Intentional Interim Conference Minister's Report

Building Relationships, Strengthening Foundations, and Preparing for Revival

When I began serving as Intentional Interim Conference Minister on June 1, I knew my first task was not to master an organizational chart, a budget, or a set of policies. It was to know the people. Because the Conference is not a building or an office. The Conference is the relationships we share.

Four and a half months later, I believe that more firmly than ever. I have seen generosity and faithfulness across our congregations. I have also seen places where trust needs rebuilding, communication needs strengthening, and expectations need clarifying. That is not a reason to despair. It is a call to do the work.

I understand this calling through four connected lenses: **Evangelism, Discipleship, Mission, and Care.** Not four departments. Not four slogans. Four ways of living the gospel together. They shape what we do, how we lead, and what we prepare for next.

1. Evangelism: Showing Up and Sharing the Good News

The first step in sharing good news is showing up. I have made it a priority to be present across this Conference—in larger congregations and smaller communities, in worship and at association gatherings, in public meetings and personal conversations. People need to know their Conference sees them.

Evangelism is more than an effort to increase membership. It is helping congregations tell the truth about God's love and recognize the good news already taking shape in their neighborhoods. We cannot do that well without first listening.



Peace UCC, Kansas City, Missouri

I have heard resilience and worry, deep commitment and real exhaustion. Churches are doing faithful work with fewer people and fewer resources. Yet again and again, I have encountered people who refuse to give up on the gospel. Preaching at Peace UCC in Kansas City and First Congregational UCC in Memphis, and visiting congregations across our associations, has reminded me that every church has gifts worth sharing.

My observation: Conference ministry cannot be reduced to providing services. We are called to connect people, encourage witness, and help congregations discover what God has entrusted to them.



First Congregational UCC, Memphis, Tennessee · September 27, 2026

2. Discipleship: Equipping and Strengthening Our Shared Ministry

Some of the most important work since June has happened where few people see it. Together with staff and leaders, I have been asking how we make decisions, communicate, manage resources, and hold ourselves accountable. These are not distractions from ministry. They are part of learning to practice it faithfully.

We have developed 2027 budgets for Conference Ministries, Camp MoVal, Shannondale, and related operations; reviewed financial reporting and fund structures; clarified responsibilities; and strengthened accountability. We are working on policies, personnel practices, a new website, better communication, and accurate congregational records. We are also preparing association conversations about the Manual on Church and what covenant asks of us.

Discipleship requires opportunities to learn together. Our Tuesday clergy conversations (9:00–10:00 AM) and Thursday church-leader conversations (9:00–10:00 AM) offer space for questions, shared experience, and practical guidance. The eCourier, quarterly *Courier*, and website work serve that same purpose: helping us lead with greater understanding and connection.



Weekly clergy conversations



Weekly local church leader conversations

3. Mission: Putting Our Faith into Action

Faith becomes visible when we put it to work. Camp MoVal and Shannondale are places where relationships take root, faith grows, and lives change. Both sites have faced significant facility and operational needs. We are addressing those needs while asking serious questions about long-term sustainability, including the Shannondale carbon-credit program.



Christmas in July · Missouri Mid-South Conference

This year's Christmas in July campaign raised **more than $40,000**. That total includes the **more than $30,000 needed for Shannondale's electrical project** and purchases for Camp MoVal: air conditioners, an ice machine, a mower, and other needed items. Both ministries benefited because congregations chose to act together.

The young people of Peace UCC in Hartsburg gave $3,000. That gift tells us something important: young people are not simply the church of tomorrow. They are part of the church's mission today. Christmas in July showed what happens when discipleship, mission, and care become more than words.

Mission also includes our public Christian witness. The gospel does not permit us to look away from human dignity, justice, or equity. These are not separate from worship, stewardship, or congregational life. They are what faith looks like when it meets the world beyond our doors.

4. Care: Nurturing Relationships and Sustaining Ministry

This Conference covers a great deal of ground. But distance does not have to become disconnection. Alongside our weekly gatherings, we have begun meeting with retired clergy on the last Tuesday of each month at 1:00 PM. These are places to ask questions, offer encouragement, and simply be together. A screen will never replace a visit. It can, however, help us stay connected between visits.



Monthly retired clergy gathering

Care also happens in the ordinary and extraordinary moments of church life: a pastoral conversation, a clergy gathering in Hermann, an association meeting, an installation, an ordination. The ordination of Rev. Max Bade at Femme Osage UCC reminds us that ministry belongs not to one person alone but to a covenant of people who promise to walk together.



Ordination of Rev. Max Bade · Femme Osage UCC



Ordination of Rev. Max Bade · Femme Osage UCC

My travels have included preaching at Parkway UCC; visits across the Eastern Association and Kansas City area; A Tent of Our Own Making in Cleveland; and all three fall association meetings, including the Eastern Association meeting in Jackson. These are only highlights of many travels. Different places, different congregations, but the same longing: clergy need encouragement, lay leaders need support, and churches need to know they matter.

I am learning that this Conference has tremendous gifts, even when we do not recognize them in one another. Relationships require care. Covenant demands honesty, communication, and accountability. And we must be realistic about our capacity, making choices that serve the future rather than asking fewer people to sustain every expectation of the past.



Kindred UCC, St. Louis, MO

5. The Work Ahead: Preparing for Revival

As we approach a new year, I will keep our work focused on evangelism, discipleship, mission, and care: strengthening relationships, equipping leaders, aligning our structures and budgets with ministry, supporting outdoor ministries, and making room to worship, listen, learn, and serve together.

Revival is not a return to the church we remember. It is not a plan to recreate yesterday. Revival is the possibility that God is doing something new among us—and that we might have the courage to recognize it, trust one another, and respond.

I came into this ministry believing that relationships are at the heart of the gospel. Everything I have seen has confirmed it. I see hope in the generosity of our people, in their dedication, and in their willingness to do difficult things faithfully. Revival begins when we see one another and our shared calling with new eyes. That work is already underway.

Rev. Phil Hodson
Intentional Interim Conference Minister