

November 2019 (second edition)



NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



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Message from the Acting Conference Minister

"Gratitude turns what we have into enough"

Rev. Michelle Hughes
Acting Conference Minister

Once again, we are nearing that time of year in which we express our Thanksgiving to God, the source of our blessings and the grounding of our hope.

Perhaps you've noticed, as I have, that as soon as October is over and November arrives, we begin to see Christmas decorations immediately go up. While I'm thrilled when Christmas comes, I'm always annoyed that the culture wants to jump over this designated time of thanksgiving. (*Okay, I am also very annoyed about the inaccurate historical narrative around this holiday - but I digress.*) I eagerly await Thanksgiving as a time to pause and reflect on what bounty God has provided; an antidote to living in a culture that constantly points us to what we lack.

I invite you to join me in making a list of all that you are grateful for in your family, in your work, and in your church. Sure, you may not have all you desire, but you will discover God has already provided enough of what we need to get us through.

I give thanks to the people of the Illinois Conference; for your work, for your faithfulness, for your support, and for being such a caring community. It continues to be a privilege to serve you.

Sincerely,
Rev. Michelle Hughes
Acting Conference Minister
Associate Conference Minister Vitality, Transformation & Sustainability



Songs in the Key of Love Raise the Roof

On Saturday, Nov. 9, Pilgrim Congregational UCC of Oak Park hosted "Songs in the Key of Love," a musical tribute to Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers. A selection of CMA choirs, praise teams and soloists raised the roof in a gospel tribute to Vertie's ministry.



Rev. Michelle Hughes welcomed us on behalf of the Illinois Conference. Rev. Dr. Melbalenia Evans led us in prayer and then served as the emcee. The Good News UCC Choir opened the concert with three praise-filled selections. Then soloist Kim Baker presented "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" and Andrae Crouch's "To God Be the Glory."

The Praise Team of Lincoln Memorial Congregational UCC lifted our spirits with three selections. During their third selection, the congregation came forward to present their offerings which will be used for scholarship help for Members in Discernment. Over one thousand dollars was raised!

Pilgrim Congregational's Chancel Choir appeared next. During their third anthem, "Marvelous" by Walter Hawkins, they were joined by soloist Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers. It was "marvelous." Lighthouse Church of Chicago's Praise Team furthered the work of the Spirit as they led us in worship.

Our final soloist was Rev. Wayne MacPherson, CMA Administrator, who sang the final

number, "It's So Hard to Say Goodbye to Yesterday," a request from Rev. Dr. Powers. The song's opening lyric asks "How do we say goodbye to what we had?" Our answers? By celebrating the ministry the CMA has shared with Vertie! By being led by the Spirit in song! By taking the memories with us as we head into the future!

Caring for Our Caregivers - Part 2

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

In recent articles, I have mentioned how caregivers in our congregations are burned out and in need of help. This isn't a newflash.

Caregiver burnout is hardly the only thing plaguing our congregations when it comes to vitality. Churches are closing, attendance continues to dwindle for many, and clergy continue to burn out along with congregational leaders. Although this seems like a dire picture, hope is far from lost.



What if we were to bring our focus to those who had the greatest need? For example, what if we reached out to caregivers even beyond our churches in the communities around us and provided a place for them to find peace, comfort, and resources? These people may just decide to stay and become a part of our church families and bring their teenage/young adult children with them.

This is *not* to say that we should use others' needs as a marketing tool to fill our pews. However, if doing God's work naturally leads to people wanting to be a part of what we are doing, then all the better.

Okay, okay, I hear you. Individual congregations aren't equipped to add yet another ministry to their already full plates. Clergy aren't equipped to deal with aging congregations and if they are already burning out, how can we ask them to manage more? The great news is, you don't have to!

The Illinois Conference and the UCC National office has a resource for congregations: Generations Care Partners Foundation (GCPF). GCPF is a 501c3 nonprofit member of the UCC Council for Health and Human Service Ministries. GCPF was created for the purpose of helping congregations thrive by meeting the following needs:

- Executive/leadership coaching for clergy
- Coaching cohorts for caregivers to help them through burnout
- Workshops for congregations and associations on caregiving and elder care
- Congregational coaching for revitalization

You need not navigate these tricky waters alone! GCPF would be happy to come to your church and lead a workshop on caregiving, hospice/palliative care, advance directives, and more. Let's provide the support that our caregivers need and be the church for those who are seeking a safe place to find their rest.

God's Peace,

Rev. Brandyn Simmons, MBA, MGCM, MDiv, PCC
Executive Director
Generations Care Partners Foundation

The Reason Why

Pastor Tyler Carrell

Park Street Congregational UCC, Mazon

As a minister, if we're honest, there are always moments of uncertainty. There are times when a sermon falls flat, a volunteer quits, or a "discussion" with a leadership team ends with frustration. Many times, we can end up asking ourselves, "*Why do I do this?*"



For the last seven years, I have had the privilege of serving at Park Street Church in Mazon, Ill. Being a small town church, there are a lot of people who know a lot about all the other people. They know your family, your background, where you used to work, live, etc. While this may be too much for some, the close community bond that is forged through small town living is a great asset. We work together to get it done. We look out for each other. We care.

Our church is host to the Mazon-Verona-Kinsman Food Pantry, where anyone, regardless of income or situation, can arrange to pick up food for their families. Each of those communities contributes and supports the pantry, ensuring that needs continue to be met. Every year, we organize what we call the Christmas Basket Project, gathering food, paper goods, toiletries, as well as toys and sweatshirts for families in our area who just require a bit of help during the holiday season. Again, many churches, volunteers, and even community donations make this possible.

