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## Message from the Interim Conference Minister

Rev. Justo González II

### You are more precious than gold

The challenge of life is not the known, the familiar or the things we've lived/experienced previously. The challenge of life is the unknown, unexpected, the things that catch us off guard and the unimaginable that often hit us like a two-by-four. In many ways, I thought I knew the ground rules of the world I've lived and ministered in as a pastor with 30 years of ministry experience. Clearly, I don't. Everything has changed.

How can this be? Nobody, asked my permission [and I suspect yours] to change the rules or the common understandings that we have in our society. Yet, here we are. The most recent COVID-19 reports state that we now have more than 1.4 million confirmed coronavirus cases worldwide, 430,271 [growing by the hour] of them are in the United States. Our daily death toll in the USA is continuing to grow. As of tonight, April 8, 2020 [7:45 p.m.] there has been 14,738 deaths in our country.

**Please continue to honor the social distancing norms that are part of the "Shelter in Place" order. The guidelines literally call us to be 6 feet away from others, to wear masks when going out or interacting with someone other than your family and to use plastic gloves to protect yourself and your families from a virus that can live up to 3 days on metal and plastic. Oh, why don't you stop reading this and go wash your hands for 30 seconds? You can always come back and read "the rest of the story." Did that sound like a suggestion? I'm serious. Go wash your hands. If you need someone to be mad at for reminding you then blame me.**

In this Holy Week leading to Easter Sunday, the Coronavirus has challenged us to be creative and learn to share the "Good News" in new, comfortable and not so comfortable ways. We've been forced to imagine a new way of being church that is outside the walls of the building we've known as "church". Look at the hymn, "WE are the church" it reminds us that the church is not a building. This new way of being the church together allows others as we welcome them to join us through live-streaming, Facebook Live and other means.

[Read More](#)

**Holy Week message from the Illinois Conference UCC**

Dear Friends,

This is a Holy Week unlike any other for us. We are keeping our bodies at a safe distance (CDC recommendation of maintaining 6 feet away from others and wearing a mask), even though we remain joined together in our hearts.



We praise all of our congregations for the creative and safe ways they are marking the events of Holy Week. We are happy to hear of the many ways the local churches are keeping in touch with each other, and particularly for keeping tabs on the more vulnerable of their members / persons in regular attendance and the broader community. In addition, we are grateful for those who continue to support their local church and its ministry through their tithes and offerings.

Truly in this time of shelter in place restrictions, we are discovering new ways to be the church to the world as it is today. Clearly God is helping us reimagine how the message of God's good love can be shared in different ways, and the church will be newly prepared for the days ahead. May God bless you and yours. May you be confident that God's love is sufficient for every challenge, even our challenge today.

In the Name of the Resurrected One,

Rev. Justo González II, Interim Conference Minister

Rev. Chuck Maney, Conference President

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## Message from the Associate Conference Minister for Vitality, Transformation and Sustainability

Rev. Michelle Hughes

### Reflecting on Nourishing Wellness

In Illinois, we were new passengers on the ride to navigate this pandemic. It seems so long ago. It was March 12-14, 2020. Clergy and MID's gathered at Techny Towers in Northbrook to be advised, nourished, and equipped to deal with the stresses that accompany us in this ministerial walk.



About 25 people showed up; attentive and well prepared with disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer and Kleenex. Our collective caution did not dampen our excitement about this event. Every one of our speakers honored the commitment to be with us and it was wonderful. We had wonderful worship and prayer time. We did QiGong. We had great food. We received good information. In short, it was a blessing. The blessing was, this was a profound time to be away at a retreat center while the rest of the world began to go a little crazy. The blessing was we had a chance to hug, get massages, to dance, to be cared for, and to laugh and to enjoy each other. The blessing was, we didn't know that in just a few days the mandate for "distancing" would prohibit us from doing just this.

Upon leaving I discovered the hoarders had devoured all bread and toilet paper, but I also experienced a new level of warmth and neighborliness among the shoppers while I stood in a long grocery line. There was God! Yes, in the peace of the retreat, yes, in the knowledge shared, but also in the calm amidst the chaos. Who knew during this Lenten season we

would all have to submit to retreating just to exist, and to have plenty of time to listen for the holy in our midst as a way of nourishing wellness not just in ourselves but in our communities as well?

