

November 2019



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## Message from the Conference Office

### Deep and Wide

Rev. Kim Wood  
Acting Associate Conference Minister

When I was a young child, one of the songs my grandmother taught in Sunday School had these simple lyrics:

Deep and wide, deep and wide,  
There's a fountain flowing deep and wide.  
Deep and wide, deep and wide,  
There's a fountain flowing deep and wide.

There were, as is usually the case with children's songs, hand motions that went with the words, which both kept us engaged and made us look cute in front of the congregation when we sang. But, from that early age, I always found comfort in those words, a sense of calm and peace.

We have just completed the season of fall association meetings in the Illinois Conference. In this issue, you will have the opportunity to read about some of them, and you'll be able to hear about others next time. As I have reflected on some of the recounts of these regional gatherings of our local congregations, I am reminded of how "wide" our Illinois Conference is. There are so many different passions, so many different gifts and talents, so many ways that we engage with our nearby and wider communities, so many ways we worship together, praise together, pray together, work together and yes, even

voice differing viewpoints together! And yet, rural, urban, suburban, small, large, medium, traditional, experimental, contemporary, single-staffed, multi-staffed, part-time staffed, full-time staffed... the list goes on, we are, together, the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ! Part of what makes us who we are is how broadly we reach across miles and our multi-capacity presence to be the Body of Christ.

I am also experiencing just how “deep” the Illinois Conference is. As you probably already know, Rev. Justo González II, our Interim Conference Minister, underwent surgery on Oct. 31 at Cleveland Clinic. First, I am delighted to report that Justo’s surgery went very well. He has been recuperating in the hospital and is looking forward to being discharged soon to return to Michigan for rest and physical therapy. I praise God for this amazing news, the love of his husband, James, and their wider family, and the support of colleagues and friends. The outpouring of prayers from throughout the conference have been incredible. I have been reminded of just how deep faith runs here.

I also see the great depth of the Illinois Conference in the ways folks are pulling together during this time of both transition and immediate necessity. While Justo has been away, other members of the Illinois Conference staff have faced some health and family issues, and the way through particular days and tasks are not always clear. But, out of the depths of this Body of Christ has come support, assistance, understanding, compassion, and an all-hands-on-deck response that reminds me that we are layers upon layers of God’s many images and blessings called together to serve as one.

For all you do, in our local congregations, in our communities, in our associations, in our Illinois Conference, and in all of God’s Creation, I thank you! And for the ways you have shared and continue to share who you are and what you can do, please know you are appreciated. Together, in our breadth and our depth, we are stronger and more able to shine the loving face of Christ in the world!

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## **Report from the Illinois Conference President**

Rev. Charles Maney

We begin and end each portion of our day praying for Rev. Justo González, and praying for Rev. Michelle Hughes, and all of the Staff of the Illinois Conference. These are challenging times and we are in the shallow end of the experience pool. But we are not alone. This is God’s work, and God will provide.

We continue to look for the best ways to support our local churches. At each of the Association Meetings we encouraged our friends to be clear about their needs with the Associate Conference Ministers. We clarified that the gifts and the resources of the entire staff are at the disposal of the entire Conference. We have money in the 2020 budget to supplement the staff as we need. What final shape the staff has in the years to come will, in part, be determined by the ways we identify and respond to local church needs in the coming months.

While it is a challenging time, it is a time ripe with new possibilities. Pray for each other.



Remember that our focus is on sharing Good News and serving God's beloved Creation, not on our own peace of mind. I am praying for you and doing my level best.

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## Chicago Theological Seminary hosts CMA Fall Meeting

INSIDE OUT: SHARING OUR GIFTS was the theme for the Fall 2019 Chicago Metropolitan Association gathering, held on Oct. 19, 2019 at Chicago Theological Seminary. Dr. Stephanie Buckhanon Crowder, Vice President for Academic Affairs at CTS, warmly welcomed us to the seminary.

Our business session began with a presentation on the Illinois Conference 2020 Budget. Then the Illinois Conference presented its candidate for Acting Associate Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, current pastor of The Congregational Church of Park Manor, Chicago. This announcement was met with great acclamation, and we look forward to our future ministry.



Worship was led by Chicago Theological Seminary students. The powerful sermon "Trauma-Informed Faith" of Rev. Dr. Zachary Moon, Associate Professor of Practical Theology at CTS, challenged us not to shame and judge trauma survivors who come to find restoration. Instead as followers of Jesus, we have the power to serve and to heal all of God's children. We were very moved by his words.

