Annual Report
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
Missouri Mid-South Board of Directors
United Church of Christ

2025-2026

Grace and peace to all the churches, persons in ministry, members, and friends of the Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ. I pray that everyone feels the presence of the living God in their lives and that you are confident and bold in your faith.

The Board of Directors of the Missouri Mid-South Conference has had a year filled with many tasks and great successes. Two phrases have guided our work: "the big invitation" and "the big ask." Our highest priority has been creating a spirit of unity and trust within our churches, clergy, and members. With boldness, we have tried to be "all things to all people," seeking opportunities to engage in conversations in as many different settings as possible. This began at our 2025 Conference Annual Gathering in Fulton and continued throughout the year as Board Members attended Association meetings, ordinations, installations, committee meetings, and many other community gatherings.

During the past year, the Board made several organizational changes. Of special importance was establishing a strong Executive Committee, including Chair Dane Sommer, Vice-Chair David Weerts, Secretary Kathleen Hamilton, and Treasurer Julia Hicks. Through the fall and into the winter, the Executive Committee met weekly at times to address the Conference's immediate needs. In December, the Executive Committee, supported by many Board members, gathered at Eden Theological Seminary for a farewell ceremony for our transitional Conference Minister, the Reverend Mary Nelson.

Immediately following the 2025 Conference Annual Gathering, the Executive Committee (according to our By-Laws) focused on finding a new Intentional Interim Conference Minister. This included several conversations with the national representative for conference minister search and call. We received and reviewed nine profiles from candidates who expressed interest in coming to the MMS Conference.

By the start of the new year, we narrowed our choices to three candidates, who were invited to join us for video interviews. In mid-February, the Executive Committee invited The Reverend Phil Hodson for an in-person interview at Eden Theological Seminary. Rev. Hodson met with the Executive Committee and then the full Board, and after extensive

conversations, the Executive Committee chose him as our Intentional Interim Conference Minister, with a start date of June 1, 2026.

As these rigorous activities were taking place, the Board began a series of deep dives into our many important issues. Our top priority was addressing budget-related issues. The Board put a review process in place for all expenses of $500 or more. We put several budgeted projects for Mo-Val and Shannondale on hold. To increase cost savings, the Board decided not to hire a contract or "bridge" Conference Minister from January through May. During this time, the Chairperson of the Board of Directors (a volunteer position) became the "administrator" of the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Board members received tutorials on the conference budget, carbon credits, tree harvests, outdoor ministries, camp infrastructure, and the eventual search and call of a settled Conference Minister. Staff meetings began regularly. We set priorities to strengthen preparations for the arrival of Rev. Hodson. The Board of Directors and Staff (along with Rev. Hodson) met at Camp MoVal during the last weekend of April for our annual retreat. This included worship, music, relationship building, and strategic planning. We also had more time to get to know Rev. Hodson.

During the spring, the Board of Directors worked diligently to prepare for Phil's onboarding. We proactively began scheduling formal and informal gatherings so he could meet as many people as possible. We also began finding opportunities for Phil to preach at as many of our congregations as possible. Board Members are required to attend as many of these events as possible. As of this writing (10/22/26), Phil has visited seventeen churches in the Missouri Mid-South Conference plus all three Associations' Fall Meetings. The Board is impressed with Rev. Hodson's vigor, openness, transparency, and business acumen.

As we prepare for our upcoming Conference Annual Gathering for 2026, "Reclaiming Our Connection," the Board of Directors has a razor focus on four issues: 1) Reminding everyone that "they" are the Conference. Much of this effort has focused on expanding our contacts with as many congregations and clergy as possible. This has also included revising the eCourier and the Conference Website with our hard-working staff. 2) With Rev. Hodson's insight, we have reorganized the Conference accounting system to understand with greater efficacy how projects are funded. As you will hear at the Conference Annual Gathering, we have made great strides in improving the health of our budget. 3) The Board has drafted a revised set of By-Laws and Constitution, which will be presented for discussion and approval at CAG. 4) And finally, right after the first of the year, the Board of Directors will begin the sacred process of search and call for a new Settled Conference Minister. This process is expected to take between 18 and 24 months. I am confident that

under the leadership of our Intentional Interim Conference Minister and our dedicated and "faith-filled" Board of Directors, we will continue to become stronger, wiser, and more united as the Body of Christ.

As I conclude, I would like to thank all the Members of the Board of Directors for their dedication, sacrifice, hard work, laughter, tears, and faith. This has been a liminal year, a year full of unique challenges and impassioned possibilities. Each of our Board members has contributed many hours, thoughtful and measured wisdom, and financial gifts that have made our beloved Conference stronger and more grace-filled. Please join me in thanking them for their service.

Respectfully submitted,

The Rev. Dr. Dane R. Sommer, Chair
Missouri Mid-South Conference
Board of Directors
Executive Committee