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## Message from the Interim Conference Minister

Rev. Justo González II

### Reflection on the Transformative Power of Crisis: (And, by the way, We're in Crisis.)

I was in crisis last Fall. Life & Death Came to visit. I had to have a serious conversation with both. I didn't want to have those conversations. I did my best to ignore them. I could not. I didn't want to talk to James about options for his life if I was called to eternity. Dealing with the reality of your own mortality and death is not the reflection I desire when I look inward. Bottom line: All of us have had or are dealing with crisis. Most of us pretend that we are not or project the image, "I'm fine." You're not fine. I'm not fine. Why can't we be real with ourselves, our families, loved ones or within our congregations, associations or the conference. It's time to get real. Yes, I'm talking to you.

(Stop Reading. Reflect on one of the crisis situations of your own life. Really, stop. Don't run away from my invitation. Look inward. Touch the pain. Recall the emotions. Let them touch you, if you've previously closed them off.) Feel whatever emotions you are feeling. Don't hold back. Let yourself touch the real you. As you are ready return to the reflection.

Siblings of God as a conference, like many congregations, we have lost our **why. Have no clue what I'm, talking about?** [Watch Michael Jr. Break Time on YouTube](#) . Never underestimate the power of a crisis to transform your present reality and the world. Crisis creates opportunities for bold audacious dreams to flourish.

[Read More](#)

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

Rev. Michelle Hughes

The United Church of Christ celebrates Black History Month. The celebration of February as Black History (or African Heritage) Month begins this week. This is a time to honor the contributions and struggles of peoples of African descent.

Black History Month is an opportunity to spend time enjoying the creativity, beauty, challenging history, and uplifting journey of God's very good creation. The [United Church of Christ](#) and the [United Church of Canada](#) have some wonderful resources that can be enjoyed throughout the month of February, as well as the entire year. Consider taking some time to sit down and learn more about the



complex and extraordinary history of African descended people through and literary works—fiction and nonfiction—written by people of African descent from various disciplines.

I hope you embrace this opportunity to learn about the Black History that may be present in the lives of those in our church, in your town, in your state, and within our denomination.

Our national office offers wonderful resources to assist having conversations about the construction of “race”. Such as:

RACE: The Power of an Illusion

1. Episode One: [The Difference Between Us](#)
2. Episode Two: [The Story We Tell](#)
3. Episode Three: [The House We Live In](#)

Post Video Dialogue. Click the link and download the study guide: [RACE The Power of an Illusion Study Guide](#)

Let us move forward to celebrate each other and to educate each other.

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## News for the Chicago Metropolitan Association

We bring you “good news” for the life and witness of our congregations. The Congregational Life Committee (CLC) has funding from the Chicago Metropolitan Association (CMA) to grant to congregations in our association for empowering their life and witness. All CMA member congregations are invited to apply for grants.

Possible uses for these funds by congregations and ministers include:

- Scholarships for church revitalization events or workshops to benefit a wide variety of congregations;
- Training for ministries that will enrich congregational life (e.g. ESL training, worship music, youth leadership development);
- Interim training for under-served populations,
- Other proposals that empower congregations.

The Congregational Life Committee administers the grants, with final approval resting with the Association Council of the CMA. Applications for funds are due by March 2, 2020.

[Click here for additional info and application form](#)

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## Nourishing Wellness: Refresh, Replenish, Renew

The Illinois Conference and the Pension Boards-United Church of Christ, Inc. (PBUCC) is offering a Nourishing Wellness: Refresh, Replenish, Renew. A Holistic Wellness two day retreat for Clergy and Members in Discernment in the Illinois Conference on March 12-14, 2020 at Techny Towers Conference and Retreat Center, Techny, Ill.

Registration is limited to 50 Clergy and MID participants. Registration fee is \$50 per person (fee waived for MID). The retreat begins with dinner on Thursday, March 12 and ends at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 14, following worship.



Please make checks payable to the Illinois Conference, and mail to: Illinois Conference UCC, 1840 Westchester Blvd. Suite 200, Westchester, IL 60154. Attention: Clergy Wellness.

