



NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



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Reflection from the Interim Conference Minister

Rev. Justo González II

Black Lives Matter: “I Just Wanna Live” May you be covered by God’s Mercy and Grace

The murder of African Americans demands that I speak boldly, “Black Lives Matter”. To be clear, all lives cannot matter until Black and Brown lives matter. Sadly, to some in America these lives don't.

Keedron Bryant, 12, wrote a song with his mom, "I Just Wanna Live". You can listen to it here <https://youtu.be/ec2GMpfMF54>. This version has an ASL interpretation. It was posted on social media after the murder of George Floyd while in the custody of the Minnesota police. The song stopped me, I mean I literally had to stop, cry, and reflect. I am and was deeply moved at hearing it. How can it be that a 12-year African American boy must remind us in song, “I Just Wanna Live.” And more importantly, how is it we do not blink an eye as many children within Chicago face life and death decisions daily when they decide what route to take to school? Please do not tell me that this is a Chicago problem. There is no them and us there is only us, the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ. Consider partnering with of inner-city congregations and pour in some of your mission dollars towards black and brown children and youth. You may be funding someone like me, your next generation of conference leaders.

We are not “post racial” or a country that does not see color. I admit that many of us like to think that or speak it out loud. Speaking it, however, does not make it true. If you do not see color, then you do not see me [warts, beauty, and all] and many other beautiful people among us and from across the world. As Puerto Ricans, we are descendants of the native Taino Indians and the African Slaves brought to the Island. Of course, we are also the descendants of the Spaniards who invaded our land, murdered the indigenous Taino Indians, and raped our great great grandmothers while murdering our great great grandfathers to create the new Puerto Rican race. It's time to really see black and brown people for who they are and all aspects of their lived reality.

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To Freedom to Breathe and Be

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

My 15-year-old son rigged up a fake exhaust on his bicycle so that it sounds like a motorcycle when he rides around the streets of the Northside. On occasion, people get frustrated by it and some are less than kind in their expression of disdain over his noise pollution. Although he is half Japanese, to my knowledge, nobody has ever hurled a racial epithet at him in their frustration.



On occasion, he will ride halfway with his girlfriend at night when she leaves our house and admittedly, I get nervous. What if he makes someone mad with his noise and things get ugly? It's dark out and what if someone is intoxicated and does something stupid? These aren't completely unfounded concerns, but they aren't something that I have to have a heavy heart over every day of my life.

I can't imagine being the parent of African American children and worrying if they are going to be pulled over by police and what could happen. I can't fathom wondering if my kids are going to come home to me every time, they leave the house. This is a burden that would destroy me.

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Ministry Thoughts

From the Minister Rev. Deborah Owen at St. Peter's UCC, Champaign

Waiting. It can be hard. Being restricted by waiting, even harder. The corona virus has certainly taught us (maybe) to be more patient and more flexible.

In the midst of what seems like a very long time to not be able to "do what we want" I am reminded of the flood story we find in the book of Genesis. I did some preaching on this last summer. It is fun to think of all those animals and how the heck Noah was able to round up all of them. But then after the building of the ark, and preparing it for animals, and getting them on board, the rain began. The deluge came for 40 days and 40 nights. Non stop rain. No breaks. No drizzle. Hard gushing rain that lifted the ark right off the ground and made it a flock yacht on top of the waves.

Finally the rain seems to subside. Does the entire herd disembark? No. The story continues with them still on the ark. The story says that despite the dry land being out there - somewhere, the whole gaggle of family members and animals stays on the ark. For another 150 days, they remain shipmates on the ark. Only after the 150 days, when the waters decreased, and ark comes to rest on the Ararat mountains. Does Noah think about leaving the ark? He sent out birds, a raven and then a dove, but both returned. He waited another 7 days and again sent out the dove. All day Noah waited, and later in the evening the dove returns with an olive leaf in its beak. That bird must have done some long distance traveling. What a mission it had to bring back some good news, but it didn't happen quickly.

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Message from the Illinois Conference President

Rev. Charles Maney

Illinois Conference Minister Candidate Announced

At our video Annual Business Meeting on June 27, you will get to see and vote for the candidate selected by the Search Committee for our next Conference Minister, the Rev. Molly Carlson.