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## Message from the Illinois Conference President

Rev. Charles Maney

### What Will Happen Next?

We are generally people who like to be together. How many churches love to brag on the quality and desirability of food choices provided at their regular potlucks? I never could imagine the day when a Pot Luck Supper seemed an extravagance, let alone a dangerous gathering.



So, even as the public is encouraged to shelter in place, we are called to be the church. We are stretching our reach and Congregations are dabbling in media they never expected to be interested in. Those who were certain their congregation was not interested in having a presence on the internet, are discovering that it is so much better to have some connection than none at all.

Congregations continue to find creative ways to meet identified needs in their communities. And even more surprising, is when the congregations ask for help in their service projects, they are finding folks within the community willing to be a part of serving others. We as the church are able to accomplish more than we knew, because we are not limited by our membership lists and we are not limited by our capital resources.

The tough times are not over. Our patience is sure to wear thin at times. We are going to get very “hungry” to be together in the ways we took for granted before. We may even need to ask for help, even if we have a long tradition of being able to do it all by ourselves, thank you very much.

So let me remind you, humility is a virtue. It can be a blessing to be blessed, even if we have long preferred to bless others. As we learn to accept the blessings of others, we can learn to be faithful in new ways to the God that stands behind every good work and every blessing.

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## Love in the Time of Corona

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

We are all doing our best as we shelter in place and try to maintain sanity amidst isolation. While we tend to our flocks, let us not forget to tend to ourselves. Many of us are picking up our phones and looking at the news much more often than we used to. The gyms being closed, being home where it's easier to grab not-so-healthy food from the pantry to snack on, and spending extended periods of time with people that we are used to being able to take in smaller doses are all factors that are likely taking their toll. So don't forget to take care of the only one that you truly can - *yourself!*



Take every opportunity to breathe, to take a walk, and to eat healthy so that you can stay well for your own sake. Self care during these times is critical. When you feel the anxiety start to build, take that deep breath and remember the words of St. Julian of Norwich: “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

Another thing that can help us in this trying time is our mindset. Jesus was constantly telling people to *repent*, or to change their minds. We can choose to see this pandemic as one that has stopped us from doing the “important” stuff that we were doing at church - especially as we approach Easter. OR, we can choose to see this unfortunate crisis as just the disruption that was needed to upset the stasis that is church and be a catalyst for change.

[Read More](#)

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## COVID-19 and the Illinois Conference UCC

As we live into new ways of being the Church during this pandemic, look to this page for resources, updates, and news as it relates to our conference churches and the United Church of Christ.

[Visit our website](#)

As a precautionary measure against spreading COVID-19, churches are suspending their Sunday worship services and other events. I will make every effort to keep link page below updated and appreciate our churches being in close contact to assist with this. Please email me at [ilconfcarmen@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfcarmen@gmail.com).

[Worship Service - Live Streams](#)

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## News from the Illinois Conference Disaster Coordinator

Hello Illinois Conference,

Everyone who reads this has been impacted by the COVID-19 virus. The lives that have been disrupted need the help of others, particularly when it comes to getting the food they need to maintain their own well-being.



As a faith-based member of the Illinois Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster, we are being asked to help accomplish the work of the many food banks across the state.

This appeal comes directly from Mr. Steve Ericson, Executive Director of FEEDING ILLINOIS, that represents all of the food banks in our state.

[Click here](#) for a document that illustrate the various coverage areas of the food banks, along with a list of the food banks and contact links to their volunteer coordinators so that you may volunteer directly.

[Click here for](#) the Feeding Illinois map.

This is a prime opportunity for us to live out what it means to “BE THE CHURCH”.

<sup>37</sup>Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?”

<sup>40</sup>And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Blessings,  
Rev. Roger Dart  
Conference Disaster Coordinator

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## Happenings Around the Conference



Tower Hill Camp and Retreat Center donates hundreds of pairs of gloves, and gallons of disinfectant and soap to local hospital and homeless shelter. This was due in part from previously received donations that allow them to be part of this ministry. Picture credit: [Tower Hill Camp and Retreat Center Facebook page](#)



The Sew What crew from St. Peters UCC in Frankfort is using their gifts to help out Medical professionals by working on making washable fabric face masks. They have plenty of fabric but are in desperate need of 1/4 inch flat elastic. If you can help or wish to donate call St. Peter's at (815) 685-5857. Picture credit: [St. Peters United Church of Christ Frankfort Facebook page](#).



