



NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



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Message from the Interim Conference Minister

Rev. Justo González II

**It's a great day to be alive.
By: the "I'm Not Dead yet" Conference Minister**



Life is interesting. Life often brings forth unexpected twists and turns. What I have learned from life in 58 years is that we cannot decide for ourselves which challenges we will accept and then attempt to control these events to obtain our desired outcome. We pretend that we do control to make us feel good but in reality control is an illusion. What we can always control is our attitude and how we decide to respond to the twists and turns of the roller coasters of our lives.

My unexpected and certainly unwelcome journey began at General Synod last summer. That led to hospitalizations in Milwaukee (5 days) and then upon arrival in Chicago another 5 days. Within 3 days, a team of Cardiothoracic Surgeons from Advocate Lutheran General hospital had shared a finding that might require open heart surgery. I heard nothing else they said. We went the conservative route thinking it might be a blood clot on my heart valve. Open heart surgery was off the table. It was never discussed again.

It took months and multiple repeated scopes and the "blood clot" grew twice during that period. I'm not a doctor but after the "mass" growing, I informed the doctor what he and I both knew this was not a blood clot. Everything was shifting. I was no longer in control. I could no longer pretend that events were not taking over. I knew I needed to surrender. In spite of hearing the words "open heart surgery" back in July, I was shocked and could not believe this was really happening.

Like most people, I could not deal with that reality and had to process and pray. It's not easy looking at your own mortality. It's hard trying to assure your spouse who is very scared for you. I too know that I might be looking at the end of the chapter of my life. I felt alone even though many people were around me.

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

Rev. Michelle Hughes

“Change is not what we expect from religious people. They tend to love the past more than the present or the future.”

— **Richard Rohr, *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life***



The New Year is a time of new beginnings and resolve. I wonder, what will we decide to do as the church to remain relevant in this current age? The task is before us; to discern what parts of our tradition must be kept, and what can we discard. We cannot simply 'do what we have always done and expect different results. This requires a close examination of all that we do: how we gather, where we gather, and how we articulate our faith in this current age. This is the core of the work being done in our TPIRC (Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations Initiative) cohorts. We come together to share ideas, strategies and the struggle of revitalization.

Your Illinois Conference is part of this national endeavor through a grant given to us by the Lilly Foundation. Our goal is to engage 45 pastors and their leadership team in this process. We still have spaces available. This is an invitation to join us on this journey. You will find details and an application [here](#).

Report from the Illinois Conference President

Rev. Charles Maney

There is a lot going on in the Illinois Conference. We continue to pray for a full recovery for Rev. Justo González II. We also pray for Rev. Michelle Hughes, and the rest of our dedicated staff. We extend a warm welcome to Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff as he steps into his new role as Associate Conference Minister (CMA).



2020 will be an important year for the Illinois Conference. We pray for the Conference Minister Search Committee as they move into the next phase of the search process. (Mr. David Holston, Conference Vice President, chairs the committee.)

We have a new staff and administrative structure in place at Tower Hill. The bulk of the restructuring took place in the middle of last year. We expect to see a significant improvement in the financial performance of the camp in the final numbers, and even better in 2020.

Read More



Volunteers and staff met Sunday, Jan. 12 to share plans and ideas for the 2020 Camp Season. Front row: Diane Hooper, Mitch Kloster, Barbara Lohrbach, Carol Currier-Frighetto, Matt Mimplitz, Kelly Gansauer, Dennis Kirscher, Brett Johnson. Back Row: Paige Russell, Sara Buresh, Tracy Heilman, Donna Boyko, Cindy White, Alan White. Not Pictured: Karen Karczewski, Lorri Fooockle, Scott and Marc Urban, Suzy Daly, Sarah Lohrbach, Tom March, Terri Kelly, Harriet Dart, Ronda Bower, Dr. Grice, Janet Thompson, Amy Wildermuth

Outdoor Ministries is excited to share their event schedule for this year. Pilgrim Park Camp and Tower Hill Camp are open throughout the year in order to serve the needs of individuals, families, and churches of the both the Illinois Conference and the areas surrounding each camp. Both camps offer a vast array of retreats, camps and workshops for people of all ages. Activities are not limited to members of the United Church of Christ— all God’s children are welcome. Programs are designed to encourage covenantal relationships, celebrate the gifts and talents of those around us, and provide opportunities for personal growth in our lives and in our experiences with God.

