

September 29, 2024

Dear Missouri Mid-South Conference Board of Directors,

In a recent committee meeting, one of you asked me directly: “Mary, are you going to go with us into this future or not? I think we’re ready to go forward, but I need to know if you’re going forward with us.”

I, too, am ready to go forward—and I’m ready to go forward with you, Missouri Mid-South. **I accept the Board’s invitation to be the candidate for the position of settled Conference Minister in the Missouri Mid-South Conference.** I have long known that I am called to Conference ministry, and I have been serving in Conference Ministry for more than ten years now. I want to work with you. I feel called to this partnership with you.

Every Conference has its challenges, and every Conference Minister has to seek difficult solutions amid no-win situations. I often say that I love my job. And when asked what it is that I love about it, my response is that I love these people, and I love these problems. When I hear from colleagues in Conference Ministry about the challenges they are facing, I think to myself, “I’m so glad to have Missouri Mid-South’s challenges.”

Three and a half years ago, none of us thought that this relationship would last more than a few months. You hired me during a global pandemic, while still living in lockdown, before we knew if or when a vaccine would be available to the public. Everything was temporary, everything was changing, everything was unpredictable. It felt impossible to make any true commitments. It felt impossible to discern God’s call.

Since that time, we’ve embarked on a series of tough conversations together, and we are still experimenting with what works and what doesn’t. In many ways, this last year or so has been the hardest, as you’ve sought to articulate a vision for the future of your Conference. I wonder if the temporary nature of my contract was a contributing factor—it’s hard to develop a long-term vision for the life of your Conference when you don’t know if the Conference Minister will be part of that long-term. I also know that I cannot put a vision into practice if you are not committed to being in partnership with me. The Discernment Committee’s work around covenant in the new CM job description gave me reassurance: I believe that you mean to make the commitment to partnership in ministry. And the Board’s response to the question of whether or not the CM must reside in the Conference gave me hope: I am heartened by your willingness to take responsibility for that conversation.

Let’s continue to serve the churches and clergy and partner ministries of our Conference, and figure out how to be faithful stewards of the gifts that God has given us, so that we can be and become the Conference that God is calling us to be. I am honored and humbled by your invitation to serve as your Conference Minister, and I look forward to continuing this ministry with you. Let’s keep up the good work!

With hope for Christ’s Peace,
Rev. Mary W. Nelson