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# Illinois Conference United Church of Christ E-Newsletter



## From the Conference Minister

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Grace and peace to you from Jesus the Christ.

*"Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering". Heb. 13:1-4*



Jorge L. Morales

It is disheartening to see how in a nation of immigrants, those seeking refuge, a better life, contributing to our economy and demonstrating an ethic of hard work to support themselves and their family are being blamed for many of the ills of our nation. Among the various messages and phrases associated with the Statue of Liberty the most recognizable is: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free."

It is even more disheartening to hear the voices of some Christian attacks on immigrants, refugees and sojourners, when they are aware that the Jewish Christian tradition and history is a history of sojourners seeking a new land, a place of freedom and peace. The biblical story from Abraham to Jesus is one of sojourners under God's guidance, often under God's commissioning and sending to seek another place for peace, security, acceptance and love -- where God is present.

We Christians have said yes to Jesus; we have consecrated our lives to his service and to the proclamation of the Good News of freedom to the oppressed. We are fully aware that Jesus' own life experience included being a refugee, immigrant, and subject to colonization and oppression. He was persecuted, died, not of old age or terminal illness, but as a victim of violence and hatred.

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Christians need often to be reminded that Jesus calls his followers to incarnate an immigrant identity of being dissatisfied with our present world order. We, his disciples, seek a new homeland that is beyond our reach, promised to us and obtained through Jesus the Christ. We are immigrants seeking the kingdom that is promised to us by our savior Jesus the Christ. Jesus was anointed to preach it (God's reign), as every preacher of good news is anointed to do: proclaim release for the captive, recovery of sight to the blind, and work to bring in the time of jubilee.

Christians seek to establish a new reign, the new kingdom that Jesus proclaimed, where God will reign in people's hearts, a kingdom initiated in this time and world where we are to live in accordance to God's will but not to be fully fulfilled in our time in this world. It is what we seek to establish, what we long for, what we hope for, what we work and seek to be realized. It is what Jesus claims us for.

We need not merely to go back and review our history to realize that we all migrated (if not we then our ancestor) from somewhere else (all but the Native American, who is also victim of persecution). We merely need to affirm our Christianity, our being claimed by Jesus, our Christian vows, to realize that we are all immigrants seeking a new homeland -- God's realm. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used the simple works of building the "Beloved Community" as the way we move in the direction of that homeland.

With all the challenges that our nation is facing these days, we cannot let the voices of rejection, hatred and acts of oppression to overwhelm us. Our voice as Christians needs to be heard as one of welcoming, inclusion, acceptance and love.

I pray that our voice will be heard and that it echoes our faith in the God who wants a better world for all peoples and seeks that we bring God's realm into being.

In Christ,

Rev. Dr. Jorge L. Morales  
Conference Minister



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**64th Anniversary**  
**The Congregational Church**  
**of Park Manor UCC**  
Sunday, May 21, 2017,  
3 p.m. - 6 p.m.  
7000 S. Martin Luther King Drive,  
Chicago  
"This Is Our Father's World"  
Food, fellowship, music  
Rev. Dr. Terrill N. Murff, Pastor

**Service of Installation**  
**Rev. Tamera D. Keller-Love**  
Sunday, May 21, 2017,  
Harvard Family UCC  
1045 S. Kenilworth Ave.,  
Oak Park  
Rev. Dr. Jorge Morales,  
Conference Minister,  
Guest Speaker

**Service of Ordination**  
**[Theophilus Jonathan Bigbee](#)**  
**[AKA TJ Bigbee](#)**  
Saturday, May 27, 2017,  
Church of the Three Crosses  
333 W. Wisconsin, Chicago

**Illinois Conference**  
**United Church of Christ**  
**Presents**  
**Boundary Training and**  
**Border Crossing**  
Thursday, June 8, 2017,  
9 a.m. - 3 p.m.  
Elmhurst College  
Facilitators:  
Rev. Cheryl Burke  
and Rev. Dr. Patti Kenney  
**[Click here to download](#)**  
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**Illinois Conference**  
**Annual Celebration**  
June 9-10, 2017  
Elmhurst College  
(See Michael Linder article)  
**[Click here for additional](#)**  
**[information](#)**

## Report from the Interim Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship and Church Vitality

*"Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18a - KJV)*

I hope the verse above caught your attention. The rest of the Proverb speaks about following God's law and Word. If you are one of the many Illinois Conference UCC churches that is experiencing declining attendance in worship, an aging congregation, or reduced budgets, perhaps one element that is needed is a congregational re-vision. There is an old African proverb that says, "If you don't know where you're going any path will do". If we want our churches to get somewhere, we need a vision of where we need to be. If you are in a completely dark room with a dart board on the wall 15 feet from you; how are you going to hit the dart board much less the bull's eye? If we turn on the light, we have a much better chance of reaching the target. As churches, we have a much better chance of reaching our goal if we allow the "light" of Christ to be our guide.