Rev. Carlson was an easy consensus choice by the Search Committee. She brings a wealth of experience and focused energy to the various tasks of this work. We are arranging opportunities for a Zoom “Meet and Greets” in advance of the meeting. Molly 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.

Rev. Molly Carlson is a graduate of The College of Wooster with a BA in mathematics and Pacific School of Religion with a Master of Divinity. She has been ordained within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) for 19 years and has held Ordained Ministerial Partner Standing with the United Church of Christ for the last eight years. Molly has served in a variety of contexts including local, regional, and national settings of the church. She has served as an interim minister, church planter, solo pastor, head of staff, and church consultant. Her ministry has taken her to Indiana, California, South Dakota, Oregon, and Tennessee.

[Read More](#)



News from Tower Hill Camp and Retreat Center

Good news we are now open and welcoming families to come and stay in one of our Cottages or A-Frame. Please call for more information today (269) 426-3881.



[Tower Hill Camp and Retreat Center Rental Information](#)

Illinois Conference Pandemic Relief Loan Program

The Loan Program Basics

The United Church of Christ Cornerstone Fund

Pandemic Relief Loan program is available to churches in participating Conferences, including the Illinois Conference.

While loan amounts and terms can vary by Conference, the Illinois Conference program is offering a limited number of 12-month, interest-only loans of up to \$5,000 at a rate of 2.50%. Loan applications are required and are due by July 15, 2020.



[Download Application](#)

[View additional information on the Cornerstone Fund](#)

Loss Control Resources for Church Re-Opening (PHASE 2 Returning to Church Services)

During these unprecedented times, Insurance Board is committed to providing information and resources for our participants. Insurance Boards shares the following additional resources for COVID-19. The new loss control material focuses on different phases of re-opening and specifically returning to church services.



[COVID-19 Phases of Re-Opening \(PDF\)](#)

[PHASE 2 COVID-19 Returning to Church Services \(PDF\)](#)

For additional resources on COVID-19 from the Insurance Board, please visit the following website: <https://www.insuranceboard.org/covid-19-resources/>

UCC Webinar: Protest during a Pandemic

Instead of becoming suppressed by the pandemic, the spirit of justice has arisen with fierce determination and become embodied in countless ways. This webinar on June 24, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. (Central Time) will reflect upon how protest has manifested itself during this time and the lessons that can be learned for communities of faith dedicated to answering the unrelenting call of justice.



Three panelists will share what they have learned: Sophia Benrud from the Black Visions Collective in Minneapolis, Lindsay Harper from Arm-in-Arm in Atlanta, and Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick from the University of San Diego.

This webinar is co-hosted by the Rev. Dr. Brooks Berndt of the United Church of Christ Environmental Justice Ministry and the Rev. Michael Malcom of Alabama Interfaith Power & Light and the People's Justice Council.

REGISTER NOW!

Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches Pride Celebration

The Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches (CCWC) will be hosting a celebration via Zoom on Saturday, June 27 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Central, they will come together to celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride as a community standing together in faith and love.



All participants need to register, so please share the link with your congregation. A 100 spots will be available, and everyone is encouraged to sign up as soon as possible.

[Click here to register](#)

[Click here for more information](#)

The Whole Damn System is Guilty As Hell

Community Renewal Society Organizing and Policy Team

The COVID-19 crisis has made the inequities in our society even more clear. As faith leaders, we are called to love and protect the vulnerable among us. We invite all clergy to endorse two crucial campaigns that will bring justice for communities and working families in Illinois.



1. [End Money Bond](#)

Nearly 1,000 of the 4,500 people who are incarcerated today in Cook County Jail are there because they do not have access to wealth to buy their freedom. Since the measures to protect against infection - social distancing and frequent hand washing - are impossible in jail, people who cannot pay their money bond risk becoming infected by this deadly virus. Money bond is not only an unjust and unconstitutional practice, but now it is life-threatening.

