

## REPORT OF THE ANNUAL MEETING CONFERENCE COMMITTEE

Two years ago, the Annual Meeting Conference Committee (AMCC) was handed a challenging idea by then Executive Secretary, Rev. Dr. Ashley Cleere: Go to a centrally located area where there were no member churches for the Annual Meeting and Conference (AMC) in order to gain wider exposure for the National Association. For 2025, several locations were considered before St. Louis was chosen.

We all wondered how we could hold a meeting without a host committee, without local churches and contacts. What was the budget? How would tasks be completed? Some people worried that placing so much control in the hands of the AMCC would remove the local control that is so integral to our identity as an association of churches. Despite the questions and potential problems, we moved forward like true pilgrims to try something new.

It has indeed been a challenge. Rev. Dr. Karen Robu, the host committee co-chair, described it as “flying the plane while building it.” Yet, no matter what obstacles we faced, this year’s committee has pushed forward to answer the question: Can anything good come out of such a radical idea, such a radical change? The answer has been “Come and see.”

When we trust God with the unknown, remarkable things happen. No host committee? Volunteers from all over the country have become involved. Talented people have stepped forward to plan worship, to choose music, to serve on the registration table and as greeters and marshals. It has taken creativity and compromise as we found times to meet on Zoom and navigated unchartered waters; however, there is excitement buzzing as we prepare to welcome our brothers and sisters to St. Louis.

We turn our eyes next to New England in 2026 where the meeting will be held in Springfield, Massachusetts. The theme “A Future and a Hope,” based on Jeremiah 29:11, promises to remind us of our Congregational roots. A host committee is already working to plan the meeting.

Even as we move back to a more traditional model next year, let us remember that our ancestors took chances to follow the Way. Change is uncomfortable; however, we need the challenges to stretch us so that we can grow. Let us continue to be willing to stretch our horizons, to learn new things, and to sail unchartered waters as we continue to welcome churches from across the globe.

Rev. Joyce Acree, AMCC chair/co-chair of 2025 host committee