

## **The 127th Annual meeting of the Vermont Conference**

**April 22nd - 23rd, 2022**

**“Welcome to the Table! Celebrating 20 years of being Open and Affirming”**

- There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28
- A definition of Eros love always includes some risk and responsibility: remember that Jesus asks Peter “do you love me?” and in response to Peter, Jesus then tells Peter “to feed my sheep.”

May we keep these verses in mind as we enter into our conference time together.

### **FIRST PLENARY (9 am - 10:45 am)**

**Call to Order:** Rev. Peter Flagg, moderator, called the conference to order and welcomed everyone.

**Procedural Issues:** Rev. Peter Flagg reviewed that as we are on zoom, that for procedural and minor votes the motion will pass unless there are objections. For other issues there will be a poll put on the screen where each person can vote and submit their votes. The tally from the votes will then be shown on the screen. The worship service was pre-recorded.

**Moment of Silence:** This was to acknowledge, reflect on, and to pray about the murder of Fern Feather in Vermont recently. There was also a picture displayed of Jeffrey - Tyler Giles.

**Confirm Quorum:** Rev. Dr.Lynn, Bujnak, conference Executive Director, confirmed that we have a quorum to run the meeting.

**Document B:** The document was reviewed on the screen. There were no objections. Document B. was adopted.

**Document C:** “ The Covenant of Dialogue” by the Board of Directors was on the screen and read to the group. There were no objections. Document C was adopted.

**2021 Annual Meeting Minutes:** Rev. Doug Carter moved to accept the 2021 Annual Meeting Minutes as reviewed; Rev. Paul Ire seconded; there were no objections; motion approved and the minutes were adopted.

**Nomination of the Parliamentarian:** Rev. Doug Carter moved to nominate Deb Ingram as the Parliamentarian; Paul Ire seconded; there were no objections; motion adopted.

**Nomination of the Scribe:** Rev. Doug Carter made a motion to nominate Karen Braeutigam as the scribe; Paul Ire seconded; there were no objections; motion adopted.

**Board of Directors Update:** Rev. Doug Carter, Chairman for the past 3 years recognized the members of the board. 2 members are stepping down this year. They are: Rev. Doug Carter and Rev. Kim McCurley. He gave a huge thanks to the conference staff as the office staff are the unsung heroes as they do a lot of work behind the scenes. He acknowledged that our Executive Director, Rev. Lynn Bujnak, has been one of the longest serving execs in the UCC church!

**A Resolution of Witness: A Resolution to advocate an amendment to Article 1 of the Vermont Constitution concerning slavery:** Rev. Sally May moved to adopt the Resolution; It was seconded by Rev. Paul Ire. Rev. Sally May spoke to the issue. She states that the issue was brought to the conference by the Racial Justice Task force of the conference and by Rev. Josh Simon. She states that the Vermont Constitution has language regarding slavery that is not clear and not applicable today. Therefore it needs to be changed as it currently is very punitive.. The current language about slavery as being to people that are of age 21 and older. It also promotes the system of using prison labor as retributive justice that keeps people in prison, working for way below any minimum wage. This system is rooted in prolonging incarceration as a way of racial discrimination and as a way to get long term cheap labor that doesn't benefit the laborer. The language in essence keeps the unfair system of "indentured servitude" going on in Vermont. Proposition 2 removes any such language from the Vermont Constitution. This was followed by discussion. Deb Ingram of the VIA Vermont Interfaith Action supports our passage of this resolution as well as supporting Proposition 2. They are available to do presentations on this topic to explain what it is about. The contact information on VIA is: 802 - 310 - 4625 and the email is: <https://viat.org> or [www.viat.org](http://www.viat.org). Josh Simon states that he is in favor of the resolution. There were no objections. A poll vote was taken. 98% voted to adopt the resolution; 0% voted to reject the resolution; and 2% abstained. Resolution was adopted.