[Take Action Now: Sign this open letter calling on Illinois to end money bond.](#)

2. [Fair Tax](#)

This pandemic is a public health emergency and an economic disaster. Working families have been hit hard by this crisis, underscoring the need to invest in the programs and services that help communities remain strong even during tough times.

[Take Action Now: Endorse the passage of the Fair Tax constitutional amendment and commit to vote in support of the Fair Tax on the November 2020 ballot.](#)

The Essential Nature of Black & Brown Lives

The last few months have brought many unknowns into the rhythms and rhymes of society. We've had months of living through unprecedented time. In this history of this nation, we've had pandemics and civil unrest, but not many have ever witnessed both at the same time.



As the Board of Directors of the UCC Mental Health Network we have carried through the last few months in prayer for you, your loved ones, and our families. When some of us thought that living through the COVID-19 pandemic was already hard enough, the senseless killing and spilling of innocent blood continued.

We, the executive committee of the UCC MHN, are blessed to have three brown and black siblings in Christ serve with us. They have opted to help us better understand from their lenses, what it is to be black and brown during this pandemic and civil unrest. We thank them for sharing their gifts with us and we also acknowledge that not all people of color are able to take these steps.

[View here here UCC Mental Health Network newsletter sent with the reflection of THREE voices from people of color](#)

In the Media

[On this Juneteenth, I'm resting up for the work ahead](#)

[Pekin church inviting community to Drive In to the Fourth](#)

[Chicago's faith leaders speak out on systemic racial injustices](#)

[Video series looks at life in Morton Grove during pandemic, isolation, Floyd fallout](#)

[St. John United Church of Christ recognizes COVID-19 deaths with flag display](#)

[What Ministers, Rabbis and Imams Preached This Weekend About the George Floyd Protests](#)

[Community gathering in Benton Harbor to unite in solidarity](#)

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

[Black LGBTQ Group Raising Money For Black, Queer Mutual Aid Fund](#)

['The church will not be silent': Clergy lead thousands in peaceful protest on Chicago's South Side](#)

[Freeport faith leaders and community join together for a drive by protest](#)

[Community Leaders Talk About Meaning Of Protest, Need For Action Against Racism](#)

[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 23: [Psychological First Aid Training for Faith Community Leaders](#), 11:00 a.m. Psychological First Aid trains faith leaders to provide supportive and practical assistance to children, adults and families who recently experienced tragedy and traumatic events. Lead by the Rev. Kevin Massey, System Vice President of Mission and Spiritual Care with Advocate Aurora Health.

June 24: [UCC Webinar: Protest during a Pandemic](#), 12:00 p.m. This webinar is co-hosted by the Rev. Dr. Brooks Berndt of the United Church of Christ Environmental Justice Ministry and the Rev. Michael Malcom of Alabama Interfaith Power & Light and the People's Justice Council.

June 24: [Conference Chat: Devotions and Conversation for Clergy and Lay Leaders during Coronavirus Pandemic](#), 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](#), 10:00 a.m.

June 27: [Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches Pride Celebration](#), 10:00 a.m. The Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches (CCWC) will be hosting a celebration via Zoom they will come together to celebrate LGBTQ+ Pride as a community standing together in faith and love.

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 via Zoom at 10:00 a.m. Followed by Zoom Coffee Hour Celebration. To attend via Zoom, contact: info@firstchurchevanston.org

June 28: [Join The Peoples Church of Chicago \(UCC/UUA\) for its service of Farewell to Rev. Dr. Susan Harlow and Installation of Rev. Dr. Vilius Rudra Dundzila](#). The service will be held virtually at 3:00 p.m.

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 7: [Psychological First Aid Training for Faith Community Leaders](#), 1:00 p.m. Psychological First Aid is designed to equip faith leaders with the skills they need to provide supportive and practical assistance to children, adults and families who have recently experienced tragedy and traumatic events. If you have questions, contact [Amy McNicholas](#), Faith and Mental Health Specialist, Advocate Aurora Health.

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](#).

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 time. Please remember you can always reach us by [e-mail](#) and let us know how we can be helpful.

Visit our
website



DONATE NOW!



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Our Church's Wider Mission

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