



REVEALING THE CALL TO REST & RENEWAL

A Message from the Working Board of the Massachusetts Council of Churches

Epiphany 2022

The revelation of Christ Jesus as Messiah transforms everything. Life as we know it is no longer the same — when the Epiphany of God’s incarnation takes hold. This is good news, especially as we continue to make sense of all the changes caused by the deadly and disruptions of the coronavirus. So much is still being revealed to us as we adapt and evolve in the wake of this relentless pandemic. What is clear, however, is that we cannot proceed with “business as usual.”

The Working Board of the Massachusetts Council of Churches will soon initiate a strategic examination of where we are being called, as we enter into the third calendar year of the pandemic, and all the devastation it has wrought. Despite all that has been lost in the past two years, we celebrate the truly extra-ordinary labor and fruitfulness of the staff of our Council. The [One Church Fund](#), the [Lydia Fellows Program](#), and the work of connecting and resourcing congregations has thrived, despite the odds. Our ministries literally have been lifelines, particularly for the most vulnerable communities and member churches.

The Working Board honors and applauds the work of the MCC, which has been faithfully led and executed by senior staff, Rev. Laura Everett and Rev. Kenneth Young. Nevertheless, we also realize that the pace at which they have been working *is not sustainable*. They deserve an opportunity to rest, replenish, and recharge. And because the uncertainty of the pandemic will surely demand further adaptation for the Massachusetts Council of Churches, we believe that *now* is the opportune time for a **sustained break** for Reverends Everett and Young.

As a second pandemic winter takes hold, the Working Board has decided to grant a one-month, paid “sabbatical break” to both the senior staff, Rev. Laura Everett (February 2022) and Rev. Kenneth Young (January 2022). Indeed, there is something about the barrenness of winter – the season into which Jesus is born – that calls us to simplicity and stillness. *Be still and know that God is* (Psalm 46:10).

We acknowledge fully the privilege of sabbatical leaves, which are not afforded to all those who labor beyond measure, especially during the pandemic. And still, we cling to the biblical call to rest. In the Exodus, Walter Brueggemann writes, “the God who rests is the God who emancipates from slavery and consequently from the work system of Egypt and from the gods of Egypt who require and legitimate that work system” (*Sabbath as Resistance: Saying NO to the Culture of Now*, 2014).

In many ways, the Incarnation of the Christ is the continuation of God's liberating work in the Exodus. The child who is born in Bethlehem, under the domination of the Roman Empire, grows up amidst deep inequities and oppression. It is this One – God's incarnate love – who beckons us to liberation: "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." (Mark 6:31).

The Working Board, then, grants these sabbatical breaks as acts of love. As we have learned from [bell hooks, who recently joined the ancestors](#): "The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom" (bell hooks, *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, 2006).

During the senior staff sabbaticals, the Working Board will journey with our recently hired staff – Administrator, Christina DeVaughn, and COVID Grant Coordinator, Rev. Bria Belim to minimize the disruption of our vital ministries. *Please continue to be in fellowship with us.* At the same time, we claim that **sabbath rest** literally means that there is a period of *no production*. We celebrate this biblical truth. Fully staffed operations of the Massachusetts Council of Churches will re-emerge in the spring of March 2022.

Beloved Church, during this season of Epiphany so much is being revealed to us. We invite you to join us in this manifestation: Rest. Love. Practice the freedom of the Incarnation that liberates us. And, prayerfully, ***we urge you to empower those in your care and with whom you stand in solidarity to do likewise.***

In the love of Christ Jesus,

The Working Board of the Massachusetts Council of Churches

Rev. Jennie Barrett Siegal, President

Rev. Dr. Karen Coleman

Mr. Leonardo Espinoza

Mr. Thatcher Freeborn, Treasurer

Rev. Fr. Samuel Hanna

Ms. Madeleine Forrer

Rev. Kyungmoon Yoon

Rev. Dr. Jay Williams