

## **2023 Annual Meeting Report for the Transitional Conference Minister**

As we reflect on the journey of 2023, it is evident that it has been a year marked by transition, exploration, and a sense of community and hope for the future. As I stepped into my role within the conference, I received generous support from Rev. Dr. Barbara Doerrer Peacock, Rev. Richard Doerrer Peacock, Wende Gonzales, Genevieve Benham, Hubert Hirwa, Rev. Susan Valiquette, and others. Also, thank you to the Executive Board for their vote of confidence and recommendation to the delegates of the 2024 Annual Meeting. There have been many, too numerous to name, who have paved the way for me to understand the landscape and culture of our conference, and for that, I am deeply grateful.

Throughout the past year, our focus has been on fostering connections, identifying needs, and expanding opportunities for ministry and mission. Despite the challenges posed by in this post pandemic era, we have endeavored to adapt and thrive. We directed our efforts towards supporting our youth, children, and families through initiatives like the Sow the Seed grant, while also addressing pressing social justice issues through grants allocated to congregations collaborating with migrants at the border and asylum seekers.

A huge portion of our time was focused on building a robust infrastructure and developing and streamlining procedures to ensure efficient and consistent outcomes. These efforts have equipped us to better serve both within and the wider church, fostering a shared understanding of our purpose, mission, and roles among all stakeholders.

Inclusivity has been a core principle guiding our actions, as evidenced by our endeavors to amplify diverse voices and experiences. We celebrated the ordination of two out of four Members in Discernment (MIDs) and welcomed a new pastor to a Marshallese congregation. Additionally, we initiated the Decentering Whiteness Task Force to address vital training opportunities and resources, reaffirming our commitment to equity and justice.

Our congregations have demonstrated remarkable collaboration and engagement, coming together for joint worship services and social justice projects. We continue to uphold our support for LaCasa in Nogales, Mexico, added support to the Franklinton Center at Bricks, and are celebrating the new church start, New Hope UCC-Phoenix, as a witness to our commitment to church growth and partnership support. We had a phenomenal clergy retreat and the pastors called to serve congregations in transitions have offered us hope for the future.

Looking ahead, our focus for the coming year centers on congregational resiliency and revitalization, with the aim of nurturing existing congregations while also fostering the formation of new ones. Now with a diverse staff, we are poised to hear from different voices, enhance the support to committees and congregations, and propel the conference towards new heights of connection, community, ecumenism, mission, and ministry.

As we bid farewell to retiring clergy and express gratitude to outgoing committee members, we also eagerly anticipate the opportunities for growth and renewal that lie ahead. Our struggles and successes of the past year have made us a stronger conference.

In closing, I extend my heartfelt thank you to everyone for your dedication, service, and unwavering commitment to our shared mission. Together, let us embark on the journey ahead with optimism and an abiding faith that the best is yet to come!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rev. Dr. Altonnette Hawkins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Rev. Dr. Altonnette Hawkins