New Hampshire Conference
United Church of Christ

Annual Reports - 2020

Conference President . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rev. Carolyn Keilig
Conference Minister . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rev. Gordon Rankin
Conference Treasurer . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Mr. Phil Warren
Christian Formation Ministry . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rev. Ken McGarry
Clergy Support Ministry . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Rev. Dr. Tim Wildman
Finance Ministry . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Mr. Neal Cass
Justice and Witness Ministry . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Ms. Deborah Opramolla
Local Church Support Ministry . . . . . . . . . . . . Rev. Dr. Gordon Crouch
Wider Church Relations Ministry . . . . . . . . . . Rev. Robert Vodra
It has been an interesting first year of my two-year term as President of the New Hampshire Conference, UCC. It began in a straightforward way with the inspiration that came from the various speakers and presentations given at Annual Meeting, inviting all of us to “Step Up and Speak Out” and to move from complicity to courage. This message was emphasized at both the Leadership Summit and the Board of Directors Retreat held in November.

Besides learning the roles and responsibilities of Conference leadership at the Summit, we had the opportunity to imagine what we individually or as part of a Ministry might prioritize as we step up and speak out, even as we noted those things that might hold us back.

The Board members took this invitation seriously, also, and it is reflected in the mission statement for the year:

*The Board of Directors is called to be the stewards of the New Hampshire Conference, United Church of Christ and its ministries, while faithfully strengthening the commitment of our churches to the wider church. Our priorities for this year include: increasing our engagement with issues of justice and peace, particularly being mindful of NH Conference Resolutions which impact the work of the board; exploring possibilities for Horton Center and the Outdoor Ministries programming as it grows; continuing opportunities for collaboration with other neighboring Conferences; facing financial challenges in creative and responsible ways; and remaining mindful of our covenant with local churches.*

The Board reviewed the recently passed resolution, *Back from the Brink*, and covenanted to individually sign the endorsement if their conscience allowed it. At the November retreat new officers and Board members were oriented to their legal and fiduciary duties and we had the opportunity to review the summer 2019 Horton Center season.

Because the Board of Directors is responsible for the financial health of the Conference, much time and energy go into reviewing Conference finances at each of our Board meetings and at Executive Committee meetings. Beginning with preparing a realistic budget for vote at Annual Meeting, we continually monitor expenses and review income, and have an independent audit conducted annually. We are grateful for the generous donations from many of our churches through “Our Churches Wider Mission” (OCWM) contributions. OCWM is the major source of revenue to fund the ongoing operations of
the Conference. We also give thanks for the support given through the “Friends of the Conference” and the Horton Center Fund appeals. While the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is still unknown, our financial position remains strong.

Included in the Board’s fiduciary responsibilities is the financial oversight of Horton Center. Aging buildings and a steep gravel road continue to have an impact on the costs of maintaining this holy space with an eye to the safety of all who come to Pine Mountain. As you are aware, the pandemic impacted the camping season this year. While the decision was made not to hold activities at Horton Center, Interim Executive Director Tim Hughes and Summer Director Tivvi Paré put together an amazing experience for our children and youth that was accessed online. Their creative and faithful work was a blessing to many.

February was the last time the Board of Directors met in person. As you are well aware, due to pandemic concerns, the Conference office has been closed to in person meetings since mid-March. However, it seems that within and across the NH Conference, those in leadership positions leaned in and have adapted to the changing landscape of being church together.

Zoom had already been well established as a helpful meeting format for many in our Conference and was used as an option multiple times a day for Conference meetings. With this technology already in place, we were able to continue to safely do the work of the Conference from our homes across the state.

Over the course of the year, the Board received reports from a number of ministries and mission groups and were impressed by the innovative ways that are being used to keep the work and mission of the Conference moving forward. We are blessed by the many hours of faithful service given to the Conference and the wider church by so many people.

I would like to express a deep word of gratitude for our Conference Minister, Rev. Gordon Rankin. Less than one year after his installation, Gordon found himself leading all of us through this time of pandemic. He became the “go to” resource for countless church pastors, treasurers, moderators, and those going through search and call, as to how to “be church” in the midst of a pandemic. He initiated round table discussions and other online communications, as well as giving safe guidance for the myriad obstacles we were all facing. The Board is aware of how much he had to learn and adapt to help all of us do what needed to be done. Thank you, Gordon.
At the same time our Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Richard Slater and the Conference staff were also working long hours from home (or very carefully at the office) to keep supporting all our local churches. Our gratitude extends to them for their dedication and support.

As the NH Conference President, I plan for and chair the Board of Directors five regularly scheduled meetings and the monthly Executive Committee meetings. I am thankful for the wonderful talent that graces all these meetings and the combined wisdom of the Board members. Two long-time Conference leaders and dedicated Board members have now reached the end of their terms of service—Mr. Brian Edwards and Rev. Paula Gile. I know that I am not alone in expressing my gratitude for their years of service to the Conference.

Rev. Carolyn Keilig
President
New Hampshire Conference, UCC.