The first round of workshops focused on congregational challenges. Dr. Sammie Dortch and Rev. Vertie Powers led "Ministering to Wisdom Folk." Rev. Justo Gonzalez taught congregations about "Creating Extraordinary Communities of Welcome." Christopher Gabriel from the UCC national setting presented "UCC Everywhere Web Technology." Pastor Jamie Frazier of The Lighthouse Church of Chicago presented a host of ideas for "Evangelism for 2019 & Beyond."

The second round of workshops focused on congregational engagement of social justice issues. Dr. Christophe Ringer, CTS' Assistant Professor of Theological Ethics, led "Setting Captives Free: Use of End Money Bond." Revs. Jason Coulter and Samuel Paul presented "The Church as Agent of Change: Introduction to Community Organizing." Kim Snoddy of RefugeeOne instructed congregations on how to co-sponsor refugee families with RefugeeOne. Rev. Catherine Watkins of SamaraCare Counseling led "Mental Health and the Church." Pastor Jamie Frazier's second workshop focused on "Combating Racism in Boystown and Beyond: The Lighthouse Foundation."

We enjoyed the blessing of fellowship. When we ate together, we also viewed "The Sharing Wall" where congregations shared resources and programming ideas. Participants departed with enthusiasm and excitement, revitalized for the ministry that lies ahead.

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## Fox Valley Association holds Fall Meeting in Downers

The Fox Valley Association Annual Fall Meeting took place on Sunday, Oct. 20 at First Congregational UCC in Downers Grove. It was a different kind of fall meeting than in previous years. The meeting took place on a Sunday afternoon instead of Saturday. It was organized by the Fox Valley Association Justice & Witness Committee. It was an occasion to worship together, learn about



Justice & Witness topics, and then to enjoy fellowship with one another during the shared evening meal that featured Mediterranean cuisine.

Rev. Scott Oberle, pastor of First Congregational UCC in Downers Grove, delivered the keynote address/call to action in his sermon titled “Watching it Burn or Up to a Point.” He described worship as less a matter of people sitting in the pews and more a matter of being actively engaged in the wider world, being a visible witness of God’s love in the world for all of God’s children, and being a good steward of God’s sacred creation.

Worship concluded with a hymn about the United Church of Christ 3 Great Loves, “ [I Will Sing of Your Love, Love, Love](#) ,” written by the Rev. Dr. Christopher Grundy, Assistant Professor of Preaching and Worship and Coordinator of Chapel Programs at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. It was performed by Kelley Calpin and Justin Kono from First Congregational UCC in Downers Grove. The gathering was then dispersed with the words, “Our time of worship together has ended, now may our Christian service begins.

Following worship, participants broke off into four Justice & Witness themed energizer sessions.

[Read More](#)

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### Talking Out The Tough Stuff

Rev. Kim Wood

Acting Associate Conference Minister

The Western and Eastern Associations held a shared fall meeting in Decatur on Oct. 19. Laity, clergy, and youth from the two associations gathered for

### **“Conversations Across the (CHURCH) Aisle.”**

Keynote Speaker Sarah Howell, Assistant Director of the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, presented the group with skills designed to help people navigate difficult conversation topics. Such ideas as looking for things in common first instead of landing on our differences in ideas or beliefs, speaking only for oneself, and giving clear information were just a few of the ways that people were challenged to work through difficult topics. Ms. Howell invited several members of the audience to act out vignettes illustrating her points (a huge thank you to our many willing actors that day). Following the keynote presentation, which was offered while participants ate a hearty lunch provided by the host church, First Congregational UCC of Decatur, everyone moved to small-group sessions. There, they tested the waters of new and rediscovered skills by breaking into triads to practice using topics that were designed to be increasingly divisive. The hope – practice now so you’re ready when you need it! The event was wrapped in music and Holy Communion that drew us together, and anointing and prayer that sent us out to serve, better equipped to draw the church and world closer together in divisive times.



