STATE OF THE ASSOCIATION ADDRESS
EOA FALL BUSINESS MEETING 10/29/2011

Friends, I have now been your Interim Association Minister for 19 months. Some days I ask myself, where has the time gone? Other days it feels like I've been here forever (and I mean that in a good way). In your program booklet there is a report from me about some of the things that have been a part of our common life these last 12 months, some of the renewing opportunities and faithful expressions of the Body of Christ as well as some of the challenges we have faced, and I hope you will take some time to read that at some point. I'm not going to read or restate all of that now, but I do want to reflect just a bit on the amazing journey we have been on together. Like Abram and so many of our biblical ancestors who followed the Spirit's leading to a new place of promise and hope, we are traveling a path God has set before us. And like any journey, our path includes twists and turns, high roads and low places that we must learn to navigate.

I don't know about you, but I prefer to have a clear idea of where I'm going and how I will get there when I embark on a journey. In fact, if I'm going to be driving to a new place I get directions from MapQuest and use my GPS, with a map in the car as backup! But I know that there are also those adventurous souls who have the time and the patience to simply head out, twisting and turning in circles, never certain where they are or how to get to the next destination.

In these days of change and transition, I think the Church, and more specifically the EOA, more often finds itself in the latter position – not necessarily by choice. We think we know what we need to do and be about, but suddenly we find ourselves in an unfamiliar and uncertain place. We try to make sense of our surroundings, to figure out where to go from here. Going back is not an option, but it's not easy deciding where to turn next. We have entered a kind of in-between time, a space in which things may no longer feel familiar and comfortable. And naturally, this in-between time brings with it more than a bit of anxiety.

What I want to encourage all of us to think about in this in-between time is that rather than living in anxiety, this can be for us a time to celebrate – because we have entered a phase that is expectant with grace. This in-between time can become for us a sacred space for discovering new life-giving possibilities for the association.

If that is to happen, however, we must be able to listen for God. That's no easy task for people of God today. We are bombarded with noisy voices telling us what to do, how to be, demanding things of us. As people of the

UCC we affirm our belief in a still-speaking God. But do we practice listening? Do we take the time and make the space to hear what God is saying to us? Instead of rushing headlong into the journey, just for the sake of doing something, do we pause long enough to listen for the directions that God is speaking to us? As we continue this journey of faith, I encourage us all to listen to the voice of God as it leads us, to trust that voice and to engage in faithful discernment as we journey.

Eugene Peterson once said, "The assumption of spirituality is that always God is doing something before I know it. So the task is…to become aware of what God is doing so that I can respond to it and participate in it." My challenge to all of us in these days is to consider the profound spiritual opportunity that transition offers. This in-between time invites us, as individuals, as congregations, as an association, to create sacred space where we can discover and rediscover God's call. And in that discernment and discovery, we will be renewed in God's Spirit, prepared to participate in the new thing God is even now doing in our midst.

I offer a word of thanks to all of you – to the staff with whom it is my great privilege to serve, and to each one of 87 congregations of this association. I am grateful for all of the expressions of faithfulness, for the work of ministry that you do in your setting, and for the support that you so generously share through OCWM with the wider church. To God be the glory.