Report from the Illinois Conference President

A Glimpse of General Synod 2019... General Synod is the gathering every 2 years of the entire United Church of Christ. Representatives from every Conference and national ministry setting, sit together and set the priorities for the church. In our system each congregation speaks for itself, the wider church reports out to the local churches and takes direction from the General Synod. There were over 700 voting delegates and 1,100 registered participants. The UCC is really a small family, and there is a true joy at seeing old friends.

At this Synod, we relied heavily on our smart phones and tablets. There were very few printed materials. Resolutions were uploaded to the webpage and corrected and updated versions were posted there before votes. General announcements were posted for all to see and find. WiFi in the Conference Center was generally good to excellent, even with hundreds of us using it.

Friday – Educational Intensives provided historical background behind the major Resolutions proposed for action. Opening Worship set the stage for the gathered group. The initial Plenary Sessions conducted routine business.

Saturday – Early Plenary did more routine reports and approvals. Dr. Matthew Desmond presented a stirring keynote that highlighted how the oppressive system of low-income housing serves to keep poor people poor and disturbs their emotional balance. The Plenary sessions highlighted our International connections.
Sunday – Morning and early afternoon were devoted to the serious committee work on Resolutions. Sunday afternoon’s Open Worship welcomed over 4000 to hear the Rev. Traci Blackmon deliver an outstanding sermon.

Monday – Illinois had a 6:30 breakfast caucus. We heard about the committee’s work on the contentious Resolution #8, which asked if there were limits to our welcome in the Exhibit Hall. Rev. John Dorhauer dropped in to answer questions. The Plenary had officer elections, which surfaced concerns about the national structure. Many participated in a protest march to ICE detention. Small group resolution discussions continued into the night.

Tuesday – The Plenary sessions completed their business. Resolution #8 was remanded to the UCC Board. We expect a Behavioral Covenant for Exhibit Hall to come out of those discussions. Installations and Closing Worship brought Synod to an end.

Rev. Charles “Chuck” Maney
President, Illinois Conference

Captured moments at General Synod...

The Illinois Conference was represented in so many ways at this year’s General Synod from parliamentarian, delegates, presenters, stage manager, exhibitors, leadership and of course visitors.
Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers, Associate Conference Minister serving Chicago Metropolitan Association Announces Retirement

Greetings of God’s grace and mercy!

The prophet Jeremiah recorded these words, “For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord, “They are plans for good and not for disaster. To give you a future and a hope…” It is with a deep sense of thanks and gratitude that these words speak across time and space, to us, the church, of life and life abundantly.

It is with sadness but confidence that I announce my resignation/retirement as Associate Conference Minister of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ effective December 31, 2019. After a year of prayer and discernment, God has led me to the conclusion that this is the right time. On December 31, 2019 I will have served as Associate Conference Minister for 8 years and in those years, I feel, we have accomplished much.

On a personal note, I would like to thank the clergy and congregations of the Illinois Conference, specifically the Chicago Metropolitan Association, for the ways we have worshiped together, worked together, played together, and prayed for one another. I thank you for the privilege of officiating at your Celebrations of Ordinations, Installations, and Commissioning. I thank you for the ways you challenged me to grow and be more fully in the presence of God. I thank you for the ways you accepted me and my leadership.

In the months to come I will not sit idly by. There are a few things I would like for us to accomplish together. However, I know that these coming months will go very quickly. In this time, I ask for your continued prayers for all of us as we begin to plan for a new phase in our lives.

I am grateful for the work that all of you do to make the church a Sanctuary where all of God’s people are safe and welcomed. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this work.

Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers Resignation/Retirement Letter

Blessings,
Reverend Dr. Vertie Powers
Associate Conference Minister
Chicago Metropolitan Association
Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ
The Zen of Caregiving

For many of us, our theology tells us that we must be martyrs. We feel that it is our responsibility to carry our cross and everyone else’s. There are two categories of people for whom this especially rings true: clergy and caregivers. I would say that it is neither necessary nor healthy to hold fast to this practice.

Self-care can seem like a frivolous waste of time reserved for the weak masses who aren’t capable of superhuman feats like we are. This thinking is not only inefficient, but it’s also dangerous.