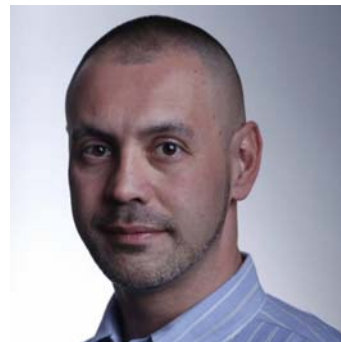
A big thank you for the amazing hospitality to Rev. Jan Johnson, Interim Minister and the members of First Congregational UCC, Decatur for hosting us. Also, a huge bouquet of gratitude goes to Rose Marie Thompson and Rev. Chuck Maney, who provided music for worship. We were blessed that Ms. Sheryll Bray and Rev. John Prain, Moderators of Eastern and Western Associations, respectively, led us into the meeting with great energy and a touch of comedy. And many kudos go to the joint planning committee, led by Vice-Moderators of the two associations, Rev. Carol Lange and Mr. Jeffrey Newcomb. Most of all, thank you to the sixty-plus folks who traveled a little bit further that our two neighboring associations could come together as to learn ways to continue to do Christ’s work in our congregations and the world.

[View captured moments here](#)

## **Caring for Our Caregivers**

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

Karen was caring for her 87 year-old mother with dementia. She was at the height of her career when the disease progressed to the point where her mom needed much more hands-on care. Between the stress of work, her own home, the lack of clear direction from advance directives, and having never been in this position before, Karen was on the verge of burnout and seriously considering giving up her career.



Eventually, the burnout can lead to depression. A recent article in the *Journal of American Medical Association - Neurology* showed that caregiver depression has a direct correlation to an increase in the

elder's increased frequency of ER visits. When an elderly person goes to the ER, there are typically resulting urinary tract infections, delirium, other infections, and a vicious cycle that can and often does lead to death. This exacerbates the burnout and depression and continues the spiral. It's avoidable and we can be part of the solution!

When it comes to the vitality of our churches, we tend to look at the macro picture, but forget what the makeup of our congregations is. A good portion of the people who sit in our pews, sing in our choirs, and serve on our committees are in similar situations as Karen. They are caregivers, they are employees, they are caught between many rocks and many hard places and yet we expect them to contribute to creating a thriving church. Eventually these people have to take a "break" from church, rarely if ever to be seen again.

Instead of being vessels *for* burnout, what if churches were to point the way to the resources to *reverse* burnout?

[Read More](#)

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## Don't let your year end donations be delayed by an incorrect address

Friendly reminder for our churches... The address where you mail donations to the Illinois Conference changed in June. To avoid delays in processing of your OCWM, particularly at year end, please use the new address found on the form at this link: [Our Church's Wider Mission and Designated Giving Remittance Form.](#)

Please call or e-mail [ilconftracy@gmail.com](mailto:ilconftracy@gmail.com) with questions on this matter or contact Conference Controller Bill Serritella at (708) 344-4470 with any questions.

**Illinois Conference, UCC  
C/O Byline Bank  
P.O. Box 5450  
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Tracy Diehl, Bookkeeper  
Illinois Conference, UCC

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## Facing Your Church Building's Uncertain Future: A Conversation

Is your congregation dealing with questions about your church building and property? Does your church building help or hinder your church mission? Join a zoom webinar [Facing Your Church Building's Uncertain Future: A Conversation](#) with Rev. Patrick Duggan, Executive Director and Rev. David Schoen from the UCC Church Building & Loan Fund

on Tuesday, Nov. 12 at 3:00 p.m. ET. The



Facing Your Church Building's  
Uncertain Future:  
A Conversation – Nov. 12, 2019

Rev. Dr. Patrick Duggan  
Executive Director  
UCC Church Building & Loan Fund  
Rev. Dr. David Schoen  
Minister in Church Letters and Clergy  
UCC Church Building & Loan Fund

A Service of Church Building & Loan Fund

conversation will explore missional options for rethinking, repurposing, relocating, and/or relinquishing church buildings. as well as helpful practices for engaging in discernment, conversation, decision-making and planning. Participants can choose to receive a copy of Facing Your Church's Uncertain Future resource as part of the [registration](#) fee.

## Happenings Around the Conference



Westchester Community Church on Sunday, Oct. 20, 2019 celebrated the 50th ordination anniversary for Rev. Bob Hempel. Bob is a minister of the United Church of Christ who lives in La Grange Park, Ill. Ordained, Oct. 18, 1969 (Baker Community Church, UCC, in Baker, MT.), he has served churches in Texas, California; Montana; Iowa; and, Illinois.



