

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE - AUGUST 14, 2011

Reflections

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

"RHYTHMS OF LIFE"



BY DAVID K. POPHAM

Starting September 1st I will be on sabbatical. It hardly seems conceivable that I have been in this position of Associate Conference Minister for almost six years. I remember visiting a church and the pastor introducing me as having been in the office for five years. At the time it had only been three. Laughingly I said "it just feels like five." Now, here at the end of my fifth year, I can honestly say "it only feels like three."

Things have changed in our Conference in these five years. We are emerging from a decade in which several of our churches lost viable youth groups. This comes at the tail end of a twenty year spiral in which the Conference as a whole witnessed a 2/3rds loss in youth from our congregations. Young adults also disappeared from our ranks as churches with at least 25% membership between the ages of 19 and 35 are far and few between.

I've suggested before that the numbers reflective of the life of our local congregations impact the number of registrants we see in our camping ministry. It should come as no surprise to anyone that in the past five years we have gone from nine camps in 2005 to six in 2011. The numbers to support larger camping opportunities simply do not exist within our churches at this time.

On the other hand there are some exciting developments within the Conference. To attend the Annual Meeting and witness local churches receiving the "Growth Award" warms my heart. Emerging data indicates that churches are poised to become centers of meaning-making in the lives of young adults and youth if we can take advantage of the present search for meaning. Yes, there's life in the old girl yet for those with "eyes to see and ears to hear."

Since arriving in the office I have been certified in coaching the Appreciative Way through the Church Leadership Institute. I have been privileged to work with churches from overarching "strategic visioning" to matters with a narrower focus. It is thrilling to work with UCC people and discover what they love about their church.

While on Sabbatical I plan to delve deeper into the mystery of the movement from the Dreaming Stage to the Design and Destiny Stages of Appreciative Inquiry: a place where congregations can get "stuck" while living out their strategic vision. On a more personal basis, with the help of the Rosetta Stone software I will start learning Spanish as a second language. Neither Hebrew nor Greek was easy for me in seminary. I am hopeful that the different approach with this software will prove successful in helping me move beyond my "second language barrier."

I will return to the office December 1st. In the meantime you can call the Conference office and they will direct you to the appropriate person for help. The Rev. Clare Twomey will be the Interim Associate Conference Minister for Outdoor Ministry and is responsible for administrating the Fall Retreats. Our Conference Minister, Tom Rehling, will be picking up the other pieces I am responsible for – take it easy on him.

Interested in submitting your own Reflection for the RMCUCC to use? contact us:

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