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

2020 Outdoor Ministries
Event Schedule

Online Registration
is OPEN!

News for the Fox Valley Association

Lavon Bayler Scholarship Application for Fox Valley Association Clergy



The Committee on Ministry is pleased to oversee the Lavon Bayler Seminary Debt Retirement Fund in the Fox Valley Association. We are happy to announce that there are several \$1000 scholarships available for 2019/20. If you have seminary debt and would like to apply for a grant, [click here to download the application form](#). If you have received a Bayler grant before, **you are still eligible to apply again this year.**

Please return all required documents by **Feb. 9, 2020** to the Illinois Conference - Lavon Bayler Fund, 1840 Westchester Blvd., Westchester IL 60154.

True Resolutions

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

A new year often brings new words of self-motivation. Oftentimes, those words sound something like, "A new year, a new me!" From this mindset emerge list upon list of goals and resolutions that actually aren't new, but rather look just like the ones from last year, and the year before, and the year before. Sadly, they also elicit the same results.

I'm not against New Year's resolutions. In fact, I think they're great. Where the problem lies, however, is in the motivation. Many of us are grasping at things that originate from our False Self, or our ego. We reinvent ourselves every year and set out on a journey to attain goals that have nothing to do with who we really are.

The start of a new year is a great milestone for reevaluation and new beginnings. I think it's a great time to hit the reset button. But perhaps it's time for a new approach.

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Earthquake Recovery - Puerto Rico

People in Puerto Rico are struggling to recover from the island's recent earthquakes. Your gift helps with both immediate needs and supports long-term recovery. [Click here](#) for information and giving links for the Puerto Rico appeal.



[Click here to donate - Puerto Rico](#)

Assistance for Australia

In response to several inquiries about how to donate funds to the fighting of the wildfires in Australia, I have found the link shown to be the best avenue. Donations to help contain The Australian wildfires may be made through links to appropriate Australian agencies that are displayed by clicking the button below. *Credit must go to Stephen Colbert and his Late Show for creating this capability so rapidly.*



United Church of Christ

Illinois Conference

Rev. Roger Dart

[Click here to donate - Australia](#)

Happenings Around the Conference

Celebration of Ministry and Service of Release for The Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers was held on Dec. 22, 2019 at Westchester Community Church in Westchester. Guest Preachers were the Rev. Dr. Melbalenia Evans and Rev. Dr. Jorge L. Morales.

[Click here to view capture moments](#)



The Congregational Church of Park Manor gathered on Jan. 5 for the Service of Release of The Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff. The Rev. Dr. Frank Thomas, Homiletics Professor, Preacher. The Rev. Justo González II, Interim Conference Minister, Rev. Michelle Hughes, ACM, Vitality, Transformation & Sustainability, The Rev. Kim Wood, Acting ACM Eastern & Fox Valley Associations were in attendance.

[Click here to view capture moments](#)



Illinois Conference announces the close of 2019 Our Church's Wider Mission contributions...

We would like to extend our deepest appreciation to all our churches that have been able to meet or exceed their OCWM goals for the year 2019. We would also like to take this time to let all our churches know that the deadline for churches to mail in contributions to the drop box is Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2020.

If you wish to bring your OCWM contribution to the Illinois Conference office the deadline is noon on Monday, Jan. 27, 2020.

DONATE HERE! Support the Ministries of the Illinois Conference

Clergy Wellness Retreat in March

The Illinois Conference is offering a **Clergy Wellness Retreat**. Why? Because Pastors and other ministry leaders are often under so much stress that they may find themselves just hanging on by a thread, about to burn out from exhaustion. Pastor stress today is enormous. The expectations that people put on their pastors - and that pastors put on themselves - can be overwhelming!

