



NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



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Reflection from the Interim Conference Minister

Rev. Justo González II

**Help me to understand, why do black and brown bodies
and lives matter less than others?**

George Floyd is...

The latest in a string of African Americans murdered by police. I come from a family of Blue (Police) and it pains me to say, "Again, Lord? How many mothers, fathers, and family members will be notified that another black body has been violated and killed? No, wait this was murder. This was the brutalization and humiliation of another mother's baby. [We're all babies to our mothers.] This was the lynching of George Floyd. The street became the tree, handcuffs were the rope. A knee became the weapon of choice that the white police officer who refused to see Mr. Floyd, as his brother, used to kill him. The officer refused to acknowledge the beauty and dignity of his victim, George Floyd. Instead he and his 3 fellow Klansmen (disguised as officers) decided that this Child of God wasn't truly human. They stripped him of his dignity and murdered him in cold blood [tears streaming down my face]. Sit with this for a minute.

Ahmaud Arbery

Jogging while black is no longer exercise for the body. It is now an excuse used by a former police officer, his son and another man to murder a 25-year-old young man simply for being black. They killed him in cold blood. No, they murdered him. They did so because he didn't fit their community. In other words, Ahmaud was a black man. Racist murderers.

Black and brown parents have "The talk" with their children, especially their male children. I too was called aside. "The talk" was given to me. "You keep your hands on the steering wheel. You respond, 'yes, sir to any request'. Don't move. Don't do anything that would give them a reason to kill you." Black and brown parents must have "The talk" with us so that we might survive being pulled over. I also learned that mothers pray every time their children get in car or leave the house for God's protection upon them. Ahmaud was just exercising. How does one explain to a parent, family member and loved ones that their son was killed? Does "The talk" now need to include lessons on the danger on jogging while black?

[Read More](#)

Update on Illinois Conference Offices

The Illinois Conference Office will be closed through the month of June. We will evaluate the situation based on guidelines put in place by Governor J. B. Pritzker to determine if we can safely return to our office. All Illinois Conference Staff have done an amazing job at adapting to working at home and will continue to do during this

Welcome to the Illinois Conference UCC Familia (Family) James (Jim) Lee, Manager of Financial Operations

James (Jim) B. Lee will be joining our conference staff as the new Manager of Financial Operations effective June 8, 2020. Bill Serritella retires effective May 31, 2020. We thank him for his faithful service.



James will be responsible for the overall financial operations of the conference. He has been empowered to review and make recommendations to all aspects of our internal systems, to assess if we have the right structures and controls in place and to provide our stakeholders the most efficient accounting information, reports and to resource our associations and local church needs. We are also converting our current financial systems platform to ACS REALM. He will also provide leadership in making sure that the new system provides financial reports that are easy to read and work for the various funds that we presently administer on behalf of the conference and other groups that have funds held within the conference.

Primary financial responsibilities, in addition to managing the department, will be to perform accounting and operational duties including establishing, reviewing and enforcing proper accounting methods, policies and principles to include internal controls related to the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.

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New Office Manager Named: Congratulations, Carmen Torres

Carmen Torres will assume the responsibilities of Office Manager on June 1, 2020 for our main office in Westchester, Ill. Carmen joined the conference staff on Sept. 19, 2000. She has worked collaboratively with our team on numerous projects over the years.



In the redesign of our Financial Operations, she will work closely with James (Jim) Lee, new Manager of Financial Operations. This is especially true in the area of employee benefits and client relations with the Pension Boards UCC, Inc. Westchester employees will coordinate their work through her and submit vacation, sick, disability, family medical leave, and employee benefit forms through her. James Lee will have overall responsibilities of all office staff.

We are thankful for her outstanding service to the conference and believe that she will continue to excel in her new role. Congratulations, Carmen.

Greetings from the Chicago Metropolitan Association

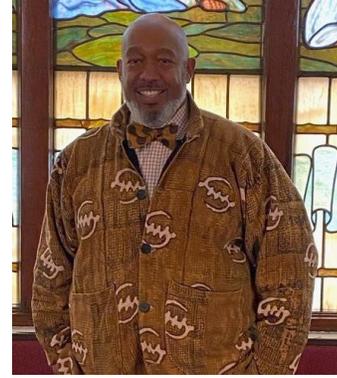
Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, Associate Conference Minister

Spiritual Awakening

A phrase that is being repeated often these days is “ we

are living in unprecedented times.” COVID-19 continues to have devastating affects upon all walks of life.

The world that we all thought we knew, has come to a sudden halt. Sports stopped, borders closed, travel suspended, schools and businesses closed, concerts rescheduled, date nights, vacations, and church worship services all came to a screeching halt. Lost jobs, furlough, many small businesses having to shut their doors. We have been “sheltering in place” and listening to media moguls explain death ratios, the spread of the virus, and how the U.S. and global economies have “tanked.”



Virtual platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and Facebook Live keep us connected and some of us have found new connections through these platforms.

We pray that it can't get a whole lot worse than this!

