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August 20, 2020

Dear members of the Northern California Nevada Conference of the United Church of Christ,

We hold all of you in prayers during these difficult days. We also hold in prayer our ministries, both together and locally, in our communities. Although our church buildings may be closed, our churches are not. We are inspired by the amazing creativity and depth of ministry that is happening in Northern Nevada and Northern California.

We apologize for the length of this letter and ask that you bear with us as we introduce you to important documents that we are requesting you receive with prayer and a commitment to discernment as we move towards the August 29 Discernment Session and October 24 Annual Gathering vote on our 2021 budget.

We finished 2019 with a deficit of more than \$80,000. This was preceded by a number of years of deficits and we can no longer operate in this way. In 2013, NCNC churches asked the Conference Council to call not just a new Conference Minister, but two full-time Associate Conference Ministers and backed up that request with a commitment to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) giving that would make this possible.

Those contributions were realized in our 2014 annual giving. However, in 2015, the year our new Conference Minister began work and two full time Associate Conference Ministers were called, OCWM giving across our churches dropped by \$100,000. Since then, every year, we have been trying to tell our story and learn from our churches what is needed to restore giving to the 2014 levels. We have continued to receive affirmation at Annual Gathering that the support of our Conference staff and Conference programs are valued by our local churches. We have heard support for a continuation of the work with a promise to support that work through OCWM giving. Unfortunately, the deficits have continued.

In 2017, Annual Gathering approved a \$5/per member giving request to offset some of our deficit, especially around our line items involving camp and youth programs. During the budget approval process there were no dissenting voices and the budget was approved without objection. We then sent out information and appeals to churches reminding them of this commitment. We estimated about \$50,000 in income from this additional appeal. However, the reality was that few churches have participated. Last year we had eleven churches contribute a total of just under \$7000.

This year we are appealing to our shared covenant in asking the churches of the Northern California Nevada Conference to enter a period of discernment, if possible, before our August 29 discernment session, and, definitely, by our Annual Gathering on October 24.

Attached you will find three budget scenarios. All three scenarios will have a budget deficit unless giving to OCWM increases.

- Scenario 1: This budget is based on four staff members (down one staff member from last year) with as many decreases in expenses as possible without further cutting services.
- Scenario 2: This budget will restore our staff positions to five and allow us to offer the kind of support we were able to offer in the last few years.
- Scenario 3: This budget is connected to the Camp Revisioning Task Force proposal for the NCNC Camping Program and, in particular, Camp Cazadero. While it will require more support from churches to make it possible, it also comes with a commitment to seek grant(s) to support it. If our churches see the benefit of using this valuable resource for the kind of justice and mission work that NCNC has historically embraced, it will require financial, time, and prayer commitments by our entire Conference.

**As for a solution for funding any of these proposals, Conference Council approved the Finance and Business Committee (FABC) suggestion that we ask you, our churches, to commit to Our Church's Wider Mission giving in the amount equal to a percentage of your operating expenses. Right now, collectively, our churches give an average of 2.4% of operating expenses to OCWM.**

With this request in mind, we ask the leaders of each church in the Northern California Nevada Conference to prayerfully and with full intent study these documents and engage in discernment around the level of support your church is willing to commit to support our work as a wider church. If you are contributing 2.4% of your budgeted expenses to OCWM, can you consider a stretch goal of 3%? If you are giving 3.8%, is 4% possible?

If you can begin this conversation prior to August 29, your delegates will be prepared to speak to which of the three budget scenarios seems possible given your churches ability to commit. If everyone who attends the discernment session comes with an understanding of their church's position, we can engage in an honest conversation about what is possible.

Based on the feedback and discussion that happens at the August 29 discernment session, Conference Council will decide on which (or combination) 2021 budget will be brought to Annual Gathering for approval. The expectation is that delegates voting at Annual Gathering on October 24 will be voting based on conversation with their church leadership and the commitment of their church for intended 2021 giving to OCWM. **Following Annual Gathering, all churches will be asked to sign pledge commitments for 2021 so we know going into the new year, what we can expect and whether further adjustments to the budget need to be considered.**

Please let any of us know if you have questions.

In Christ,

*Jeannie*

Ms. Jeannie Hobson  
Council President

*Melissa*

Rev. Melissa Tumaneng  
Conference Moderator

*Rob*

Rev. Rob Parrish  
Treasurer

*Diane*

Rev. Dr. Diane Weible  
Conference Minister