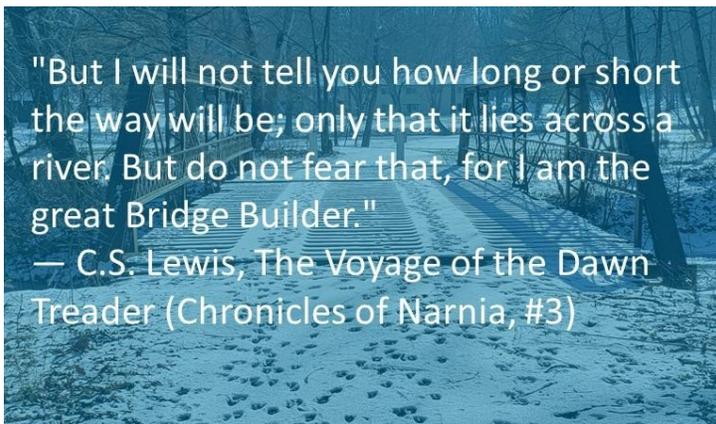


Consider these statistics...

- 75% of pastors report being “extremely stressed” or “highly stressed”
 - 90% work between 55 to 75 hours per week
 - 90% feel fatigued and worn out every week
 - 91% have experienced some form of burnout in ministry and 18% say they are “fried to a crisp right now”
 - 50% do not meet regularly with an accountability person or group
 - 44% of pastors do not take a regular day off
 - 31% do not exercise at all, while 37% exercise at least three or four days a week as recommended
- *(excerpt from Soul Shepherding blog/Bill Gaultiere)*

You are not alone. We are here to help our leadership thrive in ministry. The Illinois Conference and the Pension Boards-United Church of Christ, Inc. (PBUCC) are here to minister to our clergy and MID's. **We are offering a two day retreat March 12-14, 2020. Registration is coming soon! Space is limited... you don't want to miss this!**

Illinois Conference 2020 Annual Celebration gathers at Augustana College



Follow us on
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Watch here for
further information
as it becomes
available



Rise up and build.
Nehemiah 2:18
Illinois Conference
United Church of Christ
56TH Annual Celebration |
June 4-6, 2020 | ilucc.org

[Rockford groups prepare to help those in need during winter storm](#)

[Kindness is contagious](#)

[Learn about the Progressive Christian movement at Elgin church Jan. 12](#)

[Chicago church gifts Christmas Eve offering to children's relief in Haiti](#)

[La Grange foundation serves up 'caring' Christmas Day meal](#)

Employment Opportunities

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

Conference Calendar for January

January 17: [15th Annual Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Praise and Worship Celebration](#), 6:30 p.m. at the Progressive Community Center-The People's Church 56 E. 48th Street, Chicago.

January 19: [First Congregational Church of Elgin](#) welcomes its new Senior Minister, the Rev. Dr. Jesse Tanner.

January 19: [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration](#), 3:30 p.m. at The Big Red Church First Congregational, Sterling.

January 20: [Martin Luther King Day, Jr. Faith in Action Assembly](#), 8:00 a.m. at Metropolitan Missionary Baptist Church, 2151 West Washington Boulevard, Chicago. Hosted by Community Renewal Society.

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 12-14, 2020: [Illinois Conference Clergy Wellness Retreat](#), in Techny, Ill.

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.

July 22-25, 2020: [United Church of Christ's National Youth Event](#) at Purdue University in West Lafayette Indiana. Registration opens Feb. 1, 2020.

Free Office Item Available

Free: Xerox Fuser for Workcentre 7120. It's a replacement part is nice to have if you have the compatible copier.

Contact Julie at Prairie Association office - ilconfajulie@gmail.com.



Visit our website



DONATE NOW!



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Our Church's Wider Mission

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