[Register Here](#)



Don't forget to sign your camper up for the summer. As of the end of January, we already have 115 campers register for Pilgrim Park & Tower Hill camps. Follow the link below for online registration...

If you have any questions, please contact [odmregistrar@gmail.com](mailto:odmregistrar@gmail.com) or call (815) 447-2390.

[Registrar Online Here](#)

[Outdoor Ministries Event Schedule](#)

## In Case You Missed It!

The Illinois Conference UCC, in partnership with the Michigan Conference UCC and the United Church of Christ National Setting, sponsored and presented on Jan. 28, **Whispers of the Holy: A Lent and Easter Worship Exploration Event**. The event was held on Zoom and had over 50 participants. Presenters included Rev. Dan Furman and Rev. Rachel Bahr, pastors in the Michigan Conference, Rev. Susan Blain from the UCC National Staff, our recently retired Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers, and Rev. Justo González II, Rev. Michelle Hughes, Rev. Kathy Lawes, Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, and Rev. Kim Wood from the Illinois Conference Staff. Ideas were shared, brainstorming took place, and a general excitement about getting ready for Lent, Holy Week, and Easter filled the virtual room!



The Illinois Conference thanks our co-sponsors for sharing your creative gifts and vast expertise for this event. And, we especially thank the many participants who came together for a couple of hours to gather information and share your own insights. In case you were not able to attend, please click on the following links to view a recording of the event and resources prepared by the presenters. We look forward to offering more opportunities to explore worship and liturgy together.

[Whispers of the Holy - Recorded Event](#)

[Whispers of the Holy - Resource](#)

## Still the Same

[Rev. Brandyn Simmons](#)

You're a bit into the New Year, the holidays are behind you and Lent is still a month away. You told yourself that once you got through Advent and Christmas you'd be able to take a deep breath and feel better. You'd be reenergized and be able to get to the projects that have been sitting on the back burner for a while. You know those projects that are vital and are really going to turn things around in your church? But for some reason, you don't

feel energized at all and those projects seem overwhelming.

In other words, you feel burned out.

Many believe the misconception that burnout is the result of doing too much. In reality, burnout comes from doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons. So, what about you? Whose projects are these really who are leaving you feeling so exhausted with just a mere thought? Are they really going to turn things around or are they ideas that will just make you busier as you try and prove to your congregation what a great leader you are?

[Read More](#)

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## Philippine American Ecumenical Church regarding Taal Volcano Eruption

Rev. Eliezer Pascua

On behalf of the Philippine American Ecumenical Church UCC (PAEC) and of my family living in Batangas City, Philippines who, thankfully, are well and safe, I have been impelled to request prayers and expression of concerns for the people and communities adversely affected by Taal Volcano eruption in Batangas and Cavite provinces in the Philippines on Sunday, Jan. 12, 2020.

As of the end of January there have been about 121,000 evacuees sheltering in barely 365 evacuation centers in different places. The entire area of Taal volcano danger zone radius turned virtually into ghost towns and having the whole landscape covered with ash falls. As of Jan. 22, the locked down policy of the government (thru the Department of Interior and Local Government and the Philippine National Police) was strictly enforced to protect and deter people from coming and going into danger zone. "As Taal Volcano simmers, Philippine officials brace for long crisis..." It's really massive because you're talking of more or less 100,000 evacuees in evacuation centers," said Health Secretary Francis Duque III." (NBC News)

[Read More](#)

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## Happenings Around the Conference



Youth from First Congregational Church of Elmhurst spent MLK Day of Service at San Lucas UCC in Chicago learning about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and working at the church's food pantry. A day on, not a day off! *Picture credit: First Congregational Church, Elmhurst (Facebook page)*



Installation service of Rev. Dr. Ken Kline at Immanuel United Church of Christ in Evergreen Park was held on January 26. Officiating was Rev. Michelle Hughes of the Illinois Conference UCC. *Picture Credit: Immanuel United Church of Christ in Evergreen Park (Facebook page)*