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**Conference Minister’s Annual Report - 2020**

The past year has been a different year. (Yes, I know that is an understatement.) And I think it calls for a different kind of Annual Report. I am going to talk less about programs and activities and more about the spirit of our Conference.

Covid-19 changed everything about church. All of a sudden all of the ways in which we know how to be church were tossed in the air, and we had to figure out how to be church anew…blindfolded…for an unknown period of time. It has been challenging. It has taxed our church leadership, and we still know that we have a way to go. But I think the most important news is we have done it. We have found a way to be the church even when many of the ways we’ve done so in the past haven’t worked. I am so very proud of the churches of this Conference for your creativity, your innovation, your risk-taking, your perseverance, and your care for community. Pandemic or not, I believe the church needs more and more of these things, and you have shown that you are prepared to use them for the welfare of the church.

While I am talking about pride, I need to express pride in our Conference staff. Things changed in the church and the resources we provided in support of our churches had to change as well. Our Conference staff went above and beyond to try to help provide our churches with what was needed, even when those churches did not fully know what
was needed. Whether it was tech support, interpretation of legislation that had impact on churches, support opportunities for clergy and administrators, connection to grant and loan opportunities, or lots and lots of advice on how to stay safe during this time of pandemic, the staff went above and beyond (many times a day). Thank you Ann, Helen, Cindy, Tim, Lydia, and Richard for finding a way to provide support to our churches even when you had to invent a way.

Just as our churches had to be creative to meet the need of the moment, we did at the Conference as well. Late in the spring, it became clear that we would not be able to run on-site programs at Horton Center this year. We did what happened over and over again in 2020. We grieved a little and then set about re-visioning ministry. I cannot speak highly enough of the incredible HC@home program Interim Executive Director, Tim Hughes, and Summer Director, Tivvi Paré designed. They were able to create a program for three differently-aged camps each week that would occur in the camper’s own homes and yet still engage them with the outdoor community and the Spirit. I have to say I was awestruck at every evening Vespers session by how Horton Center community was able to be built, though in ways we never before imagined. The innovation and hard work of our directors, seasonal staff, and deans turned what was a loss into an amazing success.

There were some other important areas of innovation this past year that need to be named as well:

- A Unified Members-in-Discernment Mentoring Team (UMMT) has been developed to supplement the work of our Committees on Church and Ministry by providing both additional, intentional resources and some more consistency to the processes of those who are discerning a call to ministry. The UMMT will begin direct work with Members-in-Discernment this fall.
- The pandemic caused our Racial Justice Mission Group to pivot from planning an in-person Juneteenth Celebration to developing a Facebook Page that provided an incredible array of cultural and justice-related resources for the month of June and beyond. If you have not checked it out, please do.
- The pandemic helped us get creative and start taping some of the bright theological minds we have within our Conference in a series of Theological Roundtables. After the murder of George Floyd, we also started what will be a series of Racial Justice Roundtables to help us better look at the work we still have to do as churches to address issues of racial injustice. I expect both our Theological and Racial Justice Roundtables to continue in the year to come.
If the pandemic challenged us as church, so did the racial justice work that arose following George Floyd’s murder. I have made this statement in many places, and feel I need to say it here as well. The surprise of the year for me was that we as church seemed so much better equipped to handle what we never saw coming (the pandemic) than we are for the conversation we’ve been having for 401 years (racial justice). There is so much more work still to be done within and by our churches to dismantle privilege and build a society that provides justice for all. We made a commitment to be a Racial Justice Conference two years ago. That commitment now calls us to be bold when new transformation seems possible, and we must lend our voices to that possibility. I would commend the work of our Racial Justice Mission Group who have been true leaders in speaking to injustice and providing resources for much needed conversations. I would also commend those from various churches who have been working on the Sacred Ally Quilt Project (designing and creating a quilt which will give voice to the final words of George Floyd).

There are a hundred more things that I probably could and should write about. But as I said, I feel this report needs to be more about spirit than all the specific things. In the past year, I have seen our churches challenged in ways they never have been before. And I watched as our churches, our lay leaders, and our clergy rose to those challenges, met the moment head on, and found new ways to make sure the work of God continues. I have also watched as we have encountered challenges that we are still struggling with to allow the light of grace to enter fully. Witnessing the former gives me hope for the latter. This past year has deepened my belief that we will overcome whatever holds us back from fully and faithfully being Christ’s church.

Peace and grace,
Gordon Rankin
Conference Minister
2019 saw total operating expenses of $1,043,786. We completed the year with a net deficit of $50,431. A contract extension payment by American Tower was $50,000. This put us very close to a balanced budget (with only a $431 deficit). The Executive Committee voted to restrict those funds however for structural repairs to the Hope Cabin and technology upgrades at the Conference Center.

WIPFLi CPA’s of Bedford NH completed a thorough audit for 2019 on July 15, 2020. We are in compliance with standard accounting practices.