**Faithnet NAMI (National Alliance of the Mentally Ill) presentation.** The 2 presenters were Sarah Moran, President of VT. NAMI, and Ann Cummings, past President. NAMI is an organization that offers support to those afflicted with a mental illness as well as their family, friends and their support group. They also provide much needed education on the topic, especially as there is still much stigma around mental health needs. They

also advocate for those people whose needs around the mental illness or related to it are not met. This is both at the individual level as well as at the organizational/ and state political level. Safenet is a program of NAMI whose purpose is to reach out to faith communities to educate them on the issues and the need. People that are part of a faith community are often whom those with a mental illness reach out to as it is less stigmatizing in our response and the church hopefully has an accepting and non-judgmental attitude. We may be the first person to come in contact with someone when they are in a mental health crisis. Ann Cummings spoke of her own journey as her husband was diagnosed with bi-polar disease. We know that mental illness is a social and a public health issue. People with a mental illness are also more prone to chronic physical problems and addictions. There is still a lot of shame and blame that is attached to the whole issue. People are known by their mental illness and not seen as a person who has.... It is also researched that early identification and treatment are crucial and in many instances can prevent an illness from becoming chronic and causing other related issues. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth in general and first in Vermont. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic and the ramifications of that on youth. The spiritual needs of the people who have a mental illness are often under-identified and under-treated. We need to reach out and ask folks what they need and to pray with and for them. Please take steps to reach out and to be welcoming to them. NAMI has many available resources. The Safenet program is where mental health and the faith community intersect. Please be in contact with these great ladies! The contact information for NAMI is: <https://www.namivt.org>. They can come soon. There is not a long wait time to get them to present to your church/group/organization.

**Recognition, Transitioning, and Welcome of New Clergy:** There was a slideshow presentation of this by Rev. Jackie Lingelbach.

**OCWM and 5 for 5 Churches:** There was a video presentation on these 2 things by the Vermont Conference.

**Treasurer's Report.** A video was presented by Laura Nassau. The Anti-Racism Task Force was established this year. The Hope Fund was also started. Giving has remained robust. The operating budget was balanced and came in \$96,205.00 under budget for the year. The conference spent less due to zoom meetings. The investment portfolio did well. The Conference remains fiscally stable and the use of the endowment funds is sustainable. The budget for 2023 has increased by \$64,600.00 or 11% which leaves the question about how to fund it.

**Financial Resolutions presented by Laura Nassau.**

- **Document F:** Rev. Doug Carter made a motion to adopt Document F; Rev Paul Ire seconded. The discussion was as follows: Rev. Doug Carter stated that #3 is very important. He encouraged each church to increase their giving to this fund by 1% and to move to tithe (10%) to this fund. Rev. Mark Blank stated that a goal of 10% is not reasonable for a lot of churches for many reasons. A poll vote was taken. 88% voted yes; 2% voted no; 10% abstained. Document F was adopted.
- **Ministerial Compensation Report:** Rev. Lynn Bujnak led this discussion of the recommended guidelines for the conference compensation package. The board is recommending to have the guideline stay at 5.4% even though the actual CPI is at 6.9%. The last change made to the package was in 2017. The % at that time was also 5.4%. Rev. Doug Carter moved to accept the recommended package which was seconded by Rev. Martha Peck. Discussion was as follows: A part time pastor would take half of the compensation if they were half time, etc. The Board was also recommending that a person providing pulpit supply be paid at \$250.00 per Sunday, up from \$150.00. Rev. Leigh stated that they used the same numbers. Rev. Mark Wilson noted that the compensation hasn't been increased since 2017. He also stated that the chart should be revised to reflect the accurate numbers. There was some discussion on voting on a chart that needed to be revised. Rev. Lynn Bujnak noted that there are openings for people to serve on the ministerial compensation committee. Rev. Mark Pitton expressed sadness that there is no change after 5 years of working at the same rate. Rev. Lynn Bujnak stated that the board is trying to balance the financial reality of the conference and all of the churches. Rev. Katelyn McCrae questioned where the conference was with FMLA. Rev. Watchford made a comment that many people in the pews don't have a realistic understanding of the time that it takes to prepare the sermon, bulletin and to preach on a Sunday. He stated that only preaching is already a quarter time position. There was a comment about aging congregations that may have less funds to support the church. Another comment was made that some part time pastors work way over their hours which adds to the invisibility of the problem. Rev. Sally May pointed out that the greater than sign in one place should be a less than sign. There was a motion made to make that correction to the report by Rev. Sally May; it was seconded by Rev. Doug Carter. The poll initially wasn't correct. The options on the poll were changed. The results were: 89% voted yes; 8% voted no; and 3% abstained. The ministerial compensation report was adopted.

**11:00 am - 12:00 pm KEYNOTE ADDRESS**

**Introduction:** Rev. Lynn Bujnak introduced Rev. Darrell Goodwin to the group. Rev. Darrell L. Goodwin, a Chicago native, began as the first Executive Conference Minister of the Southern New England Conference on Jan.1, 2021. He is also the first openly LGBTQ black person to serve as an Executive Conference Minister in the United Church of Christ. He was a part of ALANA (Asian-American, Latino, African-American and Native American) which is a campus wide organization that serves and represents faculty, staff and graduate students of color at the University of Vermont. As the Chief Vision-Keeper, he is responsible for guiding the conference and its affiliates to have a positive and lasting impact in our world. The Rev. Goodwin is a member of the United Church of Christ Board, the UCC Council for Health and Human Service Ministries, and the Global Ministries Board.

