

ACTIVITES REPORT

Kwame Osei Reed

After the 2010 Annual Meeting and leading up to my January - March 2011 sabbatical, I moved forward with the conclusion of a long period of major transitions in a number of local churches. These were mostly transitions in pastoral leadership. They resulted in successful pastoral searches and planning for the installation of pastors. Starting with the very first day of my return from sabbatical, I participated in a series of installations.

I am fully convinced that both church and minister benefit from a well thought out clergy sabbatical. Yet returning from this time of doing something different can be downright disconcerting. Still, I am back and feeling good about that. Even more, I am definitely back in the swing of working with the conference churches, organizations and wider justice and ministry community. Having spent a number of years following the route of the educational mission of the former American Missionary Association that started in the Southern States during the U.S. Civil War, I have gathered a good deal of material on the schools that were established to educate then recently freed persons.

This latest phase of my visits had a related but somewhat different focus. That was interviewing present members of the university and college communities in these UCC related institutions. This was and will continue to be a satisfying endeavor. I hope others will see it as worthwhile. It will continue because there are many more persons to interview. It certainly will go beyond my sabbatical. However, I am now well on my way. I cannot see how I could have built such solid foundations without this sabbatical.

I am back

My return quickly included meeting with individual and groups of clergy. Some of these contacts had been intentionally postponed until my return. My plan to enter several local churches on various Sundays and just sit in a pew during worship was quickly thwarted in every case. I was either asked to give a brief greeting or sit in the pulpit and participate in worship leadership. My biggest surprise was being asked to be the preacher at one church in both worship services on Palm/Passion Sunday. All of this helped me know that I was back.

Being invited to lead a seminar for the Baltimore United Congregations titled "The Widow and the Orphan: Preparing Congregations to Welcome the Marginalized" provided me a reentry that left no question that I was back.

I was also able to quickly step back into ongoing work with models for several ministries that groups in the Potomac Association have been building recently. Most of them are now in the organizational structure of various committees. The Social Actions and Missions Committee has the largest share of this "grassroots organizing."

The American Institute of Parliamentarians (AIP) D C Chapter 6 conducts training each month at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Washington, D.C. This was approved as a program of the Potomac Association. It is now fully self- supporting. But the goal includes bringing together members and leaders from our local churches in developing skills in leading meetings of churches and other organizations. It provides training in analyzing and writing bylaws for volunteer groups. I work with this group in training church members. That includes my learning to become a better parliamentarian.

The Prison Returning Citizens Ministry has been approved by the Potomac Association Board of Directors. The approach of this ministry is to make presentations in Association churches that support their establishing ministries to incarcerated persons and their families. These are citizens who are scheduled to return home and to their communities in the near future. Working with Prof. H. Dean Trulear of the Howard University School of Divinity and the Casey Foundation, this ministry is housed at the Briggs Center for Faith in Action near Westmoreland Congregational UCC. All of the board members and staff of this foundation are members of the Westmoreland Church.

Then there is the Quality of Life Ministry, which is devoted to presenting seminars in Potomac Association and National Capitol Area Churches of the Christ Church. The focus is addressing the resource needs that members have as they grow older. I continue to work with a team that has a design that can be used throughout the Association and beyond. The planning team for this ministry meets at the Briggs Center. The resources for aging persons come from various disciplines. One goal is to benefit from the skills of persons who sit in the pews of our churches in presenting the seminars. Because attorneys in our churches are giving seminars regarding the legal needs and resources, we have to carefully design the seminars so that it is very clear that they are educational in nature and no attorney/client relations are being established. Participants seek their own legal counsel. Still, there are fine lines that have to be understood and observed.

We have developed Disability Ministry Workshops for persons within the ages in which people are typically in the work force. Yet, they have become disabled and cannot work. The main goal of the workshops is to provide leadership from church members who can help disabled workers use the resources that are available to them. This includes identifying their rights and/or disability benefits. Designing this ministry includes making sure that this is a ministry that can be offered to churches. It is possible for persons to work professionally in providing help to disabled persons. The Disability Ministry would in no way discourage such endeavors. In fact it looks at ways in which help can be given to church members who want to work in the area of disability services. However, the goal is for our church to play an educational role only. My role is to develop a design that keeps church programs focused on ministering through educational programs. This does mean paying attention to the fine lines. I think I am learning how the internet can be used as an educational tool and resource for designing models. This ministry has not yet been approved by the Potomac Association.

Travel During and Beyond My Sabbatical

I have expressed my fulfilling experiences in visiting and interviewing persons at AMA Schools. I do want to mention that there are some local churches that are historically related to some of these schools. For example, LeMoyne College was founded at Second Congregational UCC, which is one block from the school. That school later united with Owen College to become LeMoyne-Owen College in Memphis, TN. I have been warmly welcome at Second Congregational Church and encouraged in my telling the school's story.

In addition to visiting the schools, I participated in the Samuel Dewitt Proctor Conference in Chicago, Illinois. This great resource for churches and clergy consists of participants from various Historically Black Colleges, Universities and Seminaries. Still, it has long received major support and leadership from Trinity United Church of Christ. I am in touch with leaders from Trinity and the Proctor Conference regarding my work with our AMA Schools.

I again participated in the Association of Conference Attorneys (ACA) Annual Meeting. It took place during the UCC Annual Consultation in Long Beach, CA. I am consulting with colleges on how to design those Quality of Life and Disability Ministries in such ways that are educational and do not present legal exposure for our churches. The ACA is a great resource for our churches in this and other areas

I also participated in the National Law and Religion Conference that was held in Atlanta, Georgia in late April of 2011. The theme of the seminars was "Protecting Churches... "from legal exposure.

Kwame