2020 is a most unusual year with the COVID-19 pandemic ongoing. The Executive Committee is very keen to learn the annual impacts to our budget. As of this writing we have numbers up to July 31, 2020. The most significant disruption to income has been the loss of on-site camping at the Horton Center. Our current deficit is $68,979. While reduced expenses and more generous contributions from a direct appeal and Friends of the Horton Center have helped, we are still quite a bit off budget. The great news is that we launched HC@home, an online camping experience benefitting 94 youth. Also some of you may have seen the Sunday Service produced by the Horton Center staff.

The total contributions from OCWM, Fellowship Dues, and Friends of the Conference is down $38,157 which I consider a positive. Operating expenses are reduced by $76,798. The big blessing has been a PPP Loan (Payroll Protection Plan) from the Federal Government in the amount of $117,200. This has helped relieve us from using our line of credit. We anticipate that the loan will be forgiven. Therefore, our net operating assets at the end of July are positive $40,555.

OCWM basic support over the last 16 years (2004-2019) has gradually declined from $789,125 to $505,069 representing a 36% decrease. Fellowship dues follow along those lines as well. The Conference has therefore decreased its contribution to the National UCC by 5% to 35% from 40%. The long term decline in Church membership is the basic cause.

As your new treasurer I have reviewed our financial controls and find them adequate.

Philip Warren
Along with other ministries of our conference, the Christian Formation Ministry has had an especially challenging year due to the coronavirus. Due to the capable leadership and dedication of our conference staff and volunteers, however, we were still able to provide and support a variety of faith formation ministries for all ages.

We sponsored a conference-wide study series and discussion group based on the book *Saving Paradise: How Christianity Traded Love of This World for Crucifixion and Empire* by Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker. This 16-session series was facilitated by Rev. Emilia Halstead, pastor of First Congregational Church, Concord. Sessions were offered on Monday evenings at the conference office and via video conference from January until mid-March, when, due to the coronavirus pandemic, they were held only by video conference. Recordings of all sessions were made available for later viewing, and an online discussion group was offered as well. This transformative program was well-received, with 21 participants from churches throughout conference in attendance.

The Christian Formation Ministry supported the conference's annual Prepared to Serve event that was held at Pembroke Academy on February 22, 2020. 16 Christian Formation workshop were offered, with topics including Intergenerational Ministry, Discernment, Leading Book Studies, a Social Justice Curriculum Resource, Delivering Children’s Sermons, and Techniques to Study Scripture and deepen our faith (PaRDes, Singing the Bible, Labyrinth).

In March 2020, the Outdoor Ministries Mission Group was disbanded at the request of Conference Minister Rev. Gordon Rankin and Horton Center Interim Executive Director Tim Hughes. It was agreed that the importance to the conference of our outdoor ministries warrants that these ministries should be directly overseen and supported by the Board of Directors.

This summer, due to Covid-19, Horton Center’s program for children and youth was offered in an online format called HC@home. Five different week-long camp sessions were offered, each providing daily activities for three different age groups and led by a team of 34 deans and counselors from around the conference. 124 children and youth grew in friendship and faith by participating in these sessions, and they provided an invaluable resource for many of our churches that were unable to offer their own summer programming.
The National Youth Event had been scheduled for the summer of 2020, but was rescheduled to June 27-30, 2022 due to the pandemic. We had planned on providing transportation to and from the event for our youth and leaders along with the Maine Conference, and we will look to partner with our eastern neighbors again in 2022. Also being deferred due to Covid-19 are our Confirmation Retreat, which usually occurs at Horton Center each September. This year’s retreat is now scheduled for May 2021. And the New England Environmental Justice Youth Summit that was to be held at Second Congregational Church in Concord on March 21, 2020 has been rescheduled as a virtual event for November 2020.

Our prayer is that in the coming year, our churches and their members would continue to be richly blessed by God through the faith formation ministries of the conference in whatever format they may be provided.

Respectfully submitted, Rev. Ken McGarry, CFM Chair
The Clergy Support Ministry (CSM) is charged with tending to the well-being of our NH Conference clergy. After a several month hiatus, we began meeting again in March just as the pandemic was taking hold. In our virtual monthly meetings since we have worked with our Conference Ministers on a variety of areas.

Our ministry is indebted to Rev. Richard Slater for his work in bringing Rev. Dr. Rachael Keefe to us for an excellent virtual Clergy Day in April on suicide prevention. Dr. Keefe is a former resident of NH and has recently published an excellent book for clergy and churches on this subject.

Working with Rev. Gordon Rankin CSM has also suggested modifications and updates to our Clergy Compensation guidelines.

Boundary Awareness Training events, scholarships for clergy continuing education and seminary education, the Pastoral Development Leadership Groups administered by Pastoral Counseling Services, the Clergy Spouse Support Group, and the Clergy Convocation mission group (the Communal Clergy Sabbath will embody the Convocation this year) are all areas we have considered in our time together.