**Keynote Address:** Rev. Darrell Goodwin started out with a song of grounding that states that we should step into the flow of life and then let it go...He spoke in the context of the celebration of the 20 years of the Vermont UCC being Open and Affirming as a church. He gave some of his background and spiritual development. His question for us/everyone is "How can God say that anyone of His creations is not accepted?" He also asked the question about what inclusion means. He talked of the changes in the church in recent times with membership dwindling and the pandemic changing how church is done and who comes to church. There are now fewer people attending church than not attending. After the pandemic church those people that haven't been coming to church will be looking for a church that is ONA. An ONA initiative just can't be an add-on to the church programming but needs to be at its core. Our symbol should be "No Doors." The other thing that is necessary is to focus on the community that the church is surrounded by. This is essential to stay vital. Church needs to go and be involved in the community. We need to get louder and to be at the forefront. Rev. Goodwin noted the things that we do well in Vermont: 20 years of being ONA; anti-dogmatic, multi-perspective, and not top heavy; we give an extravagant welcome; we understand a sense of being a communal church; we do active outreach for justice and advocacy, climate change and for economic justice. What do we need to do next? We need to redefine our understanding of the Table. We need to move from saying that we are welcoming to really embodying it. Use your heart rhetoric in addition to intellectual rhetoric. And realize that people are going to come to the table in different ways. We need to have those uncomfortable conversations and to do the real work to create change. We don't need any special protocol for treating any marginalized group, we just need to treat everyone totally the same. Rev. Goodwin ended with a statement that we should be called "The Uniting Church of Christ."

**PEACEMAKERS GATHERING (4:00 pm - 5:30 pm)**

Beverly introduced the Peacemakers Gathering and acknowledged Betty Edson who so loved it and gave her all to the effort. She offered up a prayer to get us started. See conference materials for contact information for the presenters.

**Climate Change:** John Langhus of Norwich Congregational church presented. He spoke of different community based initiatives that the church is engaged in such as having a Sunday a year devoted to climate change; building replacement windows to donate to people who live in old homes; getting the 5th graders who were involved in recycling at their school come to church to talk to people about recycling; having a climate scarves initiative that involves making scarves the colors of the graph that shows climate change over time.

**Ministries along the Arizona/Mexico Border:** Marjorie MacNeill from College St. Congregational Church, Burlington presented. She spoke about her visit to 3 shelters for migrants. They provided direct services to the shelters, all of which also work on social justice issues.

**Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council:** Theresa Lever and Karen LaFayette both presented. Vermont's council is one of the few remaining as this initiative was started under President Johnson as part of the war on poverty. They collaborate with the UCC Mission board. Their focus is to bring the needs of the poor to the forefront in Vermont.

**Bethany Church in Randolph Loft: Responding to our Housing Insecure**

**Neighbors:** Charlie McMeekin presented. This group runs a laundromat in town where the homeless folk tend to hangout. They made a second floor of a church into a short term (2 - 31 days) apartment to help folks transition from the streets to their own housing. They often get people who are also victims of abuse.

**Global Ministries Mission Coworkers, Evangelical Church of West Timor:**

Karen and John Campbell-Nelson were the presenters. They spoke of their experience in E. Indonesia which led to a book titled Forbidden Memories. The book and their work is to give the women who were victims of events in 1965 a voice that has been suppressed for years about those events. The process was healing for the women. The couple combined their research for the book with pastoral care.

**Peace Vigil:** Ingrid Cichoski from Richmond Congregational Church presented. She talked of how they have been standing outside once a week each Thursday since 2005 with signs for peace in the world. This has since broadened to things such as Black Lives Matter. They have a "Peace Pole" in front of their church that states "Let Peace Prevail on This Earth" in 4 languages.

**Free Legal Clinic:** Lucy Samara from the 1st Congregational Church in Brattleboro presented. She talked about the legal clinic that they have been running for the past 7 years. It takes place once/month during the school year on a Sunday at their church. Lawyers are available for a few hours each time to consult for free on any matter.

**El Salvador Relationships:** Jennifer Ambler from Brattleboro and Theresa Lever from Montpelier. They spoke of going to El Salvador where there is a sister church for the

past 30 years. The money that they contribute supports 2 programs there: 1) education that is now helping some young adults attend college and 2) a sewing workshop to give some people some marketable skills.