Glenview Community Church wrapped up the Souper Month of Caring in grand fashion on Sunday, as the church school packed dry soup mix for the homeless, attendees wore sports jerseys and brought soup and chili, and celebrated. They are thankful to all the communities within their church that came together to benefit Connections for the Homeless, San Lucas Iglesias, and the Northfield Township Food Pantry. *Picture credit: Glenview Community Church, Glenview (Facebook Page)*



Rev. Kimberlee Whisler-Vasko pastor at St. John's UCC in Lyons and Three Great Loves Coordinator OPTIC OGMP shared... Generation to generation **#wonderwoman** believing in the power of love! The 3 Great Loves initiative is the denomination's opportunity to express how our Love of Neighbor, Love of Children, and Love of Creation work together to address inequities in our current world. *Picture Credit: St. John's UCC, Lyons (Facebook page)*

## UCC Yearbook Helpline

It's time for our churches to participate in the annual yearbook data collection. If your church is unable to complete electronically or you need additional assistance **contact your Association Office**. To login to the UCC Data Hub please go to <http://datahub.ucc.org/>. The church's ID number is the Conference number (16) followed by the church's number. For instructions on how to submit data [click here](#). **The deadline for online submission is March 4, 2020 at midnight.**

NOTE: The Yearbook office is offering an opportunity for their staff to be available to help with anything Yearbook related. The Yearbook instructions explicitly state that churches should contact the Conference or Association for assistance. However, our Conference has been selected to utilize the Help Line. The Help Line will be available Monday – Friday from 9:00 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. (Eastern Time) ending on March 4, 2020. The phone number is (216) 736-3837.

Thanks for all you do to help getting church records updated and accurate for the Illinois Conference.



## Thrive with Pride Cafe at First Congregational UCC in LaGrange

Something new is coming our way! Thrive with Pride Cafes are being established in the western suburbs. Funded by a grant from the Community Memorial Foundation, AgeOptions, the Area Agency on Aging for Suburban Cook County, is partnering with several churches and community organizations to connect older LGBTQIA adults and their caregivers to knowledge, resources, and benefits they may be eligible for. It's tough getting older but

Thrive with Pride aims to help.

Following First Congregation Church of La Grange's (FCCLG) 20th anniversary of being Open and Affirming, the Congregation was drawn to extend their ministries with the LGBTQIA community. And so, a partnership was born, and we will be one of the sites for this program.

**The first meeting of the Thrive with Pride Cafe at FCCLG, 100th 6th Avenue in LaGrange, will be held from 1:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 13.** All LGBTQIA older adults and caregivers are welcome to attend. Free parking is located a half a block north of church. The entrance to the café is on Cossitt Avenue, and the space is fully ADA accessible.

[Read More](#)

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## UCC Campus Ministry welcomes New Director

The UCC Campus Ministry Board is pleased to welcome Nate Brantingham as the new Director of Campus Ministry. Nate has a diverse educational background in computers, entrepreneurship, psychology, and most recently, theology and ministry. He grew up Presbyterian in Spokane, Wash. where he attended a liberal and affirming congregation. Once he started to find ways to use his entrepreneurship skills in ministry, he was hooked and decided to pursue ministry full time. He then attended Princeton Theological Seminary where he recently graduated. Bringing all this together with his MDiv focus, he now specializes in ministry amidst change and is a skilled speaker and educator.

[Read More](#)

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## Churches in the Media

[Even in country's darkest hours, MLK speakers say its future is in our hands](#)

[Embrace Living Communities Celebrates 125 Years of Service](#)

[Bethel UCC will present a riveting performance by the acclaimed Indigo Ensemble](#)

[Quilts leave area veterans feeling 'proud'](#)

[Audubon Program held at St. John UCC in Freeport to features arctic refuge](#)

[Immanuel United sets installation of new pastor](#)

[Chicago congregation's 'good, sacred bodies' featured in pin-up calendar](#)

[Overnight Cafe: SecondFirst Church helps people find shelter](#)

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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 February

February 7: [Westchester Community Church Fish Fry](#), 4:30 p.m in Westchester Community Church in Westchester. A great way to gather with neighbors, friends, and family!!