*"Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old" (Isaiah 43:18 - NRSV)*

Some of us remember churches that were full on Sunday with large Sunday schools along with programs and ministries throughout the week. I think Isaiah is not asking us to forget the past, but not to try and replicate the past today. We need to remember the former churches and grieve their loss. Then we need, as Isaiah recommends, to "let go." My suggestion about the past church glory days is to "Remember but not Repeat."

*"I am about to do a new thing: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?" (Isaiah 43:19 - NRSV)*

God is doing new things all the time! Our God is not a static being but a dynamic presence continually transforming our world. For instance, look at the way music in worship has changed since the 1st century church! Whether plainsong, chant, organ, choral, piano, guitar, there will always be a variety of expression, but the same message and spirit of Christ are heard and known. Our culture has certainly changed. Here in the U.S., for the first time the census data about religion showed over 50% of Americans have no religion. But what isn't measured is a hunger for spiritual truth and a desire to help those in need. God is doing new things in our Illinois Conference UCC. Gilead church in Rogers Park, Chicago, is gathering un-churched folks together, without a church building, to be in community, tell their "true stories, share good food, and worship beautifully". In Clinton, Illinois, our first ever UCC "farm church" is getting off the ground. Celebrating God's earth through organic and sustainable growth practices, Jubilee Farms is seeking to educate others about stewardship of the earth, while donating food to those in need. God is doing new things! We need to update our congregational visions in order to reach folks outside our churches.

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19-20 - NRSV)*

In the "Great Commission," Jesus sends his disciples out. He sends us out! Jesus didn't spend all his time in the synagogue; he "left the building". And as Hope UCC in Naperville tells it..."Jesus has left the building and we're following him". As churches re-vision, we need to follow the Great Commission, i.e. to get out of our buildings and into our neighborhoods and communities with the "Good News" of God's love. Through re-visioning we can identify our spiritual gifts/congregational DNA as well as some specific needs of the community around us. There will be authentic ministry from the people of God to God's children who need us. When these gifts and needs come together, there is great joy.

Many of our churches are doing this. If your church is growing in spirit and vitality and you are involved in meaningful ministry, please share your ideas with other churches directly or through the Conference (staff, E-News). If you are a church who wants to explore re-visioning, investigate resources for congregational vitality, contact me or your area Associate Conference Minister. I know God has a vision for our churches, in this time and in this place.

Rev. Dr. David Russell,

Interim Associate Conference Minister  
for Stewardship and Church Vitality

## ReVision Corner

Local church revitalization often includes reaching out into the community and responding to identified needs with resources, talents and spiritual gifts from the congregation. The HOMEWORK CAFÉ (HWC) is a Community Outreach Program sponsored by The Congregational Church of Park Manor UCC. The coordinator for the HWC is Nedra Durham, a retired educator with 43 years of experience including 30 years in the classroom. HWC is in its second year and takes place at Park Manor Elementary School on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:15 p.m.-4:15 p.m.

For the 2016-2017 school year, Principal LaShea Jenkins-Merrell decided to target 3rd grade students because this is a benchmark grade for the State of Illinois. There are 7 volunteers this year. These volunteers, along with the coordinator, tutor and help 1 or 2 students with their homework during the one-hour sessions. One-on-one tutoring works best because each student has the volunteer's undivided attention during the time they're together. Principal Jenkins-Merrell, the teachers, the participating students and some of their parents often express their gratitude for this Community Outreach Program.

