

December 3, 2025

From the Designated Conference Minister

Dear Siblings in Christ,

I write today to let you know that I will not be your candidate for Settled Conference Minister.

I have reached this decision after much prayer and reflection, recognizing that my greatest contributions during our time together are the work of an interim, and I celebrate with you all that we have accomplished together these past twenty months. A ministry of presence is key to conference ministry, and I have appreciated the ways congregations have welcomed me and the many talented clergy of this conference have engaged with me. As you look forward, I hope you will prize this quality of engagement - a lived expression of covenant between conference and the local church - in your next conference minister, too.

You are blessed with an incredibly talented staff who have worked together to digitize records and transition to a virtual office in this season. The institutional memory that Arlene Hobson possesses is a treasure in this conference, and has been a gift to me. I celebrate her upcoming retirement and the faithful work she is doing to prepare Beth Astarte to take on aspects of her role going forward in 2026. Beth is a welcome addition to the team, and her perspective from the local church has further grounded all of us in the work to which you have entrusted us. You could have no more faithful a steward than Andy Warren to both oversee conference finances and to engage with our congregations in financial matters with wisdom and clarity. And Mark Boyd's work helping to shape a bright, sustainable future for your retreat centers is indispensable. As a conference, you have much to be thankful for.

In a few months you will vote on a new constitution and bylaws. These governing documents help to articulate the role of the conference in the life of the Church, and the writers who have invested so much passion and energy these past three years of developing the documents have done so faithfully, diligently, and creatively. I am grateful for their efforts, and prayerful that these works will serve you well.

As you look forward, I pray the Spirit will give you clarity. You must discern who God is calling you to be in this moment - in keeping with the polity of the United Church of Christ - and be able to clearly articulate and share that vision. The locus of life in our denomination will always be the local church, and the conference is called primarily to support that effort through its various functions. The vision for ministry within the Conference comes from the membership, through the annual meeting, and is entrusted to the care of the Board of Directors and conference staff. Without a clear articulation, trust is the cost. As stewards of the vision, the Board must be able to clearly communicate it out at every opportunity.

I am confident God is up to something in the Pacific Northwest Conference. May you follow the Spirit's leading into that future filled with hope.

Blessings,

Rev. Phil Hodson

Designated Conference Minister