promote education and advocacy toward a more compassionate treatment of immigrants. Please visit the Conference website (wcucc.org/justice) for a comprehensive list of justice resources and contact information.

Finally, in 2018 our congregations contributed a total of $1,591,500 toward Our Church’s Wider Mission! These OCWM gifts primarily support the shared mission of our Conference life. They also support the work of the National setting of the United Church of Christ, and important ministries such as the Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC), United Church Camps, Inc. (UCCI), the Council for Health and Human Services (CHHSM), Chicago, United and Eden Seminaries (CUE) and Wisconsin Campus Ministries.

Beyond that, our amazing Special Mission Gifts offer relief and compassion here at home and around the world. In 2018, our Wisconsin UCC congregations contributed $127,683 to One Great hour of Sharing, $48,071 to Strengthen the Church, $76,437 to Neighbors in Need and $85,740 to the Christmas Fund.

Friends, Despite all of the challenges the Church faces these days, the spirit and energy of our Conference life is strong! Our covenant of care—and the bond of love we share in Christ—is a beautiful expression of God’s shalom, offered to a broken and fragile world. Together, as we collectively embody the values of Jesus, we impact our communities in truly transformational ways!

With deep gratitude and great hope,

Rev. Franz Rigert
Conference Minister
The Wisconsin Conference

Churches 218
Members 40,914
ONA Churches 63

Care of Pastors and Congregations

In 2018, Conference field staff:
Preached and worshiped with churches 85
Supported searches 62
Recommended Interim ministers 22
Attended ordinations, ecclesiastical councils, installations, farewells 47

Communities of Practice

Clergy Groups 16
Christian Educator Groups 3
COP Participants 101

Youth Programs

Programs offered 6
Participants 323

New Conference Initiatives

General Synod hosting
Damascus Project
Legacy Program
Periodic Vocational Support
Shared Ministry/Small Church Group

Cultivating Congregational Leadership

Lay Academy participants 56
Represented churches 36
Damascus Project courses 2
Damascus Project participants 32

Catalyst Innovation Grants

Scholarships–Leadership Training 15
Innovative Ministries Grants 19
Grants totaled $53,880
Congregations impacted 36

Amazing Generosity

General Synod Fund $48,597
Annual Fall Appeal $19,730
Special Offerings $337,931
OCWM $1,591,500
“5 for 5” Churches 118
An important purpose of our Wider Church is to provide ministry opportunities that your local church cannot: support for congregations during times of growth, transition, conflict and visioning; support for clergy and lay leaders; leadership development, resources to fuel innovation and justice efforts, camps, youth programming, connection to the national church and more. Your generous contributions to Our Church’s Wider Mission support these ministries.

Seventy-five percent (75%) of Conference revenue is used in Conference ministries that directly support our congregations and clergy.