Pastor Terrill Murff  
The Congregational Church of Park Manor UCC

## You are invited to the Illinois Conference Annual Celebration, June 9-10, 2017

Dear Friends,

It is my pleasure to invite you to the 53rd Annual Celebration of The Illinois Conference, United Church of Christ, June 9 and 10, 2017 at Elmhurst College. I urge each congregation to send delegates, and I extend the invitation to include all authorized ministers of the Conference, our Members in Discernment, and other interested members and guests. The planning committee has worked hard to put together an exciting program, and as always, we will worship together both days.



*Michael Linder*

In a time where there are so many social ills to be addressed, and while church attendance nationally and often locally has decreased, we still recognize that many times it is the local church that is best equipped to transform lives in our communities. While there continues to be great value in our traditional patterns of church worship and mission, to reach more members of our communities, to reach those most in need of hope and faith, we need to get outside of the walls of our sanctuaries. We need to do "Churching Outside the Box." I hope that the program of this year's Celebration will expose you to the ideas other congregations and groups have put into action and motivate many of you to have Outside the Box conversations in your congregations and associations.

In addition to the program and worship, we will conduct the business of the Conference and honor some among us who have made special contributions to the mission of the Illinois Conference. And, of course, there will be exhibits to visit and plenty of social time to renew old friendships and make new ones. We come together this one time a year, and I know, for me, it is something I look forward to attending all year long.

I hope to see you all in Elmhurst, June 9 and 10.

God's. Peace be with you always,

Michael Linder,

President, Illinois Conference

## Youth Lock-In at Illinois Conference Annual Celebration

Youth in 8th through 12th grade are invited to register for an overnight Youth Lock-In, as part of their participation at the Annual Celebration. The Lock-In begins at 9:30 p.m. on Friday, June 9.

We will gather in front of the fire place in the Elmhurst College-Frick Center building at 9:30 p.m. Once together, we will walk to St. Peter's United Church of Christ, Elmhurst, (where we will be spending the night). Youth should bring a sleeping bag, change of clothes, toiletries and a snack to share. Youth will be participating in ice breakers and then walking to a bowling alley nearby.



Youth that are participating in the Lock-In need to register at the conference by Wednesday, May 31. To register online [click here](#) and to download registration and parental consent forms [click here](#).

For more information on the Youth Lock-In, please contact Matha Mendoza at [marta.elmhurstucc@sbcglobal.net](mailto:marta.elmhurstucc@sbcglobal.net).

### *Note:*

- Adult male chaperones are needed.
- Youth can participate in the Annual Celebration and not be part of the Youth Lock-In.

## CMA Spring Meeting held at University Church, Chicago

On Saturday, May 6, University Church in Hyde Park opened its doors to the CMA Spring Meeting, "Changing Lives: Continuing Testament - Welcoming New Ministries." Rev. Julian DeShazier is Senior Pastor. Hospitality was provided by The Sanctuary Café, a new café managed by church member Martin McKinney. We were welcomed abundantly.

Rev. DeShazier welcomed us to worship which included University Church musicians and members. We sang about a "sweet, sweet spirit in the air." The message was delivered by Sarah Jones, a Member in Discernment. The Youth Choir of Covenant UCC and the Mime Ministry of Trinity UCC, Chicago, fed our souls. Their appearances were sponsored by CMA's Off the Pews program.

The Nominating Committee report was approved. Our new slate is headed by Moderator Rev. David Stewart (Kenwood UCC) and Moderator-elect Regena Glenn-Caldwell (Trinity UCC, Chicago). Ann McCarthy (Westchester Community) is now Past Moderator. We thank her for her service to our association. Ann and husband Bill McCarthy have visited over 50 CMA churches in worship. We also approved revisions to the CMA Constitution.

Kimball Avenue Church, located in Logan Square and pastored by Rev. Bruce Ray, told their story, their history, their long involvement with social justice issues, including being a member of the Community Renewal Society, and their moving story of damages sustained in a flood. It could have closed the congregation. Instead, they took their building down, piece by piece, in a deconstruction project that recycled 90% of the building. The project also offered employment opportunities and eventual certification in deconstruction to people who had just been released from prison. A labyrinth and community gardens are located where the church stood.

Parishioners Karren Ray, life-long member, and Kyle Gilbertson, new member, spoke about their involvement with the church. Idida Perez, a member of Nuestra Senora de Las Americas, an Episcopalian congregation, spoke about how her congregation, on the brink of closing, now worships with Kimball Avenue Church. Ministry possibilities abound!