February 10: [Feed Your Faith](#) webinar presented by Heifer International, 7:00 p.m. Join Zoom event [here](#).

February 16: Rev. Justo González II, Interim Conference Minister, 9:00 a.m. will be preaching at [United Church of Christ in Garden Prairie](#).

February 19: [Medical Marijuana and Employment Practices](#) Live Event and Webcast, 2:00 p.m. EST. Join Insurance Board at the City Club of Cleveland for their first ever Live Webcast Event. Register now to receive a confirmation email with information for viewing and reminder emails: <https://loom.ly/VrgFpKs>

February 23: Rev. Justo González II, Interim Conference Minister, 10:00 a.m. will be preaching at [Plainfield Congregational Church in Plainfield](#).

February 23: [The Indigo Ensemble](#), 3:00 p.m. presented by Bethel UCC in Elmhurst.

February 23: [5th Annual Church Choir Expo](#), 3:00 p.m. hosted by Zion UCC in Peru.

February 25: [Pretrial Fairness Act Lobby Day](#) in Springfield. Free bus registration from Chicago is available, please register [here](#).

February 27: Webinar: [Ground Zero in the Struggle for Environmental Justice](#), 1:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)

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## Upcoming Events

March 3-5, 2020: [CHHSM 82nd Annual Gathering](#) in Memphis, TN. The Guest House at Graceland will serve as the conference site. Together We Create a Just, Caring and Compassionate World.

March 7: [Mental Health First Aid Training](#), 8:00 a.m. at Community UCC in Champaign.

March 8: [Commissioning of Linda Morgan](#) as Faith Community Nurse, 10:15 a.m. at Community United Church of Christ in Champaign.

March 12-14, 2020: [Nourishing Wellness: Refresh, Replenish, Renew](#). A Holistic Wellness Retreat for Clergy and Members in Discernment in the Illinois Conference, in Techny Towers Conference and Retreat Center, Techny, Ill. Space is limited to 50 Clergy and MIDs. You don't want to miss this!

March 21: [NAMI Mental Health First Aid Training -Youth version](#), 9:00 a.m. at St. John's UCC in Lyons.

March 31, 2020: Free Webinar: [Planned Giving to Support Mission and Ministry](#), 7:00 p.m. EDT. Lead by Andrew B. Warner, CFRE, serves as a Generosity Outreach Officer of the national setting of the United Church of Christ.

April 24-27, 2020: [Ecumenical Advocacy Days](#) gathering "Imagine! God's Earth and People Restore" in Washington, D.C.

June 4-6, 2020: [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: [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 gathering at the US Capitol in Washington DC.

July 22-25, 2020: [United Church of Christ's National Youth Event](#) at Purdue University in West Lafayette Indiana. Registration opens this week.

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## Pretrial Fairness Act Lobby Day

Register now to join people from across the state in Springfield on Feb. 25, 2020 for a lobby day and rally at the state capitol. We need your help to educate legislators about the Pretrial Fairness Act and the need for transformative bond reform. Busses will be leaving from around the Chicagoland area in the early morning and returning in the evening. Keep your eyes on our social media for updates on the [Pretrial Fairness Act](#) and how you can support pretrial freedom in Illinois.



Registration is required. Click below to reserve your spot on the bus.

[Register Here](#)

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## Earth Day Sunday - CREATION JUSTICE MINISTRIES

2020 is the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day, so we are sure to see more community celebrations than usual this year. This year, Earth Day falls after Easter. Earth Day Sunday can be celebrated April 19, 26, or another day convenient for your faith community.



The 2020 theme focuses on "The Fierce Urgency of Now." It features stories of congregations taking climate action, liturgical resources, and faith-rooted interpretation of recently released dire Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports. The resource and accompanying web-based materials are available for free download at [www.creationjustice.org/urgency](http://www.creationjustice.org/urgency).

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[Visit our website](#)



[DONATE NOW!](#)



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