CSM is also sponsoring an Advent and Christmas liturgical planning event on Zoom led by The Rev. Maren Tirabassi on October 1.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have listened to our Conference Ministers as they describe their ongoing pastoral and leadership work with our clergy. This has led us to recommend to local churches an additional week of annual leave for clergy, and the publication of periodic articles in Weekly News reminding lay folk of the unique challenges for parish ministers in this remarkable time.

Our Ministry has met with each of our Conference Ministers, and the members of our Ministry are: Rev. Dr. Billy Brown, Verna Ross-Hoyt, and Rev. Gina Finocchiaro.

Respectfully submitted,
Tim Wildman, Convener
Finance Ministry Annual Report - 2020

Under the Conference Bylaws, the Finance Ministry “shall develop the means to strengthen generosity through education and advocacy and steward the assets of the Conference; shall interpret Our Church’s Wider Mission (Basic Support) as a means of covenantal faithfulness.”

The Finance Ministry has been reactivated after a period of not meeting. The Ministry has been meeting monthly since November. We currently have four members and our meetings are attended by Conference President Carolyn Keilig, Finance Officer Lydia Frasca, and Conference Minister Gordon Rankin.

Some of our work has been put on hold as we determine how best to interact with local congregations during these unusual times, but we are continuing to meet and carrying out our role.

Here is an outline of the areas we have begun to work in:

- Ministry Member, Dan Tinkham has been doing regular education items in *Weekly News* encouraging churches to support OCWM and providing stewardship education.
- Handwritten thank you notes are being sent to church that have pledged.
- Discussion has taken place with the Local Church Support Ministry as they set up a local church Stewardship Mission Group. We plan to work in conjunction with the Local Church Support Ministry but felt it better fit under their umbrella.
- A yearly Finance Ministry calendar has been updated and will continue to be modified throughout the year.
- At each meeting we review 20 local churches to determine if there are ways that we can better connect with them. Personal contacts take place when helpful.
- We reviewed and discussed the former “Church Advocate” program. In this program volunteers would present “mission moments” prepared and sent to them, to their local congregation. We will continue to look at the possibility of doing this in the future.
- Discussion has taken place concerning digital giving. This will be discussed further in the future.
- We know that work is being done to establish a good Conference-wide data base. We support this and know it will help with our work moving forward.
We truly appreciate the continued local church support of OCWM. During these times as we deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, your gifts are incredibly important to the ongoing work of the Conference. Now, more than ever, the connections between the local church and the Conference are vital.

Respectfully submitted,
Neal Cass, Chair
Finance Ministry

Justice and Witness Ministry Annual Report - 2020

There are seven mission groups under the Justice and Witness Ministry (JWM). Below is a brief report on each one.

Economic Justice Mission Group Annual Report -- 2020
The Economic Justice Mission Group of the NHCUCC Justice and Witness Ministry (JWM) seeks to be a voice for economic justice and to serve as a catalyst for others in UCC congregations statewide (as well as those in other faith communities) to allow the cries of those experiencing economic suffering and injustice to move us into enacting our faith in solidarity with them in our quest for a fair and moral economy as a core tenet of our religious belief.

Through partnership with the American Friends Service Committee, the NH Council of Churches, and the Granite State Organizing Project, the NHCUCC Economic Justice Mission Group has played a leading role within the economic justice advocacy community in New Hampshire. As anchor members at the NH Moral Economy Table, and active participants within the NH Poor People’s Campaign, we have worked tirelessly to raise the voice and expand the moral witness of people of faith on matters of economic justice and injustice in the state.

Key ways through which we have sought to build an economically “Just World for All” include our founding role, along with leaders within NH Unions such as SEA/SEIU Local 1984, in revitalizing the historically transformative alliance between the faith and labor communities, continuing participation within the NH Voices of Faith, and advocating for restoring and raising NH’s minimum wage. We are especially pleased to have been able to bring faith and labor leaders together to hear and learn from Joerg Rieger, the founding director of the Wendland-Cook Program in Religion and Justice at
Vanderbilt Divinity School, more than once throughout this past year, and we look forward to updating our NH Conference Resolution calling for livable wages for all workers.

On a more somber note, our hearts are heavy with the untimely deaths this past year of two of our most dedicated members—Ken Gould, who died back in November of 2019, and more recently, Les Norman. Rest in peace and power, Ken & Les—we miss you, and your passionate commitment to economic justice lives on within and among us.

**Environmental Justice Mission Group**

The Environmental Justice Mission Group has stayed active this year in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic. We have met, via Zoom Meeting, on our regularly scheduled first Monday of the month. We attended this year’s Prepared to Serve Conference and everyone on our group participated in presenting sessions. We also invited Alan MacDonald from the First Congregational Church of Wilmot to give a presentation, which was well received.

One of the projects we have been working on for a couple of years came to a close, and we now have a new “Green Congregations” brochure with information to help churches in New Hampshire move to become more sustainable. We have spent time updating our NHCUCC web page regularly with content, a reading list, links to other sites for information, Webinars and our new mission statement, which we felt needed to be more concise and give a greater sense of urgency.