Time and time again we are amazed at the hard-work that our many volunteers complete for our community! This picture features volunteers from San Lucas UCC in Chicago. San Lucas UCC continues to serve the community even amidst #COVID19. To donate: <http://ow.ly/GEgg50yUXEK> Picture credit [San Lucas UCC, Chicago Facebook page](#).



Saturday Food Pantry at Church of Peace in Rock Island is still open Saturdays from 9-11 a.m. Extra precautions have been taken and the food already pre-bagged to allow for social distancing. Picture credit: [Church of Peace UCC, Rock Island Facebook page](#).

## Pilgrim Congregational UCC in Oak Park welcomes Senior Pastor

Pilgrim Congregational Church UCC, in Oak Park, is pleased to welcome Rev. Colin Knapp as its Senior Pastor. Knapp begins this ministry after serving churches in Chicago and North Carolina. He is a graduate of Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights, Ill., and of Duke Divinity School; his ordination in the UCC is pending. Much of his ministry has been focused on helping young people make sense of an ancient and paradoxical faith, with awareness

that any meaningful faith must be paired with action in the world. That passion matches Pilgrim's focus on social justice and community outreach. Colin loves to learn and is looking forward to exploring Oak Park with his wife, Molly, and their son, Jude.



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## Holy Week and Easter at Home Resources

from Association of United Church Educators

Association of United Church Educators (AUCE) has curated the following lists of educational resources on their website. One for [Holy Week activities and lesson plans](#) and the other for [COVID 19](#).



### Holy Week

- [5 Holy Week activity ideas](#) for families
- [Virtual Holy Week and Easter ideas](#) from the Disciples of Christ
- [Holy Week Play Sets](#)
- [Holy Week @ Home using all your senses](#)
- [Holy Week Prayer Stations](#) for kids
- [Children's book reviews with lesson suggestions](#) (search for Holy Week)
- [Worshipful activities](#) for from Carolyn Brown (scroll down to Lent/Easter)
- [Holy Week activities](#) for kids
- [Make an altar for home](#)
- [Holy Week at home](#) from Building Faith
- [7 Ideas for Holy Week at Home](#) from Christine Hides
- [Read & color walk through Holy Week & Easter](#) from Picture the Bible (free download)
- [Holy Week Tenebrae at Home](#) from SALT Project
- [15 Ways to Observe Holy Week & Easter with your family](#)

### Easter

- [Children's book reviews with lesson suggestions](#) (search for Easter)
- [Worshipful activities](#) for from Carolyn Brown (scroll down to Lent/Easter)
- [Easter snacks](#) to make with kids
- [Zero-waste Easter basket ideas](#)
- [Easter science activities](#) for kids
- [Easter at home](#) from Building Faith
- [Easter Photo Scavenger Hunt](#) for families (an Easter Egg Hunt alternative)
- [Easter with Kids](#): 32 ideas from Sacraparental

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## Community Services Tools and Resources

In response to COVID-19, the State Emergency Operations Center has activated a State of Illinois Community Service Support Team to develop **tools and resources to support your whole community response efforts**. The team focus is on community support services (also referred to as wrap around services) for individuals who are home-bound or self-quarantined.

We also understand that there are many creative solutions being employed throughout the state, many of which you are participating in! Does your community have a great initiative or resources addressing COVID-19? Please send a link or

description to [voadillinois@gmail.com](mailto:voadillinois@gmail.com) and cc: [dpg.serveillinois@illinois.gov](mailto:dpg.serveillinois@illinois.gov) so we can share best practices across organizations!

