

Dear Friends,

Grace and peace to you!

I wanted to write to you in my first week as your Transitional Conference Minister and let you know how glad I am to be with you. I'm still unpacking and getting settled in but have already had amazing conversations with several of you around our Conference and look forward to even more.

About a week ago at this time I arrived back to the US after a month in Japan. This was my third trip and I went to retreat, write and explore. It was an amazing experience! I learned many things along the way but let me share one insight in particular. It involves traveling to unknown places. That was partly why I went to Japan, to immerse myself in a place and culture that were very different than what I have known. There is always a level of nervousness about being in a place that I do not know, surrounded by a language I did not understand, customs that were different, and far away from family and friends.

Sometime in that month though, something happened. I became calm. Not calm because I suddenly understood all that was around me, but a calm that comes from realizing that I had learned how to explore, how to wander in unknown places and make my way. I realized I had some tools to do this and realized that having these tools, and knowing how to explore allowed me to engage the unknown with a certain peace and calm.

This interim period marks a time of discernment, reflection, and exploration for us in our Conference. I believe there is a direct correlation between our willingness to explore and the success we will find in this time. So I would encourage us all to summon our courage and see where God might lead us and what we might learn from the journey.

Let me leave you with a few lines from Rudyard Kipling's "Explorer" that says all this far better than I can:

There's no sense in going further --
it's the edge of cultivation,"
So they said, and I believed it --
broke my land and sowed my crop --
Built my barns and strung my fences
in the little border station
Tucked away below the foothills
where the trails run out and stop.

Till a voice, as bad as Conscience,
rang interminable changes
In one everlasting Whisper
day and night repeated -- so:
"Something hidden. Go and find it.
Go and look behind the Ranges --
Something lost behind the Ranges.
Lost and waiting for you. Go!"

We move within the One that resides in all that is lost and found. Peace to you on your journey friends.

Phil

Rev. R. Philip Hart
Transitional Conference Minister