Due to Covid-19, we had to change the date for our second New England Environmental Justice Youth Summit. It will be held Friday and Saturday, November 20 and 21, 2020 and will be virtual. Many thanks to Sue Moore for the time and effort she put in to get everything rescheduled.

Rob Grabill and Bob Shore-Goss are our liaisons to the New Hampshire Interfaith Power and Light Group. Bob has also been working on a resolution on The Rights of Nature, which we hope will be presented at the 2021 General Synod. We regularly contribute to the NHCUCC Weekly News and promote getting out to vote for the environment. We have promoted “Green Teams” for churches to look at their environmental impact and to become Creation Justice churches. We have stood against the Granite State Pipeline project and donated to the UCC 3 Great Loves Tree Planting Campaign for Earth Day. We encourage churches to use Season of Creation sermons during September and to include references to God’s Creation often during worship. We give our support to [350NH.org](http://350NH.org), the Sunrise Youth Movement, the Poor People’s Campaign, American Friends Service Committee, Granite State Organizing Project, and...
NH Interfaith Power and Light. We welcome anyone with a desire to promote care for the Earth through advocacy, education and/or activism to keep the Earth in repair for the future.

Respectfully submitted,
Robin Walkup, Chair

Immigrant and Refugee Support Group
As the Immigrant and Refugee Support Group carries out the biblical mandate to welcome the stranger and love our neighbor, and as we undertake our work as advocates, allies and educators, there is a place for everyone within the Conference to make a difference. Whether you or your congregation are able to contribute $10 or $1,000 (or any other amount) to our Immigrant Bond and Support Fund (via [https://bit.ly/2GibJnx](https://bit.ly/2GibJnx) or a check sent to the NHCUCC, 140 Sheep Davis Road, Pembroke, NH 03275) - whether you can sponsor an educational program on immigration (even a virtual one) or find a short- or long-term host home for a refugee-seeker, or undertake any simple act of unconditional welcome, your support and that of your congregation will have an impact on individual lives. Contact irsg.nhcucc@gmail.com for details.

Through collaboration with and seeding of other immigrant advocacy groups throughout the state, this small committed group of volunteers continues to rise to every challenge thrown our way.

Setting Captives Free!
In July 2018, after a period of informal support, the Immigrant and Refugee Support Group was authorized to establish a separate Immigrant Bond and Support Fund (and bank account), ultimately overseen by our NHCUCC fiscal office, through which specially targeted tax-deductible donations can be made. The Fund is dedicated to helping immigrants detained by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) in the Strafford County jail and others who have a connection to our area who face the threat of deportation. The Fund is devoted to four areas: (1) Providing access to telephone calls and basic supplies through small contributions to detainees’ jail commissary accounts; (2) Paying bonds for those who have been deemed eligible for release by ICE or an immigration judge; (3) Providing monthly post-detention benevolent assistance and other supports for released immigrants who await formal work authorization; and (4) Funds for legal representation in compelling circumstances.
Since the inception of the formal NHCUCC Immigrant Bond and Support Fund:

- UCC members, churches and friends have contributed over $114,500 to the Fund. THANK YOU one and all!
- We have paid $69,000 in bonds to facilitate the release from jail of 14 immigrants/refuge-seekers. (The bonds are returned to us by the Department of Homeland Security after the individual completes all required legal proceedings – something that may take a year or two, or more.) One $10,000 bond has been returned to the NHCUCC after our brother Bienfait finally received a legal asylum ruling!
- We have assisted 14 individual immigrants/refuge-seekers with short-term benevolent assistance.
- We have provided a lifeline for ICE detainees in Dover to the outside world by providing modest funds to their personal jail commissary accounts for telephone access and/or to purchase basic personal hygiene supplies. With 402 jail commissary deposits, we have assisted well over 300 ICE detainees since July 2018 with communications and personal dignity.
- We have supplemented the cost of legal services or court fees for seven individuals in particularly compelling cases.

Since November of 2019, ICE has refused to allow us to use our account to bond immigrants out of detention, due to our derived tax identification number being absent from an ICE-required IRS database. Several possible denominational remedies were pursued to no avail. But we didn't let that stop us! Instead we collaborated with UU Action NH and the NH Council of Churches to continue bonding immigrants out of detention.