**Pride Parade and other things ONA:** Erika Thompson and Vicki Scherer from St. Johnsbury, Hadley Bunting from Charlotte, and Bob Driver and Paul Eyer from Williston presented the things that they are doing in their area. These included things such as the pride parade in Burlington and chalk messages on the sidewalk..

**Vermont Interfaith Action:** Bill Neil presented. This is a faith based community organization that works to build relationships as they work on justice issues in the community. They are part of the National Network called Faith in Action. This group has worked on a guide to community engagement with local police and are working on correction reform and racial justice.

**Racial Justice Task Force:** Sally May from Malletts Bay and Sandy Soho from Windsor presented. They are shifting from talking to engaging those who come to the group. This is a place to share and to learn and has resources.

**Tribute to Betty Edson:** See Video from the conference.

**6:30 pm - 8:00pm**

## **SECOND PLENARY**

**Ordination Anniversaries and Church Celebrations** (see video from the conference)

**ONA Church Recognition:** Lynn Bujnak presented on the 20 years of the ONA churches in the conference. She acknowledged the 30 years the UCC has been ONA as a denomination and that this is the 50th anniversary of Bill Johnson being the 1st openly gay man to be a pastor in a UCC church. There was a video shown on the history of ONA and Bill Johnson. The question “What’s Next?” was raised with the answer being 100% ONA churches. A video was also shown on the ONA churches in the conference.

**Speak Outs:** Rev. Peter Plagge noted that only 3 had signed up and that there was room for more and to email if you are interested.

- **Summer Lunch Grant Program:** Presented by Grace Cleary. There will be more information to come later on this. During the pandemic the local schools delivered meals to families. 27% of Vermont is now food insecure! This program re-instituted the summer lunch program and the food pantry. There is an e-kit available for those who want to set up a food shelf. Other resources are: hunger free Vermont on the web and food bank Vermont.
- **Conference Disaster Relief Coordinator:** this position has been revitalized and new to Vermont Greg Briggs is the coordinator who will lead the emotional

support team. Gregg is looking for interested people to discuss this. The goal is to 1)train people to give emotional/spiritual responses to folks in distress and 2) training and preparation for the churches to also do so.

- **Vermont Interfaith Action:** Deb Ingram was the presenter. She talked of the work that they are doing on Proposition #2 at the state house. She gave a brief overview of the hour-long presentation that they can give at any church around the state. There is training to work on the campaign on May 4th and 7th.
- **Ed Winters:** He stated that one could google: universal school meals which is an act to be a hunger free state of Vermont. One can also call one's rep to ask them about it.

**Hope Fund Fundraising Team Presentation:** The Hope Fund Team includes Rev. Andy Nagy-Benson, Rev. Leigh McCaffrey, Rev. Elissa John and Rev. Paul Sangree. The Hope Fund was established in November 2021 and has established 3 pilot initiatives. A video on the Hope Fund was shown that can also be shown in one's churches. The goal for fundraising is \$200,000. \$52,360 has been raised to date. The goal is to have each church participate in fundraising for the fund, starting with having a collection in each church on Pentecost Sunday. There are many ways to donate to the fund. One can give through the web page and can spread the giving out over 3 years if desired. The committee has resources that can be used to solicit funds such as the Hope Fund video, worship resources, a bulletin insert. All of this is available on the conference website. The funds will be given out by the Hope Fund Discernment Team. There is an application process and they hope to start distributing the funds this fall.

**Global Ministries:** Karen and John Campbell-Nelson presented. They talked of the issue of post-colonialism and their exploration of those who are entitled to tell the stories and who can interpret them. They spoke of people's stories who had lived under colonialism in Indonesia and what it was like for them. Their message was about mission being everywhere and for all. They talked of learning that there is true mutuality in mission, that church is fellowship and relationship and that ALL Christians are missionaries.

**Recognition of Members in Memoriam:** See video.

#### **Speak Outs:**

- Greg Briggs, **Disaster Relief Coordinator** spoke to add that there is an old disaster relief trailer that hasn't been used. One idea that he has for it is to turn it into an Arts and Crafts trailer. He is looking for ideas on how to repurpose this trailer.



- **Horton Center Camp:** Ed Winters talked of there being outside mini sessions of camp at the Horton Center and that camp scholarships are available by contacting the conference office.

**Introduction of Love Church:** presented by Rev. Peter Plagge. A video on the Love Church was presented that showed them doing yoga, dinner and weekly forest meditation.