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Dancing Flames and Changing Tides

Rev. Kim Wood, Acting Associate Conference Minister

“Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2: 2-4 NRSV)

I am a visual person, which is why, when I think of Pentecost, I see flames. I envision the Holy Spirit moving as dancing flames, touching each of the gathered apostles chosen by Jesus to continue his ministry. Close your eyes for a moment and think about the last time you sat in front of a fireplace or around a firepit or campfire. Bouncing tongues of yellow and red, blue and green, changing shape fluidly, sometimes steady, sometimes roaring, never quite tamed. A flame touches John on the head, then leaps over to Matthew. Like a swish, it pirouettes from Peter to James to Thomas. On and on it flows from one to another, sometimes resting, sometimes bolting across the room, flickering mischievously one moment as if trying to decide where next to land, and then engulfing them all.

What happens next is miracle! Those flames were accompanied by a great noise, like a rushing wind, an alert to everyone in the area that something extraordinary was going on. There were people from every nation living in Jerusalem. They spoke many different languages, and yet they could all understand what Jesus' apostles were saying about God's amazing deeds – each in their own language and in a way they could grasp. Imagine if the message of God's incredible love and radical hospitality could capture everyone's attention, wherever they were and in a way that made total sense to them!

[Read More](#)

Fox Valley Association Justice and Witness Ministry Team Invites You to NOW, MORE THAN EVER

[HOW TO BE A COMMUNITY ACTIVIST DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC](#)

a webinar for laity and clergy presented by Mr. Ernest Crim III on Wednesday, June 11 at 1:00 p.m. (event opens at 12:45)

In this time of shelter-in-place, social/personal distancing, and much of life online, organizing as community to publicly raise our voices against injustices requires creative and innovative methods and determination. NOW, MORE THAN EVER, the stakes are high! Issues that put people at risk and deny human care and compassion are rising up at an alarming rate. NOW, MORE THAN EVER, the need is great! Voices are being silenced and the marginalized are being systematically and systemically shoved aside. NOW, MORE THAN EVER, the Church is called come together to shift the trajectory and change the world, one community at a time! BUT WHERE? AND HOW?



Our presenter, Mr. Ernest Crim III, will offer practical strategies about how to engage in community activism and organization as we honor the very real need to care for and protect our neighbor and battle the current pandemic crisis. The webinar will last for approximately 1 hour (extra time allowed should the need arise for additional questions). Attendees are asked to register ahead of time utilizing the link below. Once registered, you will receive a link to attend the event on Zoom.

[Read More](#)

Message from the Illinois Conference President

Rev. Charles Maney

Annual Business Meeting

We are working hard to prepare a virtual Annual Business Meeting for the Illinois Conference, doing our best to accomplish critical tasks to make it possible to move forward. On June 1, we will open registration for this virtual meeting scheduled for June 27. There will be *No Cost* to register, but registration is necessary in order to be counted for the required quorum, and to vote. Registration will be open from June 1 to June 12, [click here to register](#).



Registration packets will be sent out with specific instructions for voting. Packets will include the materials needed to review the report of the Nominating Committee for the incoming slate of Conference officers and Committee chairs. Included will be the notes on the proposed change to the By-Laws recommended by the Conference Council, to allow flexibility in determining the date of subsequent Annual Meetings.

Most important, we will include a brief biographical sketch of our candidate for the next Conference Minister. We are arranging opportunities for a Zoom “Meet and Greet” in advance of the meeting presentation. The candidate is currently serving as an Interim Pastor. That congregation has generously offered to make the candidate available to us as early as August. We are blessed.

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Outdoor Ministries is thinking “Out of the Box”

Our children and youth campers won't be coming out to Pilgrim Park and Tower Hill for summer camp this year, so we're going to bring the camps to you!



We are developing an "Out of the Box" camp experience that will include daily hands-on devotions, daily lessons with activity, and some of your favorite camp swag. \$50.00 will provide a full week of learning, growing, and engaging with our faith.

Individuals can order "Out of the Box" camp kits for your children, your grandchildren, your neighbors. Churches can order "Out of the Box" camp kits for your Faith Formation program, as an alternative to Vacation Bible School, as outreach to your neighborhoods.

Registration details will be available in June.

The Great Selah

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

I've always been impressed with the ability of those who can see and translate for the rest of us the way that things really are. People like Dave Eggers and David Sedaris who can see the heartbreaking beauty and hilarity of life that we often have difficulty putting a name to. Those like Barbara Brown Taylor or Frederick Buechner who can see the trees ablaze with the glory of God and come back from the thin places to tell us what they've seen.



We live all these things on a daily basis, but I wonder why we don't have the eyes to see them. Is it because we weren't given the *urim* and *thummim* to behold the unseen? I doubt it.

My daughter's name is Selah. It's a term that occurs 74 times in the Bible. The best way to describe *selah* is as a pause to *be* in the presence of God. Where the Psalms were sung in and on the way into the temple, it was a reminder that worship and being were a relationship and not a constant outpouring. I wonder how often when I call my daughter's name that I remember to pause and be.

[Read More](#)

Little Rock Mission Trip Update

Roger Dart, Conference Disaster Coordinator

For several years, the Illinois Conference has created a mission work trip to the Church World Service disaster response warehouse in Little Rock, Ark. Our work consists of sorting and correcting already assembled disaster response kits.