Responding to the Pandemic
Due to the pandemic, our immigrant visitation program has been temporarily shut down at the Strafford County jail. But that hasn’t stopped our volunteers from advocating for immigrants detained at the facility, who contact us indirectly via the Freedom for Immigrants hotline and the Boston Immigrant Justice Accompaniment Network (BIJAN), requesting funds for telephone calls to family members, lawyers and other supports. Concerned about the vulnerability of immigrants, other prisoners, staff and the broader community due to the risks of COVID-19, we supported the ACLU’s class action lawsuit by organizing quarantine housing and host homes for those who might be released due to medical vulnerability. And we provided important guidance to activists with Never Again Action NH when they originated a series of car rallies at the facility to remind those imprisoned there that they are not forgotten.
Through our collaboration with the Seacoast Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition (SISC), Kent Street Coalition and the Concord Unitarian Universalist Church we were able to offer up to 12 possible quarantining spots for people coming out of immigrant detention during COVID. To date, four immigrants have been released into our care by US District Court Judge Landya McCafferty, including Ernest with the support of Durham Community Church, "Inna" with the support of Dover Friends Meeting, K and D with the help of South Church Unitarian Church in Portsmouth. Following quarantine, three individuals moved into longer-term host homes coordinated by the IRSG’s new Placement Team. Freedom for Immigrants interviewed Nancy Pierpont for their recent edition of ImmPrint, *Borderlines: Nancy Pierpont on Providing Post-Detention Support Amid COVID Crisis*. As chairperson of the IRSG, Nancy Pierpont serves as part of the NH Rental Assistance Team which helps immigrants excluded from unemployment benefits and COVID stimulus payments to pay their rent during the pandemic. With a grant from the NH Charitable Foundation and donations from individuals, the team has been able to provide more than $100,000 of rental assistance to immigrant families throughout the state.

**Good News!**
We are happy to report that Asylee Mamadou, who wowed the gathered congregation at Annual Meeting 2017 with his support of our [resolution](mailto:resolution), has graduated from Somersworth High School. And Bienfait, who spoke so eloquently at Annual Meeting 2019, was also granted asylum on March 9 of this year. We are also happy to report that Z, who was separated from his son at the border, is now reunited with him and his extended family in New Hampshire, thanks to a bond we paid.

**Ongoing learning and growth!**
We have collaborated with the Seacoast Interfaith Sanctuary Coalition to create a Host Home Manual, and recorded video presentations entitled “Immigration 101” (a mini-version of our Prepared to Serve version) and “Temporary Host Homes.” (Contact Community Church of Durham member Peggy Kieschnick, via email at: [peggy.kieschnick@gmail.com](mailto:peggy.kieschnick@gmail.com)) to schedule a Zoom session of Immigration 101 and/or Temporary Host homes for your own congregation.

The SISC Communication team has developed a “Did You Know…?” church bulletin series and our own team member Chuck Kennedy has developed a “Welcome the Stranger” series for our NHCUCC newsletter. Barbara Schult, Cindy Nottage and Nancy Pierpont hosted tables at several outdoor events where our brochure could be explained and disseminated to those interested.
The new IRSG Placement Team has developed a set of templates which can be used by local host home networks, hosts and guests to support effective placements, and clarify roles and expectations.

With the help of Ann Desrochers and Freedom for Immigrants’ design coordinator Jeffrey Brown, our conference-linked website has improved. It now matches nicely with our tri-fold brochure.

We participated in a webinar series called “Changing Systems Changing Ourselves,” a collaboration of AFSC’s Friends Relations, the Unitarian Universalist Association and Unitarian Universalist Service Committee’s Love Resists campaign, Church World Service and Freedom for Immigrants. We have begun a study of abolitionist principles and will take part in the upcoming National Bond Fund Network discussion sessions and will continue to collaborate with the Defund Hate campaign. We have just agreed to purchase copies of See No Stranger by Valarie Kaur convener of the multi-year Revolutionary Love Conference, which will be used by both the IRSG and the jail visitation teams for book discussion and to imbue hope against this terrible background. On October 18 we are also sponsoring two immigrants to co-present with team member Becky Field about her recently published book Finding Home.

We strongly encourage all NHCUCC congregants to watch the six episodes of Immigration Nation, available on Netflix, to see a brutally accurate picture of US immigration enforcement.

Solidarity!
The 2020 Annual NH Immigrant Solidarity "walk" consisted of an interfaith vigil/Jericho Walk around the Manchester ICE building, a Never Again Action style car rally at the jail and a socially-distanced picnic replete with coveted Indonesian food provided by NH Indonesian Community Support with their usual hospitality and finishing with a not-to-be-missed sermon by immigrant pastor Andre Bennett.

Join the #Defund Hate campaign to cut funding for ICE and CBP, and to prevent unauthorized transfers from other government agencies for detention and deportation. You can share Rev. Jason Wells’ recent op-ed in the Concord Monitor, and email each of our Members of Congress with this action alert.

It is also important that immigrants are included in federal COVID relief packages. Our Congressional delegation needs to hear from us. Please sign and share.
Open and Affirming Concerns Mission Group
No report available at this time.

Opioid Crisis Mission Group
No report available at this time.

Peace with Justice Advocates Mission Group
We began 2020 with energy from the 2019 Annual Meeting Conference Approved Resolution, *Back From the Brink: A Call to Prevent Nuclear War*. We had begun making presentations to NHCUCC church groups and then the pandemic put a halt on those in-person meetings. We are ready to share on the Zoom platform, however, we have not yet found a church group ready to take up this topic at this time. We are continuing to work in other areas of our mission. Our current focus areas are: challenge militarism and organized violence; challenge unfettered US support for Israel; challenge Islamophobia and religious and racial bigotry; challenge structural economic injustice; challenge local UCC congregations. There are specific actions under each of these broad focus areas and we actively support other work of other NHCUCC Mission Groups. We’d be glad to share more details regarding our focus actions. We’re ready to work with any of our NHCUCC churches.