**Closing prayer:** by Rev. Lav Mueller

**1:30 pm - 2:30pm**                      **THIRD PLENARY**

**Worship:** Rev. Peter Plagge opened the session to a short worship by the worship team.

**State of the Conference:** Rev. Lynn Bujnak and Rev. Paul Sangree together talked about the state of the conference. They noted a need to continue to have hybrid worship. In lieu of the toll of the pandemic on clergy the conference gave from 1 to 4 additional weeks off to help them recharge. Tuesday morning all clergy zoom meetings are held for support. Typically between 16 and 30 clergy attend. The positive of the pandemic was that everyone noticed an increased need for each other and ways to connect. There are other pastor support groups around the conference and it is estimated that about 80% of the clergy attend one of those. In the pandemic the conference added 9 first time clergy which has been noticed by schools such as Yale. Each 1st call clergy will get a mentor to work with them. The by-laws were revised with some good leadership from the Board of Directors. The conference now has a Racial Justice Task Force. At the first meeting they defined their purpose to focus on action, not just talk and they sent out a survey to churches to complete and return. The Hope Fund goal is to welcome and engage the larger community that each church is in. On May 22nd there will be a workshop called "Tippers to Tithers" that is very effective in changing the giving at your church. Deb Ingram reported that there has been much search and call work done. There had been 35 vacancies and now there are only 5. There is a need to promote the idea of bi-vocational ministry as many of the smaller churches only have part time positions open. Martha Peck asked how all of the conference staff are taking care of themselves. Rev. Sangree stated that there is great collegial staff at the conference that mitigates a lot of the stress. He also takes his typical breaks. Rev. Bujnak stated that some silent retreat time helped her as well as music. There was continued discussion about the issue of getting and finding paid facilitators for events; the VAST program ending a few years ago and the need for an

increase in non-traditional preparation programs for people, especially if they are to be bi-vocational.

**Hope Fund Original Grants:** Rev. Leigh McCaffrey presented on this. She reminded the group about the various ways to give that include spreading one's donation out over time and donating an asset to the fund. The Hope Fund Video was shown.

**Speakouts:** Rev. Jeremy Kirk reminded people to get their elements for communion ready as the service will be riveting.

**Environmental Ministries Presentation:** Fred Taylor presented. He spoke about the Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge and reminded people of Earth Week this year. He talked of savoring the moments of encounter with nature and reminded us that Simone Weil said that "absolute attention is prayer." He talked of the brokenness of the earth being places of the manifestation of holiness and the pandemic being a portal into a new world. He addressed the old question of "How can we have hope when everything is desolate?" by stating that be open to imagining a radically different set of possibilities. He took this from the book Radical Hope by Jonathan Lear.

**Nominating Report:** presented by Rev. Lynn Bujnak. See video presentation. There were 3 nominees for the Board of Directors: Rev. Dr. Amy Melloncamp, Rev. Dr. James Mills, Rev. Erin Reardon, Rev. Ed Winters, Rev. Elliott Munn, Rev. Dr. Scott Couper. There is also a need for people to serve on the nominating committee. See video for the whole slate of people nominated to positions. Rev. Evelyn?? Made the motion to accept the slate of the Board of Directors presented to the conference. Deb Ingram seconded although it was noted that it came from a committee and thus didn't need a second. The voting was as follows: Yes: 97%; No: 0%, Abstained: 3%. There will be a commissioning for the Board of Directors.

**Presentation of Gifts and Thanks:** Rev. Peter Plagge presented a local gift basket to the keynote speaker Rev. Darrell Goodwin.

**Thank You:** Thank yous were also given by Rev. Peter Plagge to Shawn for the wonderful harp music that was played as we were gathering for our sessions. This was a very thoughtful gesture and much appreciated. Rev. Plagge also thanked the Parliamentarian Deb Inghram; scribe Karen Braeutigam, Stephen Emidon for the music; the conference planning committee of Rev. Rev. Amana Swoyer, chairwoman; Rev. Elisa Lucozzi; Rev. Dr. Shawn Bracebridge; Pastor Jeremy Kirk; Rev. Dr. James Mills; Daun Smith and Rev. Peter Plagge and last but not least Alice and Jackie from the conference office.

**Adjournment:** Doug Carter made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Rev. Jackie Lingelbach from Williston seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.

**2:30pm - 3:30pm WORSHIP WITH COMMUNION** (See video).

Respectfully Submitted,  
Karen Braeutigam,  
Assistant Pastor, and Deacon at FHUCC