Community Advocate Report

FIRST UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST—Carlisle- October 15, 2020

“The word of God is alive and active.”

Hebrews 4:12 (NIV)

I chose the above passage from Hebrews to share about my ministry as a community advocate—especially through the teamwork I do with non-profit organizations in Carlisle. Indeed, all of the organizations I work with are those where I was invited to serve as a board member (Maranatha—Carlisle, Kiwanis of Carlisle, Mental Wellness Awareness Association, and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Agencies I work with include the Cumberland County treatment courts and Cumberland County Prison. I am also on the board of the Carlisle Area Religious Council—a group comprised primarily of lay representatives of a many religious affiliations. Now in my sixth year as an ordained UCC minister serving the community where I wanted to provide a spiritual presence to people in the community who may need either a minister or a spiritual director. I discerned my chaplaincy “call” after completing many years (9 years) as a very part-time seminary student.

After graduation from Lancaster Theological Seminary, and fulfilling my secular seminary requirement at Hoffman Homes for Youth, I felt specifically “called” to chaplaincy completing my year-long chaplain residency at Mennohaven Retirement Community and moving into Chaplain Residency at Hershey Medical Center. I felt a strong “connection” to serving individuals who may be either regular church attendees—or may no longer even attend church—yet wanted to have “someone to talk to” when they experienced difficult life situations. Consequently, I decided to complete a 2-year Spiritual Direction Program at Oasis Ministries for Spiritual Development.

When I look back on my life now—at 72-years old—I find that God is still completing his painting—actually perhaps more of a puzzle because I don’t know the puzzle pieces God is putting together. My career was as a criminal justice professor where I taught, conducted research, and fulfilled community service—one as a member of the Advisory Board of the Cumberland County Drug and Alcohol Commission where I now attend Coalition meetings. Over the past six years I have participated--and been invited to be trained--in “Youth Mental Health First Aid”, “Question, Persuade, and Refer” (suicide prevention), “Trauma-Informed Care” among other programs. I am a team member of trainers from community agencies who work together to train personnel from community agencies. For me, “God is Still Speaking,” and I continue to “find the fit” to complete the puzzle GOD began when I was in my “mother’s womb.” I am now blessed by GOD to be an older woman with a young heart who still wants to work for the “Glory of God” as a community advocate with the poor, hungry, disadvantaged, and/or grieving individuals who wonder how God works in their lives.

Sometime after I was ordained and installed, and just beginning my ministry at First UCC, someone “took me aside” and quietly told me that First Church approved my community chaplaincy ministry because they “knew me and believed in what I wanted to do as an ordained minister.” I was told that “church would not have approved anyone; they trusted and had faith in me to “develop a vibrant social justice ministry.” I thank First Church for believing in me. It is through First UCC’s Congregation, Consistory, and Clergy’s faith and trust in me to make the Word of God alive and active in the Carlisle community that I continue to serve in a community of non-profits and public institutions as a community advocate.

Over the past five years (my sixth year officially started after I was ordained in April 2014), I have written monthly reports for Consistory. I continue with all the work I began. As people both in church and community know, I am always ready to talk about my community ministry. I look forward to opportunities to share about my continued work with non-profits that have provided even more opportunities for me to serve people in our midst who struggle each day.

To the Glory of God…We Serve.

The Rev. Dr. Donna C. Hale

Chaplain Advocate—First UCC--Carlisle