Jesus taught us to practice sabbath and to take nothing more for the journey than is absolutely necessary. Part of this is practicing what community organizers call the Iron Rule: Never do for others what they can do for themselves. We are called to be empires so that others can use the gifts that they have to bless themselves and others. If we do everything for them, we rob them of the opportunity to shine. If we carry everybody else’s burdens, we only weigh ourselves down and end up in burnout.

If we are burned out, we become incapable of even meeting our own needs. This is why self-care is so important. It is not a practice for the weak, but for the wise. Contemplative practices such as meditation and centering prayer, taking sabbath, exercise, and quiet time go a long way in maintaining sanity.

Brene Brown speaks a lot of vulnerability. She says that real bravery and courage require this aspect of living. To be able to admit to ourselves and others that we are not superhuman is not only to be real, but it is a gift to ourselves and others. If Soorates’s words are true and the unexamined life isn’t indeed worth living, then I think a little self-examination would lead to the discovery of a need for vulnerability and rest.

Besides taking time for rest and activities that give us life, we can also do something that is completely insanely radical: ASK FOR HELP! There are many resources at our disposal. Some are apparent and some aren’t. The nice thing, though, is that we can ask around and somebody will ultimately lead us to the right place.

For both caregivers and clergy, you can take workshops and retreats to get the information you need. Caregivers can utilize the services of a geriatric care manager to navigate the wild maze of senior care, Medicaid, Medicare, and hospice and to find respite care for their loved one. You can find some of this information at www.generationscarepartners.org.

Our Conference and Associations are also a source for information. They can lead you to other churches that are addressing similar issues as yours, direct you to an individual coach, or put you in contact with the person who has the resources you need. They can also help you with stressful matters within your church.

Finally, learn how to say NO! We can do anything, but we can’t do everything. More on this to come in the next article.

God’s Peace,
Rev. Brandyn Simmons
Farewell worship and reception for Rev. Dr. David Russell

God is not done with us. On Sunday, June 30, we gathered at St. Paul UCC in Palatine for the retirement and worship celebration of the Rev. Dr. David Russell ministry at the Illinois Conference as Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship and Church Vitality.

[Image: farewell_worship_and_reception.png]

View more moments of the day.

Happenings at Around the Associations...

[Image: st_pauls_ucc_chicago_parade.png]

After a stirring service St. Pauls UCC, Chicago marched alongside The Lighthouse Church of Chicago UCC and along with a reported 160 other churches in the Pride 2019 parade.

Photo credit: St. Pauls UCC, Chicago.

We want to give a BIG, “Thank you” to First Congregational Church of Des Plaines. Jim Foster & the Crew for volunteering their time at Tower Hill Camp.

Stewardship Information for Churches

Qualified Charitable Distribution:
A QCD is a tax-efficient way to make charitable donations. It's a direct transfer from an IRA to a charity, and it's available only to IRA owners and IRA beneficiaries who are age 70½ or older. A QCD is different from a required minimum distribution, which clients must begin to take no later than the year they reach 70½. A client could take his first RMD prior to reaching age 70½, but he would not be eligible to do a QCD until he actually attains this age.
QCDs can be counted toward satisfying your required minimum distributions (RMDs) for the year, as long as certain rules are met. In addition to the benefits of giving to charity, a QCD excludes the amount donated from taxable income, which is unlike regular withdrawals from an IRA.

From the UCC Booklet:
"Stewards in the Household of God" written by Doris R. Powell defines Stewardship this way:
Stewardship is more than money. Stewardship is more.
St. Francis of Assisi said, "Stewardship is everything I do after I say I believe."

Reflection on Stewardship:
Expressing Generosity written by Rev. Gwendolyn V. Kirkland

I give thanks to you, O LORD my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.

Psalm 86:12 NRSV

I was amazed in a recent meeting with a client and her niece. The client survived a stroke three years ago and as a result has aphasia, as well as some paralysis on her right side. Aphasia is a condition caused by an injury to the brain that may affect the ability to speak, read or write. Someone with aphasia may find it very difficult to find the right words to say, though their intelligence is not affected.