What happens over time is that people begin to associate the Church (not just Park Street) as a place where they can get help, a place that makes a difference, and a place where they can play a part in making the world better. It is these sorts of programs and activities that bring us together as a body, strengthening and supporting one another in pursuit of the unity that Jesus prayed about in Gethsemane.

A few years ago, we had a cookie drive to raise funds for sponsoring an adopted child. Afterward, we had cookies left over, and so our youth group took the remainder to some non-church folks in town. At one house, our students rang the bell and a man came to the door whom they had never met. His first words were, "You're from Park Street, aren't you?"

When we become known for our unity, generosity, and our love, then Jesus gets the glory. People begin to see us as banners declaring who He is. His name gets lifted higher than ours. And then they come to know Him.

That is the reason why we do what we do.

Happenings Around the Conference



First United Church of Oak Park Installed Rev. John Edgerton as their next Lead Pastor on Nov. 10, 2019.

Picture credit: Rev. Kimberlee Ellen Whisler-Vasko.



Rev. Josh Kuipers was installed as Senior Pastor of Congregational UCC in St. Charles on Sunday, Nov. 10, 2019.

Picture credit: [Congregational UCC St. Charles](#)



Congregations participating in the TPIRC program, funded through a generous grant by the Lilly Foundation, gather in cohorts quarterly. Cohort 4, shown here, met at Zion UCC in Gilman for their first gathering on Nov. 9, 2019.



Faith Community UCC in Bensenville dedicated their new Memorial Bell display on Oct. 27, 2019, as part of their Totenfest Sunday Worship. The three bells, placed together in front of their building on Center Street, come from the three congregations that came together ten years ago - St. John's UCC, Peace UCC, and Immanuel UCC to become one new congregation. Rev. Catherine Balk, pastor, officiated the dedication.

Collection for Church World Service Buckets and Kits

In recent years Church World Service buckets and kits have been taken to CWS as part of a mission trip of DOC and UCC members to Little Rock. This year the trip was not planned - though there will be a trip again in 2020.

Since congregations may have collected CWS buckets and kits (or supplies for making kits and buckets), we are arranging to transport those items to the CWS drop off point in

Elgin, Ill. **Persons can drop off buckets and kits, by Dec. 6, 2019** at the Disciples Regional office (401 S. Jefferson, Bloomington), St. Peter's UCC (905 S. Russell, Champaign), First Federated Church (3601 N. Sheridan Rd., Peoria) or St. Peter's Evangelical UCC (119 S. Grove St., Kewanee).

For questions or further information contact David Kniker at (309) 853-7814 or dfkniker@gmail.com . Thank you.

UCC Webinar: "Solar Power 101: A Webinar for Faith Communities"

Does your faith community have soul-ar power? For faith communities, solar power can mean putting panels on a roof, but it can also mean much more. The pursuit of solar power can also be a way to serve the community and advocate for a more just society. In this area, Solar United Neighbors has done ground-breaking work



Solar Power 101

A Webinar
for Faith Communities



that has been replicated all over the country. Anya Schoolman is their founder and executive director. For her accomplishments, she was honored by the White House in 2014 as a Champion of Change. In this webinar, she will cover three critical areas for faith communities interested in solar power: practical tips for going solar, solar coops as a way to lower costs for faith communities and neighborhood residents, and how faith communities can advocate for energy democracy and equity. The webinar will be on Dec. 5, but register even if you can't make it in order to receive a link to the video later.

Sign-Up NOW!

Churches in the Media

[Interfaith Thanksgiving event set in Aurora](#)

[Elgin Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration Nov. 24 to feature special music](#)

[Chicago Youth Will Meet To Talk About How To End City's Gun Violence \(5th Annual Youth Peace Summit at Saint Pauls UCC, Chicago\)](#)

[St. Paul United Church of Christ Barrington Places Ribbons for Peace Throughout Christmas Season](#)

[Hampshire church to host candlelight holiday concert Dec. 8](#)

[Princeton ready for 11th Christkindl Markt](#)

[Rockford community mural underway at SecondFirst Church](#)

[St. John UCC presents donation to veterans organizations](#)

[Conference Minister has lived with debt, is 'thrilled to be part of a solution'](#)

[Granville UCC Mission Team to work in Puerto Rico](#)

Employment Opportunities

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

Conference Calendar for October

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.

November 24: [Service of Ordination Robert Buckner II](#) , 3:00 p.m. at Covenant United Church of Christ, South Holland.

Upcoming Events

December 1: Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers, will be preaching at [First Congregational UCC in Naperville](#) at 10:00 a.m.

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

December 3: [#Giving Tuesday : Help Erase Medical Debt - You can erase medical debt for thousands of families across the country. DONATE HERE](#)

December 12: [Understanding Sudden Death Grief in a Faith Based Setting](#) by NAMI Metro Suburban, 11:30 a.m. at First Congregational Church of Western Springs.

December 12: [Grief After Sudden Loss: Finding Hope and Healing](#) by National Alliance on Mental Illness Metro Suburban Affiliate, 7:00 p.m. at First Congregational Church of Western Springs.

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.

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.

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 with questions on this matter or contact Conference Controller Bill Serritella at (708) 344-4470 with any questions.

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