Beth Dickerson, Chair of the Church Standing Committee, moved to approve Kimball Avenue Church as a United Church of Congregation. Welcome Kimball Avenue United Church of Christ!

Thank you University Church!

## Eastern Association Spring Meeting in Sauk Village

The Eastern Association gathered for its Spring Meeting at Grace United Church of Christ in Sauk Village on Saturday, May 6. Our hosts, members of Grace UCC, provided a wonderful setting for our program of the day, "Cracking the Codes", a conversation on race. Rev. Lorrie Reed and Rev. Barbara Lohrbach led those attending our meeting in a significant opportunity to learn from one another the many ways history and culture have worked to grow bias and privilege. Gathered around tables of diversity, the conversations held were powerful and engaging.



*Rev. Lorrie Reed and Rev. Barbara Lohrbach leading the conversation on race.*

Marva Campbell-Pruitt, our Eastern Association Moderator, led the business portion of our meeting, including the election of members and leaders for new terms on Association and Conference committees. Stewardship awards were presented as well as recognitions of clergy ordination anniversaries and church anniversaries. At the conclusion of the meeting, Marva passed on the gavel of leadership to Rev. Eric Quinney-Burnard, Pastor of First Congregational UCC in Lockport, who becomes the new Moderator of the Association for the coming year.



*Gavel transfer from Marva Campbell-Pruitt to Rev. Eric Quinney-Burnard.*

## Events in the Eastern Association

The Nor'Easter Cluster churches gathered for their biennial Music and Arts Festival at St. Peter's UCC in Frankfort on Sunday, April 30 at 3:30 p.m. A wonderful program led by several church choirs, organists, bell players, flautist, cello player and a two combined choir numbers was appreciated by all who attended the event.



*Eastern Association Music Festival*

The Eastern Association gathered to Install Rev. Ryan Travis as the Pastor and Teacher of First Congregational UCC in Decatur on Sunday, May 7. It was a wonderful celebration of this new relationship and we look forward to Ryan's ministry in our joint work in the Association.

On Sunday, May 21, the Eastern Association will gather for an Ecclesiastical Council for Mark Jacobs, candidate for Ordination. St. Peter's UCC in Champaign, home church of Mark, will serve as the host church for this important event which begins at 3:00 p.m.

Rev. Patricia Morton will be installed as Pastor and Teacher of St. John UCC in Peotone on Sunday,

May 28, during the morning worship service which begins at 10:00 a.m.

A tentative date of June 4, has been chosen for the Installation of Rev. Amy Rixx as the Associate Pastor of Plainfield Congregational UCC. The plan is for a 3:00 p.m. service.

### Western Association Spring Meeting convened in Springfield

First Congregational UCC in Springfield served as the host church for the Spring Association Meeting for the Western Association on Saturday, April 22. The church had been busily preparing for the visit of sister churches from the Association and all their hard work and renovations were very evident in the beauty of the sanctuary and building.

Rev. Bryan Sirchio served as the Keynoter and Worship leader for the day. Bryan shared a great deal of his music and testimony of his journey for his ministry as well as his significant support of ministry in the poorest country of the world, Haiti. Bryan's music and stories inspired all who were present for the day.



*Moderator Ken Webster*

During the business session, Ken Webster, our Association Moderator, led us through the agenda, including elections, presentations of grant awards from the Association's Leonhart Fund, Stewardship awards and reports from Association committees. At the conclusion of the day, Ken Webster passed on the gavel of leadership to the new Western Association Moderator, Rev. Ken Kramer, Pastor of St. John UCC in Lincoln. We are grateful for all in the Western Association who work so diligently to provide leadership for Association and Conference committees.



*Bryan Sirchio*

### Fox Valley Association Committee On Ministry at work



*Photo Credit Alex Kentfield*

## Environmental Task Force releases video series

The Environmental Task Force of the Illinois Conference is pleased to announce the release of an amazing video series resource for Faith Communities: **Sustaining Creation - A Faith Journey for Small Groups**.

This eight session series is intended to guide Christians on an extended journey to a new understanding of our Call to live sustainably with all of God's Good Creation. Richly grounded in scripture, this series includes reflections, interviews with Creation Justice faith leaders, taps into the wisdom of noted authors, takes the audience on location to ponder the Climate Crisis and how God is calling us to respond. Included in the series are participant discussion guides and action steps to living sustainably.