After going over her detailed budget, line item by line item, my client made verbal and physical gestures that she did not want to go on, there was a problem. Both her niece and I were puzzled and tried to figure out what was causing her such distress. We backtracked and finally discovered the area of her concern. It was the line item that showed her giving to her church!

Her concern with the line item that showed her giving to the church, was that it was not enough! She frowned and shook her head at the number. The three of us spent some considerable time talking about what the giving should be until finally the niece asked me, “What amount should we give?”

New Lock box announcement

Our bank has informed us that there has been a system update that involves a change in the mailing address for our lock box receiving contributions. Please discard any previous editions of the remittance form you may have and use the form on our website. (Link: Remittance Form - 2019)

While the new address listed below is effective immediately with deposits made available to us in a new system, there will be a grace period during which the conference will receive funds submitted to the Wisconsin location using the bank’s old system. We truly appreciate your patience with us and our financial partners as we make this transition.

Feel free to contact Conference Controller Bill Serritella at (708) 344-4470 with any questions.

Illinois Conference, UCC
Illinois Conference Disaster Ministries Call for Volunteers

There is an immediate need for your help in cleaning up flood-damaged homes in the Moline, Illinois area. The need is for people who can spend from two to seven days adding their hands to this task.

This request comes to us as members of the Illinois VOAD. We will work with the Southern Baptist Disaster Ministries, which has taken the leadership role in this cleanup effort.

Sleeping quarters, food canteens and a shower trailer are being provided for the volunteer workers. Contact Mr. Harold Booze, Southern Baptist Disaster Ministries Command Center Moline during July at (217) 622-5101.

Roger Dart
Conference Disaster Coordinator

Back Bay 2019 and 2019 Mission Trip Calendar

Mission trips to Back Bay Mission are great opportunities for learning, service, and fellowship. These week-long immersive mission experiences teach participants about poverty on the Mississippi Gulf Coast and prepare groups to serve in their own communities.

Click here to learn more about mission trips at Back Bay Mission, including how to register!

Dates available for 2019! Click here to view the 2019 Mission Trip Calendar.
Dates available for 2020! Click here to view the 2020 Mission Trip Calendar.

Green New Deal Webinar

At General Synod, an overwhelming majority of delegates voted to become the first Christian body to endorse the Green New Deal! This month's Creation Justice Webinar will follow-up this momentous event with a webinar focused on what faith communities can do to advance the Green New Deal. The
webinar will feature Varshini Prakash, one of the leaders of the movement that brought the Green New Deal into public conversation. Prakash is a co-founder of the Sunrise Movement and its Executive Director. The webinar will be held on July 11 at 1 p.m. ET, but a recording will be sent out to all who register. Register today!

Churches in the Media

United Church of Christ hosts PRIDE Picnic in Freeport

Acclaimed Trinity Choir shines in an event to support children

Des Plaines Mission Team Efforts Enhance Church Campground

Employment Opportunities

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

Conference Calendar for July

July 13: Racial Justice Summit: Boystown & Beyond, 10:00 a.m. at Lighthouse Church of Chicago UCC, Chicago. This event is convened by Lighthouse Church and co-sponsored by Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches and the Chicago Metropolitan Association of the UCC. Other co-sponsors are forthcoming.

July 14: Ecclesiastical Council for Jagan Samuvelraj, 3:00 p.m. at St. Matthew UCC, Wheaton.

July 17: Off the Pews/Advocate Youth Program: Live from the Heart, 8:30 a.m. - noon, Stein Auditorium Advocate Christ Medical Center, Oak Lawn (via video Conference).

July 28: Rev. Justo González II, Interim Conference Minister, 10:15 a.m. will be preaching at Zion United Church of Christ, Peru.

July 28: Service of Installation for Rev. David Inglis, 3:00 p.m. at St. John's UCC, Union.

Upcoming Events

August 5-9: Mediation Skills Training Institute for Church Leaders (MSTI), St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Glen Ellyn.


October 2: Clergy Day Away with Barbara Brown Taylor at Pilgrim Park, Princeton.
October 9-10: ATiM 28th Annual Gathering with Rev. Dr. Robin Meyers. Theme for this conference: "The Challenge of Ministry in Times of Divisiveness".

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