Racial Justice Mission Group
At Annual Meeting 2019, the Racial Justice Mission Group (RJMG) introduced *The Process for Becoming a Racial Justice Church*, a resource developed by the RJMG for local churches wanting to designate themselves as a NHCUCC Racial Justice Church. “Forgive Us Our Trespasses,” a workshop dealing with microaggressions, was also presented at Annual Meeting. We presented three workshops for Prepared to Serve in February: Awakening to Racial Justice 101, the Cash Value of Whiteness, and Forgive Us Our Trespasses. We staffed informational tables for both Annual Meeting and Prepared to Serve.

With the impact of COVID-19 disproportionately affecting people of color, we sent a letter to the President and Manager of WMUR emphasizing that their public announcement, *We’re All in This Together*, did not include all of us in New Hampshire. The public announcement was devoid of any people of color rendering residents of African, Latinx, Asian, and Indigenous descent invisible in our state while they suffered most from the virus.

Our letter writing continued in the wake of the tragic deaths of Ahmad Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. We drafted the letter sent to all the Conference congregations. We also sent letters to the Superintendent and Principal of Kingston
High School and copied the Rockingham District Attorney regarding an incident where three male high school students mockingly re-enacted the murder of George Floyd for social media on high school grounds. We sought restorative justice consequences for their blatant callousness. We appreciated co-signers Conference Minister, Rev. Gordon Rankin and Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Richard Slater.

We encouraged and supported the United Church of Jaffrey, UCC to call on congregations to sew quilts memorializing the last words of George Floyd. In April we met with the Rev. Dr. Velda Love, Racial Justice Minister of the UCC at the national setting.

Our May Implicit Bias Training Event for Authorized Ministers and Lay Leaders of the Conference was postponed to October 28th. The training will be offered on Zoom and led by Dr. Darnisa Amante and the Rev. Eric Jackson.

In June we launched the NHCUCC Juneteenth Celebration Facebook page and saw the followers grow from within the Conference and beyond. The page is managed by Kira Morehouse with Brookside Congregational, UCC. The purpose of the page is to provide history about Juneteenth, share the work of artists of African descent, and promote the visibility of people of African descent in New Hampshire. We were pleased to have participation from the national setting of the UCC, as well as NHCUCC, the Manchester Unit of the NAACP, and the Black Heritage Trail. An unexpected and much appreciated participant in our Juneteenth Celebration was singer and songwriter Reggie Harris. Reggie Harris teaches and inspires racial justice with his personal story and music.

The Facebook page is continuing to inform, celebrate, and lift-up experiences of BIPOC children with the initiation of a Saturday Morning Story Time. Congregations are urged to purchase a book from an annotated bibliography which is provided by the RJMG and video themselves reading the book for posting on the Facebook Juneteenth page. The page highlights educational events and raises the theme of racial justice.

The RJMG continues to be a resource for churches on racial justice. We invite you to visit our Conference Webpage. We meet on the second Thursday of each month and even in these times of social isolation, we continue to bear witness that Black Lives Matter. May the God, in Whose image we are all created, gather us into the Beloved Community where justice reigns and we can live together peacefully in love.

Respectfully submitted by, Dawn Berry

Rev. Renee Rouse, co-chair - Northwood
Local Church Support Ministry (LCSM) has two Mission Groups that fall under this Ministry: A New Thing Task Force and the Prepared to Serve Planning Committee.

**A New Thing Task Force**, chaired by Rev. Gayle Murphy, helps NH Conference churches confront the reality of ministering in communities which are primarily unchurched by helping them listen for how God might be inspiring them to pursue creative responses to their unique settings and circumstances. The main focus at the start of 2020 was to conclude the Creating and Leading the 21 Century Church (CL21) class. By their original time line, this two-year class involving nine churches was to end on May 30. But like all parts of our lives, COVID 19 changed everything. Instead of concluding on May 30, the CL21 class participants took more time to name their joys and frustrations with all the change, to apply the CL21 lessons learned to their situations, and to look for God’s presence in it all. They now plan to conclude the class in January 2021. At the same time, A New Thing Task Force is discerning what they will do next. They are greatly inspired by the many creative ways that churches have responded to the challenges of the pandemic.

**The Prepared to Serve Planning Committee**, chaired by Rev. Ruth Gallot, delivered another excellent one-day Prepared to Serve event on February 22. There were 330 attendees with a total of 402 participants, and 70 workshops were offered (64 unique offerings, with 6 presented twice). This event provides training and education in all facets of church life, as well as a time of fellowship and worship. Special thanks to the 6-member planning team that expends “Herculean effort” in creating this crown jewel of an event for our Conference. In light of the pandemic, the PTS Planning Committee will be making a decision in September regarding how/if to hold Prepared to Serve in 2021.