Due to the restrictions placed on group activities by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Disaster Advisory Group has chosen to cancel the 2020 trip and instead, put our energies toward making plans for a better trip which will take place in early November of 2021.

Pandemic grants for churches added to UCC National Setting COVID-19 relief response

The United Church of Christ National Setting is

offering financial assistance to local churches whose ministries have been challenged by the novel coronavirus pandemic.

As one, the national officers have collectively identified \$2.6 million in COVID-19 relief, \$1.5 million in loans that will be [administered through the Cornerstone Fund](#) and another \$1.1 million in micro grants. The grant application process opens June 1, 2020. Grant money will be available through the process detailed below by the UCC executives.

Our prayer is that this offering will be useful to churches most in need during this COVID-19 pandemic season.

The National Officers of the United Church of Christ

[Click here to find a list of resources with links to application](#)

School for Ministry Summer Intensive Retreat Online

The School for Ministry 2020 Summer Intensive

**“Called Beyond Conflict: Your Church As
Healing Witness In The World”**

Online Classes via Zoom
June 22 - 26, 2020

We encourage you to register and join us
during our summer of learning

Workshops:

Healthy Congregations | Mornings June 22-24
Tuition: \$90 before June 5th
Led by staff of Lombard Mennonite Peace Center

Conflict in the Church: Entrusted with the Message
of Reconciliation | Morning June 24 and All Day June 25
Tuition: \$99 before June 5th
Led by staff of Lombard Mennonite Peace Center

**Register today at cciwdisciples.org
or email lorrie@cciwdisciples.org for
additional information**



[Registration is NOW open. Sign up today!](#)

CONVERGENCE
WEEKLY

inspirational news | radical encouragement | tools for the work

**We are
Convergence.**

Convergence, formerly The Center for Progressive Renewal, supports the reshaping of organizations, congregations and leaders engaged in an age of movement from “organized religion” to “organizing religion” driven by the values of an inclusive, progressive theological vision for a more just world for all.

[Sign Up Here.](#) To receive information on online courses, seminars and resources offer by Convergence.

[Visit website](#)

In the Media

[Community and faith organizations strive to address food insecurity in C-U](#)

[In response to pandemic, we're learning how interdependence, freedom are linked](#)

[Chicago faith leaders divided on whether to reopen for in-person service as state adds more than 2,300 new COVID-19 cases](#)

[St. Peter's UCC Skokie Reopen Plan](#)

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

Employment Opportunities

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

Conference Calendar for June

June 2: [Tuesday for Nurture: Leading Small and Rural Churches](#), 2:30 p.m. via Zoom. Representation of rural church matters. Rural churches need to be heard.

June 3: [Taking Flight: Restarting Your OWL Program](#), 11:00 a.m. Unique challenges and opportunities arise with the restarting an interrupted Our Whole Lives program. Please join us via Zoom for a sharing of questions, concerns, ideas, and recommendations! Open to OWL facilitators and program coordinators in all settings, religious and secular.

June 3: [Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders-Coronavirus](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. The Illinois Conference Ministry Leadership Team invites you to the next scheduled gathering on Zoom.

June 6: [CMA Spring Meeting via Zoom](#). Details and other information will follow but, for now, save the date!

June 10: [Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders-Coronavirus](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. The Illinois Conference Ministry Leadership Team invites you to the next scheduled gathering on Zoom.

June 11: The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ's Fox Valley Association Justice and Witness Ministry Team Invites You to NOW, MORE THAN EVER! [HOW TO BE A COMMUNITY ACTIVIST DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC](#) a webinar for laity and clergy presented by Mr. Ernest Crim III, at 1:00 p.m. Information on the Illinois Conference Website beginning June 1, or email ilconfkimberly@gmail.com.

June 17: [Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders-Coronavirus](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. The Illinois Conference Ministry Leadership Team invites you to the next scheduled gathering on Zoom.

June 19: [UCC Church Wide Event: Juneteenth 2020](#). Many former UCC clergy, national and ecumenical partners, and UCC congregations will participate. More details are forthcoming.

June 20: [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.

June 24: [Devotions & Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders-Coronavirus](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. The Illinois Conference Ministry Leadership Team invites you to the next

scheduled gathering on Zoom.

June 27: [Virtual Gathering: Business Meeting of the Illinois Conference Annual Celebration](#). Registration will open on June 1. [Click here to register](#).

June 28: [A special worship service and send off of Rev. Dr. Ann L. Rosewall from the ministry of First Congregational Church of Evanston, UCC](#). This worship service will be online followed by a virtual coffee hour on Zoom. More details to come.

Upcoming Events

July 1: [Abuse Prevention: Creating a Safe Environment](#), 1:00 p.m. Central. Join Insurance Board for our Live Webcast. Learn about resources and new tools to protect those in your care.

July 24-25, 2020: [Virtual Gathering: 2020 National Youth Event](#). Many of our original NYE presenters are excited to be able to put together meaningful content which will be shared via the web and will include live chat features during and after each premier. More details and registration are soon to come and will be found on the [NYE website](#).

Visit our website



DONATE NOW!



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