Message from the Interim Conference Minister
Rev. Justo González II

Distracted

I was distracted. Alone in my own world. I was focused on something that didn’t matter but seemed super important at that moment.

"Justo. Justo." I heard trepidation in his voice. Something was not right; my heart was pounding when I realized I was DISTRACTED and that cars were coming at us. His voice caught my attention. I looked up and I had just run a red light. I was so DISTRACTED that MY ACTIONS could have killed or severely injured us.

When we are not paying attention, or focused on the wrong things, it is a recipe for disaster. For pastors, including myself, we can and do get lost in the sea of busy work. I’m talking about things that keep us DISTRACTED; things that take up our time and we think we’ve accomplished a lot. As pastors, we have been to meetings, planned worship, engaged with the community, but in the realm of larger issues of ministering in this post digital age, we have done little but move in circles. As a conference, we have been distracted “the way we have always done it”; still operating in an organizational system that no longer serves our reality. We have been distracted away from making the changes needed.

Indeed, the Church universal, the Illinois Conference, our five associations (yes, yours), and our local congregations have been very distracted. We have been distracted by our narrative of yesterday; we have been distracted by who has left; we have been distracted by what we don’t have. We can no longer afford to daydream about yesteryear and our desire to be who we once were in our rich history (understand, this is not a call to lose that history, but rather not to be completely bound by it.)

These distractions can kill us! Now is the time to get focused on our future destination. Now is the time to get focused on how to bring the love of God and the message of hope and healing to this hurting and broken world. Now is the time to let the scales fall from our eyes and see the reality before us.

This distraction does not serve us well. Let’s RE ENERGIZE and MAKE THE HARD DECISIONS THAT MOVE US AWAY FROM DISTRACTION and AWAKENS US INTO TRANSFORMATION that God Intends. I pray that this will be…

Report from the Associate Conference Minister for Vitality, Transformation and Sustainability
Love is still in the air...

February is the month of love! In times past, because I didn’t have “a significant other”, I felt a little left out during this time of red roses, sappy cards, and candlelit dinners. In this season of my life, my perspective has changed. I now embrace this as a time to tell those family and friends I love; they are in my thoughts. In that same vein, although Valentine’s Day has passed, I want to take a moment to tell my church family how much you are appreciated, and how much we recognize the love and care that goes into your ministry.

As I receive your pledges to give to the ministry and mission of the Illinois Conference and the United Church of Christ, I am encouraged by your generosity even in this time of budget woes and declining membership for many. Your love for the church is apparent. Through your efforts we know you have hope in this conference and believe that we will continue to serve you by championing new initiatives. Your support lets us know that you have faith in our endeavors to serve you.

Thank you for the love you have shown and continue to show.

Sincerely,
Rev. Michelle Hughes

1 Corinthians 13:13: “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

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**Report from the Illinois Conference President**

Rev. Charles Maney

Greetings Illinois Conference Friends:

I would like to take this time to remind you once again to save the date for the 2020 Illinois Conference Annual Celebration being held on June 5 - 6, 2020 at Augustana College in Rock Island. Pre-meeting events will be held on Thursday, June 4, 2020.

If your church is considering presenting a resolution, click on the following link to view "How to present a resolution" to the 2020 Annual Celebration body and a resolution template. Resolutions are DUE to the Conference office no later than Tuesday, May 5, 2020.

The official call to our Annual Celebrations is as follows:

The By-Laws, Article II provides:

1. Every local church which has standing in an Association of the Conference shall be entitled to representation in the Conference by one voting lay delegate, and in addition thereto, each such church shall be entitled to representation by one voting youth delegate (a person at least 14 years of age, but not older than 22.) A church of 800 or more members shall have one additional delegate and one additional youth delegate.

2. All ordained, commissioned and licensed ministers who have standing or recognition in an Association of the Conference shall be voting members. The members of the Conference Council shall be voting members of the Conference during their term of office.