**Administrative Professionals Day.** On April 15, under the leadership of Cindy Bradley, Ann Desrochers, and Helen McGlashan, the LCSM offered its annual
Administrative Professionals Day. Due to COVID 19, an abbreviated version of the event was held online. There was much sharing and encouraging as support staff members were newly navigating the pandemic.

A Future Endeavor. The LCSM is working to create a Stewardship Mission Group as a part of its Ministry. The aim of this group will be to provide local churches with resources and support regarding fundraising, annual giving, capital campaigns, and planned giving.

Respectfully Submitted,

Rev. Dr. Gordon L. Crouch
Chair, Local Church Support Ministry

Wider Church Relations Ministry Annual Report - 2020

Wider Church Relations ministry is a “limb” of the tree of the conference, with several areas of “fruit” hanging from it. As the needs and energy of the conference and those participating in it change, this model allows new fruit to develop and if any fruit is older, not doing what it was intended to do, it can fall off. Officially we are called to “seek and promote the means for congregations and persons to engage the needs and opportunities of the world; engages Jesus’ prayer, ‘that they all may be one’ and finds the means for action.”

To say that this year has been different is an understatement, all of us where thrown into new ways of doing ministry, new ways of meeting, and new ways of being the church. I don’t know if we will ever get back to “the way it was,” but are looking at the good things that may come out of this time. The last few meetings of our group were held on Zoom, which resulted in greater attendance, and the work continuing. As we move into 2021 I hope we are all choosing the good things we have learned and trying to incorporate those into the future work of the church.

Below are the areas in which we seek to support these means for action as our mission statement suggests:

Disaster Response: Jan Howe, has decided to step down from her role as Disaster Response Coordinator after several years of service to the conference. We thank Jan for her years of faithful service. Our Ministry group had a discussion about the
continued need for this mission group and it was decided that it was valuable to the conference and have asked Gordon Rankin to start thinking of a replacement for her.

**Ukama Mission Group** has continued to meet, and had planned a trip this past summer to Zimbabwe. Unfortunately this was not possible, and is currently on hold. Attempts were made this year to hold zoom meetings in New Hampshire with churches in Zimbabwe. Internet connections over there are unstable, and there is a huge time difference, so this has been marginally successful. The connections between our churches and our partners in Zimbabwe are a source of joy and we look forward to exploring ways in which virtual conversations may become more common and a time in which travel to Africa will be safe enough to resume.

**General Synod** happened last year (2019) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and was scheduled for July 16-20, 2021 in Kansas City, Missouri. Because of the uncertainty around travel safety which could continue into the summer of 2021, the UCC Board has decided it will be held virtually. Over the past several years more and more of the program was livestreamed, so they feel the technology is available to meet on the internet rather than in person. This will create an opportunity for our churches to partake in this national gathering. Obviously there is very little information about the details of this, but expect in the spring much information will come out which should be shared with our churches. It should be noted that discussion about funding could occur, as the conference will not incur travel costs this year for this event.

**Global Ministry Mission** was created in 2018 after we held a very successful event inviting a few who have participated in ministry around the world to share their experience with members of the New Hampshire Conference. The focus of this group is to share the story of what the UCC is doing in the field work of mission around the world, and they are figuring out the best ways to share those wonderful stories. This group has been loosely held together, but found it hard to “do” a lot with only zoom meetings available.

**Volunteer in Mission** is a brand new group, just starting in 2019. In addition to learning about our global Missions, there may be opportunities to do hands on mission work either in the US or beyond. Many of our churches do these trips, but many churches feel they are too small to take on a larger mission trip. This group may work to facilitate partnerships between churches, share best practices of mission trips, may even plan a conference sponsored mission trip in the future. A survey has been distributed by *Weekly News*, and results have been shared. Jeff Scott has agreed to head this group up, and will be in contact with those who responded to the survey and then looking to widen this group.
New Hampshire Council of Churches Jason Wells, the Executive Director of the New Hampshire Council of Churches has not let this virus slow down his work much. During the height of the pandemic he produced weekly video sermons that churches could use to give their ministers a week off, and has been sharing helpful information about resuming in-person worship. Jason also serves as a co-director of the New Hampshire Poor People’s Campaign, and had planned to attend a large event in Washington DC this summer. Due to the pandemic this was moved online. Jason has also preached in many churches until the pandemic hit. If ever there was a time for several denominations to come together with a unified voice, it is these days. Our support of the National Council of Churches provides us much in return.

Although the pandemic has turned our ministry upside down in many ways, the church is learning that flexibility is a key to survival. We were all taught as children that the church is not the building, but the people. This year has shown us that our church continues to spread the good news, to do the work we are called to do, apart from our buildings. Our church is strong in these days.

Respectfully submitted
Rev. Robert Vodra with gratitude to the other members of this Ministry: Rev. Duane Bailey, Rev. Sandra Pontoh, Rev. Jeff Scott, and Rev. Sara Marean