On June 1 of last year, I returned from my sabbatical, with my wells refilled and my spirit refreshed. In my ministry, as I know to be the case for many, it is so easy to be stretched thin and taut by the urgent now; I am deeply thankful to the New York Conference for offering me that sabbath time to rest, to reacquaint myself with the stories that have shaped me and the ministry in which I am engaged, and to explore a variety of spiritual practices that have reconnected me in essential ways.

The work to which I have returned is multi-faceted – which is a joy for me. I love to be able to see and support the church from so many different angles. One day I’m working with a Committee on Ministry that is seeking to provide formative opportunities for a Member in Discernment. On another, I’m part of a situational support team that offers guidance to a congregation struggling with a divisive issue. I’m privileged to witness exit interviews, as the gathered reflect upon the ministry that a pastor and congregation have been able to do together, to support congregations in transition as they discern who God is calling them to be in the next leg of their journey, and to celebrate the installation of new pastors. I talk with so many who wrestle with a call to ministry and wonder if it is time to take a step forward. And, especially in the past weeks, I find myself teaching the nuts and bolts of video conferencing to lay leaders who need to gather and to ministers who can use just a little help to share the good news in a new way. I am grateful to be at so many tables -- physical, metaphorical, and virtual – as people of faith think together about what it means to be the body of Christ in a particular context, in this particular moment.

Through the New York School of Ministry (NYSOM), I’ve worked to continue to provide opportunities for leadership development, ministry preparation, and continuing education. This year, more than 60 individuals, from nine of our ten associations, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the Presbytery of Northern New York took advantage of at least one NYSOM offering. The courses taught were: Congregational Life, Introduction to Christian Theology, ½ Basic Boundary Awareness Training, Liturgy & Worship, American Church History, UCC (Post 1957) History & Polity, and Pastoral Care in a Time of Pandemic. Our learning events -- meeting face to face in the fall and via zoom in the winter -- gave lay people, MIDs, and authorized ministers an opportunity to learn together. I led the fall event on models of conversation and formative stories, and we were lucky to have Rev. Arlen Vernava lead the winter event, which focused on leadership insights to be gained through the use of the PAEI model. Our ongoing certificate programs, the Christian Leadership Program and the Word & Sacrament Program, offer MIDs in the Conference an alternative educational and formational path toward ordination. This year, we were delighted to welcome our first participant from outside of the Conference into our Word & Sacrament Practicum. In the fall, we celebrated the graduation of Yvette Wynn from the Christian Leadership Program and Craig Wilson from the Word & Sacrament Program. Craig was ordained a week following that graduation. I am proud to say that we have had six NYSOM graduates ordained in five Associations.

I am thankful for all whose efforts and energy make the New York School of Ministry thrive: our faculty, our mentors, our supervisors and the congregations in which our students develop skills and a sense of pastoral identity, the members of the Committees on Ministry with whom we work, those who have contributed to our scholarship fund, and, of course, Lisa Delgado, our NYSOM clerk. I give thanks, as well, for the ministry team of which I am a part and for the administrative staff – wonderful colleagues, all. Finally, and most importantly, I give thanks for the churches of the New York Conference, who continue, year in and year out, to work together to equip people for the various ministries to which God has called them and to strengthen the witness to God’s way of love and justice.

Report of the Associate Conference Minister for Leadership Development
Rev. Marjorie Purnine