

Announcement from the Illinois Conference Council

The Illinois Conference Council joyfully announces The Reverend Justo Gonzalez, II as our Intentional Interim Conference Minister beginning October 29, 2018. Rev. Gonzalez currently serves in a dual role within the Michigan Conference, UCC as Southwest Area Minister, where he resources approximately 50 congregations and two Associations in West Michigan, as well as Conference Coordinator for Latinx Ministries.

From Rev. Gonzalez:

"I am excited about joining with you, the People of God in the Illinois Conference, as your new Intentional Interim Conference Minister. Together we will be in conversation, look inward, and discern and discover where God is leading us as a conference. I am an in and out of the box thinker who believes in always exploring the options we can't even imagine at this time. Discernment, listening, discovering and being open to the varied voices among us is vital to serving God, lifting up the Risen Smiling Christ and being in relationship to each other.

I am also a covenant guy. We are in covenant with each other and must always work to strengthen our bonds and to mutually support our varied ministries and hold each other accountable at all levels. I am not an expert and am not an "I have all the answers type of guy". I am a pastor and coach.

I do know that that our collective wisdom is vital to discerning God's will as we live into our future together. I am certain that the wisdom we need to move us forward already exists among us. You are the experts of your reality, cultural context and community. I will lean on you to learn, and I will embrace the wisdom you bring to the table. I am committed to making sure that everyone is welcome and has voice at the table.

Our diversity of cultures, languages, orientations, values, beliefs and experiences make us unique. These excite me as a Latinx pastor. I look forward to engaging in conversations and to sharing one-on-one with you. Expect to see me throughout the conference. Relationships are important to me and I want to get to know you. Yes, I truly mean you.

My commitment to you is to be a brother in Christ and to partner with our associations, churches, conference staff and other constituents to make sure we are listening, asking the right questions, discerning together and responding to your needs. I look forward to meeting folks in our rural, urban, and suburban communities, and to learning and growing with you.

Thank you for all you do and for being a local expression of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ in your community."

Rev. Gonzalez was recommended to the Conference Council after an extensive search by the Interim Conference Minister Search Committee, chaired by Illinois Conference Immediate Past-President Mr. Michael Linder (Fox Valley Association). Committee members included Conference Council members Rev. Charlene Hill and Ms. Juanita Bradley (Chicago Metropolitan Association), Mr. Frank Figueroa (FVA, youth representative), Ms. Mary Newcomb (past president, Western Association), Rev. Tom Ewing (Personnel Committee Chair, Eastern Association), and Rev. Kim Wood (current president, Prairie Association). The Committee was staffed by Rev. Lee Albertson from the National Offices of the United Church of Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. A huge thank you to the entire Search Committee for its dedication and hard work, and for bringing us an extremely qualified and innovative candidate in a very short time frame.

While Rev. Gonzalez will not officially come onto staff until the end of October, you may see him around the Illinois Conference occasionally before then as he takes time to work with Acting Conference Minister Rev. Char Burch and conference leadership in preparation for his time here. We are excited by the experience, compassion, and enthusiasm he brings to the Illinois Conference, and we encourage you to get to know him as he partners with us in ministry. We also invite you to keep Rev. Gonzalez, Rev. Burch, the Illinois Conference leadership and staff in your prayers as we move into this new phase of the ministry of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.