**Please click links below to view messaging, tools, and resources:**

- Identifying Emerging Needs within the Community
  - Tool: [“Methods to Identify Emerging Needs”](#)
    - This tool walks through the process of: updating 2-1-1/3-1-1, creating a coordinated call center, putting together a community wide online survey, and setting up a community fund to provide financial assistance
  - Tool: [“Organization Call Line Sample Scripts”](#)
    - This is an example of a script that could be used as part of the coordinated call center
- Coordinating Services & Service Delivery Modifications
  - Tool: [“Discussion Points for Identifying Service Delivery Modification Impacts”](#)
    - This can be utilized to promote coordination among community organizations, businesses, and public entities
  - Resource: [“Pet Resources and Resource Q&As”](#)
- Volunteering
  - Resource: [“COVID-19 Volunteerism Messaging”](#)

**Please remember it is imperative to maintain the health and well-being of volunteers and the community members they serve.** Please refer to the volunteer safety guidance available [here](#). Please reach out to [livoad](#) with any questions or concerns, and we will work together to find solutions!

Best,  
The State Community Services Support Team

*The [Serve Illinois Commission](#) is the state's lead agency under the Illinois Emergency Operations Plan (IEOP) for volunteers and donations in times of disaster.*

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## Message from the Justice and Witness Committee of the Chicago Metropolitan Association Illinois Conference UCC

Does your congregation minister to people who are homeless? Veterans? Foreign born residents? Retirees who winter out of state? College students? Farm families? People living in large apartment complexes or other large housing units? All these groups are at high risk of being under-counted. Learning more about the coming Census and why it is vitally important will help you answer questions from the people whom you serve. The State of Illinois and Cook County recognize that a successful census will be aided by faith communities. [Here is a link to a useful video](#) that in clear and simple language helps people understand the census and why it is important to be counted. Please consider showing it during adult education classes, coffee hour or other appropriate forums.



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## In the Media

[For religious leaders, the pandemic doesn't negate faith but points to its importance. 'What we are trying to do is offer people hope'](#)

[Here are some Chicago-area religious services to stream online](#)

[Faith Over Fear: How Churches are Helping Their Congregations despite Service Cancellations](#)

[Churches are adapting to new normal caused by coronavirus outbreak](#)

[Prepared for a disaster, and glad they were -- Sheffield church donates 180 masks to OSF clinic.](#)

[Is your Chicago church, mosque or synagogue broadcasting its services online? Tell us about it.](#) *(invitation from the Chicago Tribune)*

[Winnebago community members create masks for healthcare workers](#)

['Small church with a big heart' embodies love of neighbor in Chicago's Humboldt Park](#)

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## Employment Opportunities

Click links to view [Ministerial opportunities](#) and [lay employment opportunities](#) within the Illinois Conference.

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## Conference Calendar for April

April 9: [Webinar: Yoga Therapy and Preventing Burnout](#) at 10:00 a.m.

April 15: [Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders -Coronavirus](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom.

April 22: [Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders -Coronavirus](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom.

April 24-27: [Canceled: Ecumenical Advocacy Days](#) gathering "Imagine! God's Earth and People Restore".

April 25: [E-mail/Mail Communication: Western Association Spring Meeting](#).

April 28: [Webinar: Financial Controls and Best Practices for Churches](#) at 2:00 p.m. E.T. by the Insurance Board.

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## Upcoming Events

May 2: [Canceled: Lighthouse Foundation's – Coming Out Celebration](#)

May 2: [On-line Chicago Metropolitan Association Spring Meeting](#). Watch here for further information as it becomes available.

May 2: [Canceled: Prairie Association Spring Meeting](#).

May 3: [Eastern Association Spring Meeting](#), 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. at St. John UCC in Beecher.

May 9: [Fox Valley Association Spring Meeting](#), 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. at the Northern Illinois Food Bank in Geneva.

June 4-6, 2020: [Postponed: Illinois Conference 56th Annual Celebration](#), at Augustana College, Rock Island, Ill. "Bridge Building - Rise Up & Build," the theme of the 2020 Annual Celebration.

June 20: 2020: [Digital Gathering: Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival.](#)  
Mass Poor People's Assembly and Moral March on Washington will be a generationally transformative digital gathering.

July 12-18: [H.U.G. Camp](#) at Tower Hill Camp and Retreat Center in Sawyer, Mich.

July 22-25, 2020: [CANCELED: United Church of Christ's National Youth Event](#) .

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