

WDC Associate Conference Minister (KS-based)
Kathy Neufeld Dunn

2020-21 was a year of trying to support and encourage exhausted pastors and other church leaders. It was also a year of researching ideas and resourcing congregations and pastors on how to respond in healthy ways to pandemic limitations on congregational life, with specific emphasis on worship, music and faith formation. Many congregational responses included virtual gatherings, but not all. I encouraged courageous pastors to do some analysis of what new ways of being church together they might want to carry into the future, which they will be ready to lay aside when the pandemic is behind us, and which traditional ways of ministry they will pick up again and which they will not.

Below is a summary of some of my ministry emphases during the past year. Thank you for the privilege of serving you in these ways.

1. Resourcing Healthy, Missional Church

Israel-Palestine Task Force hosted two significant virtual gatherings that drew people from across MC USA. “Racial Justice from Palestine to the US” on 9/21/20 was an intersectional look at racism in two cultures featuring Sarah Nahar, Jonathan Kuttub, and Alex Awad with Esther Koontz, facilitating. The task force hosted a conversation about next steps of justice and peace in Israel-Palestine on 4/13/21.

Immigration Task Force hosted a virtual conversation, “Reconnecting Immigrant Hope” on 3/25/21.

Abuse Prevention and Response: I continued to offer Safe Sanctuaries trainings during this past year with new emphasis on safety in virtual ministry settings. In addition to these introductions to safety and prevention of abuse of children, youth and vulnerable adults, during the first six months, I spent significant time supporting and resourcing congregations and their pastors who were responding to sexual misconduct, by those who are not credentialed ministers. I also invited a group of specialists to do an audit of our website and trainings to critique how we are doing with our abuse prevention and response in WDC.

Faith Formation Resourcing: I offered two virtual webinars focused on faith formation. “Connect! Faith Formation in Challenging Times” took place online on 10/24 and “Now What?! Post-Pandemic Faith Formation,” a conversation with WDC pastors and faith formation volunteers was on 2/27. First Mennonite Church and Beatrice Mennonite/Summit Street Church invited all WDC congregations to join them for their weekend spring mission event, 3/13-3/14/21 this year about “Raising Disciples” with Natalie Frisk.

2. Sustaining Transformational Pastors

Chaplaincy Support: I hosted two virtual chaplains’ gatherings for sharing and prayer. These include WDC and SCC chaplains.

Ministry of (Virtual) Presence: I supported, resourced, and prayed with pastors by phone, text, and via Zoom. I made a point of checking in for support and care calls with all my active pastors, whether they asked for them or not.

Healthy Boundaries 101 (basic) and 201 (advanced) trainings: All Healthy Boundaries trainings went online this past year. We found that our own WDC ministers, as well as other MC USA ministers, found this to be a useful service.

3. Connect pastors and congregations with WDC and MC USA resources and mission

Bi-Weekly Area Conference Ministers' meetings with denominational ministers and other MC USA staff have helped keep Heidi, Sandra and I alert to new initiatives, studies, and other resources which we've strived to share with our congregations and their pastors.

Search Committees – I have walked with one congregation in the midst of an active pastoral search this year. It's been a unique challenge. Three others are just beginning the process as the pandemic restrictions are lifted. I regularly connect congregational leaders and potential candidates to MC USA resources and best practices during this vital, transitional time.

The ongoing gift of the **WDC Hope Fund** has offered encouragement and funding for more congregations this year, first exclusively for Covid-related challenges. Now for broader emergency needs. Thank you to all who have supported this fund and will continue to do so in the future.

4. **Coordinate Assembly Planning** – This year's hybrid Annual Assembly will hopefully reach more people than an on-site only event would. We will evaluate the pros and cons of having delegates and friends on-site and online. Thanks to each of the wise and gifted people on the Annual Assembly Planning Team.