Series outline:

Segment 1 The Situation We Find Ourselves In

- 1.A Things Have Really-Really Changed
- 1.B Some Deadly Serious Risks Lie Just Ahead

Segment 2 So Why Aren't We Responding?

- 2.A Old Stories That Are No Longer True
- 2.B Those Pesky Human Behaviors

Segment 3 And Yet There Are Reasons to Hope

- 3.A Hope Arising Out of New Technology & International Cooperation
- 3.B Hope Arising Out of Ancient Stories Made New Yet Again

Segment 4 Discerning God's Call

- 4.A Where Do We Go From Here?
- 4.B How Do We Get There?

*Sustaining Creation - A Faith Journey for Small Groups* is available without charge to Faith Communities everywhere by contacting [terrencegallagher@hotmail.com](mailto:terrencegallagher@hotmail.com).

For further information, access our website [www.sustainingcreation.org](http://www.sustainingcreation.org).

## Great Lakes Regional Youth Event is coming

Dear friends and colleagues,

We bring you greetings from the Planning Committee of the Great Lakes Regional Youth Event (GLRYE) of summer 2018!

Every four (4) years, GLRYE gathers hundreds of youth from across our Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana/Kentucky, Illinois, and Illinois South Conferences for four (4) days of workshops, fellowship, music, and worship—all of which is designed specifically with youth in mind. This event is open to all youth who have completed grades 6-12, and is an unforgettable occasion for all who attend.

As we prepare for this amazing event, we are actively seeking both young people and youth leaders from the Illinois Conference who would like to participate in the planning of this year's GLRYE. Currently, the event dates and location are in negotiation, but we don't want to wait—we are way too excited about this amazing opportunity to build up the voice of our youth in the Illinois Conference and wider Midwestern region. We know that when great minds and hearts gather, God's Holy Spirit brings forth amazing work.

As soon as you are able to do so, please reach out to the youth, young-adults, and youth leaders in your local congregation. Let them know that we would love to have them as a part of this year's GLRYE planning team.



We can't wait to hear from you, and can't wait to see what God has in store.

With many blessings,

Rev. Emily Ann Davis | First Congregational Church of Crystal Lake, IL  
[emily@fcc-cl.org](mailto:emily@fcc-cl.org)

Rev. Kim Whisler-Vasko | First Congregational Church of Downers Grove, IL  
[pastorkim@uccdg.org](mailto:pastorkim@uccdg.org)

### Conference e-mail and website information

Listed below are the e-mail addresses and the website information:

Illinois Conference general e-mail: [ilconferenceucc@gmail.com](mailto:ilconferenceucc@gmail.com)  
Conference Minister Jorge Morales: [ilconfjorge@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfjorge@gmail.com)  
Interim Associate Conference Minister (Stewardship and Church Vitality)  
David Russell: [ilconfdavid@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfdavid@gmail.com)  
Associate Conference Minister (Prairie\Western) Kathy Lawes: [ilconfkathy@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfkathy@gmail.com)  
Associate Conference Minister (Eastern\Western) Tom Norwalk: [ilconfom@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfom@gmail.com)  
Acting Associate Conference Minister (Fox Valley/CMA) James Olson: [ilconfjames@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfjames@gmail.com)  
Associate Conference Minister (CMA) Vertie Powers: [ilconfvertie@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfvertie@gmail.com)  
Conference Controller Bill Serritella: [ilconfbill@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfbill@gmail.com)  
Tower Hill Camp: [towerhillcamp@gmail.com](mailto:towerhillcamp@gmail.com)  
Pilgrim Park Camp: [odmregistrar@gmail.com](mailto:odmregistrar@gmail.com)

Illinois Conference support staff:  
Naomi Else: [ilconfnaomi@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfnaomi@gmail.com)  
Carmen Torres: [ilconfcarmen@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfcarmen@gmail.com)  
Wayne MacPherson (CMA): [ilconfwayne@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfwayne@gmail.com)  
Tracy Diehl (Prairie): [ilconftracy@gmail.com](mailto:ilconftracy@gmail.com)  
Connie Owens (Western): [ilconfconnie@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfconnie@gmail.com)  
Accounting (Conf.): [ilconftracy@gmail.com](mailto:ilconftracy@gmail.com)

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