All registration materials will be posted on the Illinois Conference website soon after Easter.
Blessings,
Rev. Chuck Maney

**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 Techy Towers Conference and Retreat Center, Techy, Ill.

ONLY 10 SLOTS STILL OPEN. Registration closes on Feb. 26, but we’ll be full very soon. REGISTER TODAY.

Want to know what will happen at our Clergy Wellness Retreat view a draft agenda [here](#).

Registration fee is $50 per person (fee waived for MIDs). 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.

Don’t delay - Register now!

The staff of Tower Hill are busy readying facilities to welcome church retreats, family reunions, youth camps and weekend get-a-ways. Rooms are being refreshed, trails are being cleared, wood is being chopped and reservations are being taken.

We are also scheduling Spring Work Groups. Possible projects include putting up gutters, power washing exteriors, exterior painting, trail clearing, log splitting, invasive species removal, roofing, decking and more. We provide the lodging and supplies for work groups but do ask that you cover the cost of your meals. If you’d like to help accomplish this work but can’t join a work group, please consider sponsoring one. Here’s how it works: they do the work, and you help to cover the cost of their meals.

If you’d like to learn more, please contact Rev. Tracy Heilman, site manager at Tower Hill, at (269) 426-3881.

Outdoor Ministries Event Schedule

Registrar Online Here

The Intentional Second Vocation
There are so many things that we don’t learn in seminary. We’ve talked about some such as how to minister to aging congregations. Another one is that most of us will not be able to earn a living wage on our church income alone. Unless our partner is the primary wage earner, the overwhelming majority of us have to be bi-vocational.

How many times have we heard of a colleague who had to work doing funerals or weddings well after retirement just to put food on the table? How many “retired” pastors do you know that must take a call just so that they can have a parsonage to avoid being homeless? Most of these people likely thought that they would be provided for in retirement when they started out in ministry. Today, many of us have pensions, but we are also aware that we need another vocation to supplement both our current income and our retirement.

There are many options when it comes to being bi-vocational. Sure, you can go and pick up some part-time work at Starbucks to make ends meet. But what if you were to make your second vocation exactly that - a vocation? What if you were to be intentional about it?

**TPIRC APPLICATIONS ARE STILL OPEN**

We are still accepting TPIRC (Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations) applications. We currently have 10 openings. If you are interested in participating in the TPIRC, please click link below and fill out the application. Submit application to the Rev. Michelle Hughes, ACM for Vitality, Transformation, and Sustainability at ilconfmichelle@gmail.com. **Deadline for application: March 15, 2020.**

**Benefits of the TPIRC**

**TPIRC Application**

**Happenings Around the Conference**

For more than 40 years, Ronald McDonald House Charities of Chicagoland & Northwest Indiana programs have grown as the need continues to provide comfort to families of children with complex medical issues. We would like to entertain you in our Joan & Sidney Roth Conference Center where you can enjoy a delicious sit-down meal from Executive Chef Mike Leigh.

The mission team of St. Pauls United Church of Christ in Chicago is hard at work this month in Haiti building a new stairway at Three Angels orphanage and school Children’s Relief in Port Au Prince. The need in Haiti is great. Picture credit:
All are welcome at Peace Memorial UCC in Palos Park

On February 2, 2020, the people of Peace Memorial United Church of Christ, Palos Park, voted to become an Open and Affirming congregation of the UCC. Their welcoming statement reads:

"In the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, Jesus names those who are “blessed”, the poor, the hungry, those who grieve, those who are humble, the merciful, the peacemakers, those who are mistreated for “doing right”. Also, the Gospels tell us that the most important commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind, and the second is to love your neighbor as you love yourself. When Jesus is asked “Who is our neighbor?” he responds with the parable of the Good Samaritan. Samaritans were considered unworthy of regard or respect; they were not accepted in “normal” society. Jesus broke bread with tax collectors, prostitutes and lowly fishermen. Jesus healed lepers and those of unclean spirit. These actions demonstrate to us that no one is to be excluded from the kingdom of God, a kingdom we are challenged to live here and now.