Western Association Committee on Ministry gifted First Congregational UCC in Canton a "Supply Shower" as a way to show gratitude and express thanks for hosting many meetings at the church. Members of the committee gave dish soap, toilet paper, trash bags, cleaning supplies and coffee to replenish their cupboards. We are truly grateful for the church's ministry to the Western association. Pictured are: The Rev. Sue Harrington, Pastor of First Congregational UCC and Virginia Vassen, member of COM and member of the church in Canton.



On Sunday, Oct. 27, First Congregational Church of Huntley welcomed Rev. Steven Welker at their new Intentional Interim



San Lucas United Church of Christ in Chicago and the Illinois Conference would like to thank all the volunteers who made

Pastor. *Picture credit:* [First Congregational of Huntly facebook page](#)

Produce Mobile through San Lucas United Church of Christ a success. On Oct. 21 they help served over 125 families in the Humboldt Park Community.

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## Churches in the Media

[Advocate Aurora Health announces \\$50 million commitment to invest in underserved Illinois and Wisconsin neighborhoods](#)

[Lilly awards 2019 clergy renewal grants to 18 UCC churches](#)

[St. John United Church of Christ becomes first church in Illinois to go solar](#)

[Moline church expands its 'essential' holiday giving](#)

[Bethel United Church of Christ Salutes Broadway](#)

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## Employment Opportunities

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

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## Conference Calendar for October

November 9: [Songs in the Key of Love: A Concert of Choirs in honor of Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers](#) , 3:00 p.m. at Pilgrim Congregational UCC, Oak Park.

November 10: Rev. Kim Wood, Acting Associate Conference Minister, will be worshipping and preaching at [St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Monee](#) at 10:30 a.m.

November 10: [Stewardship Sunday Fair](#) , 11:00 a.m. at BWS Family Life Center. Hosted by the Stewardship Ministry of Covenant UCC, South Holland.

November 10: [Service of Installation for Rev. John Kuipers](#) , 3:00 p.m. at Congregational UCC, St. Charles.

November 10: [Installation of Rev. John Edgerton](#) , 3:00 p.m. at First United Church, Oak Park.

November 12: [Clergy Ethics Training 201](#) offered by the Western Association, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. at St. Peter's UCC, Kewanee.

November 12: [Facing Your Church Building's Uncertain Future: A Conversation](#) by UCC Church Building and Loan Fund. Webinar Conversation. [Register here](#).

November 14: UCC Webinar: ["Worker Justice Is Climate Justice"](#) , [Sign-up here](#) .



November 17: [Rev. Jennifer Little and Rev. Dorey Reigel](#) , 3:00 p.m. at Lake Fork UCC, Atwood.

November 24: Rev. Kim Wood, Acting Associate Conference Minister, will be worshipping and preaching at [Lyonsville Congregational UCC in Indian Head Park](#) at 10:00 a.m.

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## Upcoming Events

December 1: [Installation of Rev. Rev. Dr. Marilyn Pagán-Banks](#) , 3:00 p.m. at San Lucas United Church of Christ, Chicago.

December 15: [A Festival of Lessons and Carols by Hal H. Hopson](#) , 3:00 p.m. at St. Paul UCC, Pekin.

December 22: [Service of Farewell and Release for Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers](#) , 4:00 p.m. at Westchester Community Church, Westchester. Reception to follow.

March 19-21, 2020: [Clergy Wellness Retreat](#) , stay tuned for future information.

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.

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Rise up and build. Nehemiah 2:18

**Bridge Building**

Pilgrim Park, Princeton, Illinois

**Illinois Conference United Church of Christ**  
**56<sup>TH</sup> Annual Celebration | June 4-6, 2020 | ilucc.org**

The Illinois Conference Annual Celebration Planning Committee is working hard to prepare for our 2020 Annual Celebration on June 4-6 at Augustana College. Rev. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, and Rev. Dr. Felix Villanueva, Conference Minister of the Southern California-Nevada Conference UCC, will be our keynote speakers as we gather on this scenic college campus in our Western Association. Please mark the date on your calendars and watch for more information and registration materials in the coming months.

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## Generous donations from ...

First Congregational Church of Dwight has two brass candle holders for solid wax

candles, one brass altar cross, and a box of large chime system cartridges (for the old kind of system that uses big cartridges). The church will gladly give these to any church that could use them. Please contact the church at (815) 584-1260 or Rev. Grant Speece at [grantspeece@gmail.com](mailto:grantspeece@gmail.com) .

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1840 Westchester Blvd., Suite 200, Westchester, IL 60154