In the spirit of Christ's teachings and to affirm our commitment and covenant to live the teachings of the Gospel today and every day, Peace Memorial Church UCC welcomes you.

Read More

Aging Congregation reaffirms their faith
Pastor Colleen Lawrence, First Congregational Church of Marseilles

In the Fall of 2018, 12 adults of First Congregational UCC in Marseilles began studying "My Confirmation", the UCC Guide for Confirmation Instruction. Many had been confirmed earlier in life from other denominational churches, some never confirmed and only one confirmed from this very church. Each had a desired to study and Re-Affirm their faith.

Over the year an a half, we did stick to the study of the book, but also did an in-depth study of each of the twelve disciples after Christmas, with each one choosing a particular disciple and then dressing and presenting a self-resume of that disciple on Maundy Thursday, after a shared meal. They then took their place at the empty table, representing The Last Supper, before Communion. After Easter we invited others and went to witness The Pasion Play in Bloomington. In late Fall of 2019, we watched the movie, The Amistad. On the day they Re-Affirmed their faith, they led Worship.

As a Pastor of 25 years, I was never more moved. Praise God for the children of God, (even if 55 and older).

Livestream of UCC Press Conference for New Toxic Air Pollution Report
On Ash Wednesday, the United Church of Christ will be live-streaming a press conference from Washington, D.C. as a new environmental justice report is released. In the spirit of the UCC’s pioneering 1987 report on environmental racism, this report will focus on 100 super polluters across the country and the communities that suffer from their toxic air emissions. The children living in these communities will be a particular focus of the report. The press conference will feature the Rev. Benjamin Chavis who coined the phrase “environmental racism.” Other speakers will include the Rev. Traci Blackmon and community voices from the most affected communities. Press conference will be live-streamed on the UCC Facebook page. You can learn more about the press conference on the UCC Facebook event page.

UCC Webinar: Ground Zero in the Struggle for Environmental Justice

Around the country, the health and well-being of communities, especially their children, are threatened by corporations that pump toxic chemicals into the air. This webinar will take place the day after the release of a new environmental justice report from the UCC. It will feature leaders from grassroots organizations in parts of the country suffering from high concentrations of pollution. These leaders will help us discern what faith communities can do to confront this moral crisis. Even if you can’t make the webinar’s scheduled on Feb. 27, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. Central Time, still sign-up, and we will send a recording. Register today!

Churches in the Media

Nonprofit RIP Medical Debt Promises To Clear Away Thousands In Debt For A Penny On The Dollar

Rollo church named to National Register of Historic Places.

Employment Opportunities

Click links to view Ministerial opportunities and lay employment opportunities within the Illinois Conference.

Conference Calendar for February

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 26: Ash Wednesday Press Conference and Service at 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.
EST press conference will be live-streamed on the UCC Facebook page. You can learn more about the press conference on the UCC Facebook event page.

February 27: Webinar: Ground Zero in the Struggle for Environmental Justice, 12:00 p.m. (Central Time)

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 4: Yearbook online Submission Deadline! 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.

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 Clergy and MIDs. You don’t want to miss this!

March 13: Avalon Park Project Against Violence host a discussion on HR0433 Violence as a Health Crisis, 12:00 p.m. at Avalon Park Community Church in Chicago.

March 14: St. Luke UCC holds Annual Chili Supper Fundraiser, 4:00 p.m. at St. Luke UCC in Beecher.

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.

April 25: Western Association Spring Meeting at Trinity UCC in Quincy. The Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, Associate Conference Minister serving the Chicago Metropolitan Association will be the featured speaker.

May 2: Lighthouse Foundation’s – Coming Out Celebration, 11:00 a.m. at Lighthouse Church of Chicago.

May 2: Prairie Association Spring Meeting at English Congregational UCC, Big Rock.

May 3: Eastern Association Spring Meeting, 2:00 p.m.-6:00 p.m. Watch here for further information as it becomes available.

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


June 20: 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.

Visit our website

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