



# NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



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## Message from the Interim Conference Minister

### What's on My Mind?

#### Let me share...

Rev. Justo González II

James and I just had a heart to heart conversation (no pun intended) over dinner. We asked each other where we were at with all of this. Well, I brought up the subject because I want to know where he is at with all of this.

He did what any good spouse would do. He was being brave. He said all the right things and what I would expect as a surface level response. I love him but I did not believe him. There is much more going on with him. He stated, "I need to be strong." I thank him for that, but I also invited him to touch the scary places of this unexpected, unwelcome, highly uncomfortable journey. So, I gave him permission to be real and honest with me. Suffice as to say we both agree, "This sucks!"



Yet, we are clear God is and has always has been present and active in all that we celebrate and in all of our blessings. Some of us seem to forget that Jesus carries us even through the parts of life that we'd rather have go away, forget or pretend never happened. God continues to be God and I am grateful. I am assured of the eternal love of Jesus. The smiling / laughing Christ smiles grace in my life even when I don't deserve it. Then again, do any of us really think we deserve the unconditional love of and warm embrace of God and Jesus the Christ?

I have been (we have been) overwhelmed with words of grace and compassion. Prayers are flowing from many sectors. Many have reached out via texts, emails, or Facebook. That's all great. We appreciate that. I also have been deeply touched by the prayers of people (some of you I know, and others know me by name or by virtue of my position). I really don't care how you know me. James and I are simply grateful for your love, kindness, overwhelming support and prayers.

Many of you have just stopped and hugged me. That's awesome! To my sister who gave

me the Angel that I share in the picture, words alone are insufficient to express how deeply moved I am. She shared that it was given to her at a vulnerable stage of life. She stated that it was now time to share that Angel with me. That Angel and all of you will travel with James and me. It will be at my bedside pre and post-surgery.

[Read More](#)

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## Report from the Associate Conference Minister for Vitality, Transformation and Sustainability

Beloved Friends,

As people who love their faith communities, it is no news to you that the church as we have known it, is in a period of unprecedented change and disruption. The days of simply doing it the way we have always done it are over. I think Martin Luther King said it best: *"If not now, when? If not us, who?"* It is up to us. Both pastors and lay leaders must adapt, and discover new ways of leading. It is time for us to discern together what future God is calling us to.



We have so much to do to work to keep our church vital. It is a big job that can only be accomplished with your prayers and help.

I want to thank you for your confidence and trust as I have joined our Conference Team. It has been a month since I came on full time as your ACM for Vitality, Transformation and Sustainability, although my work with the Conference has been ongoing since June.

In August, at Tower Hill Camp, we trained 30 clergy coaches that will be paired with our TPIRC congregations to journey alongside both the pastor and their leadership team. Our coaching year will begin in January 2020.

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## Report from the Illinois Conference President

We were surprised to learn of the impending surgery for Rev. Justo González II. We pray for the surgical professionals who are called on for such an invasive intervention. We pray for Justo and James to feel the love and support of the wider community of the United Church of Christ at this difficult and challenging time.

News from the Conference Council—The Search Committee for the Acting Associate Conference Minister (CMA) is complete. The Rev. Dr. Terrill N. Murff has been called to serve in this role. Presently, Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers and Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff are transitioning. She will end her service on Dec. 31, 2019 and he will join our team Jan. 12, 2020.



The Search for the next Conference Minister is now underway. Miguel Frias has been added to the Search Committee in order to represent a wider perspective of the membership in the Conference.

The 2020 Budget has been prepared. The Conference Council reviewed it at the Oct. 12 meeting. It will be presented at the Fall Association Meetings. We continue to look for ways to reduce expenditures and work towards addressing the needs of the local churches.

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## A Purposeful Paradigm Shift

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

“Well, that’s just not the way we do things.”

“We just need to get the young people back.”

“We need all of our committees meeting so that we can function as a church.”

“Our churches are dying and young people aren’t coming because sports teams are scheduling games on Sundays.”



Ah, the fallacies of the church collective mind.

The things that we continue to tell ourselves become concretized as gospel truth. We know in our hearts that church has to change if we are to survive. We know that there is a new iteration that needs to be born somewhere over the horizon, not only for future generations, but for existing generations who are in need of spiritual nourishment. But we also know that we need to feed the flock that comes through our doors on Sunday morning as well as those that want to, but are homebound, their caregivers, etc.

So, what are we to do?

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## Whispers of Advent: An Advent Lectionary Sermon & Worship Seeds Preparation Zoom Event



Join a lunchtime Zoom event with your Conference Ministry Leadership Team on Oct. 24 from 11:45 a.m.-1:45 p.m. As we offer possibilities for liturgy and sermon exploration for each of the Sundays of Advent, as well as Christmas Eve/Day Worship.

Please e-mail your reservation to [iconfkimberly@gmail.com](mailto:iconfkimberly@gmail.com) by Wednesday, Oct. 23 at 3:00 p.m. A Zoom link will be sent to you prior to the event. You must be registered to receive access to the Zoom link. Register NOW!

## UCC Webinar: “Worker Justice Is Climate Justice”

As the climate movement pushes our society toward becoming fossil free, how can we ensure that the transition happens in a way that is just and fair for workers? This question will be at the heart of the UCC’s next [Creation Justice Webinar](#). The featured guests will be Michael Leon Guerrero from the Labor Network for Sustainability and Michael Williams from the BlueGreen Alliance.



In a world that often falsely pits the wellbeing of workers against protection of the environment, they will help us see how matters of justice are interconnected rather than oppositional. The webinar will be on November 14<sup>th</sup>, but register even if you can’t make it. [Sign-up now!](#)

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## Happenings Around the Conference



Our National Setting, Trinity United Church of Christ, Covenant United Church of Christ, St. Pauls UCC, the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ and Leaders Network bought 5.3 million dollars of medical debt. Families across the state (5,888 individuals and families) will receive a letter notifying them that their medical debt has been paid. They are now medical debt free. Praise God for calling us to be the Church and the faithful who have united to buy this medical debt.



It is with great joy that we announce that the Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff has been called to serve as the new Associate Conference Minister primarily serving the Chicago Metropolitan Association. Thank you, The Congregational Church of Park Manor for sharing your great leader with the Chicago Metropolitan Association and the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.

At the Western and Eastern Association joint Fall Meeting on Oct. 19, 2019 at First Congregational UCC, Decatur, the Western Council honored the Rev. Kathy Lawes for her 10 years as Associate Conference Minister serving the Western Association with a beautiful rainbow stole.

## 2019 Clergy Day Away Evaluation

If you attended the Clergy Day Away event with Barbara Brown Taylor, we want to hear from you.

We would love some feedback, please click link below.



**BARBARA  
BROWN  
TAYLOR**



[Clergy Day Away 2019 Feedback](#)

## Churches in the Media

[Nearly 6,000 Chicagoans to get letters this holiday season saying their unpaid medical debt is forgiven. Learn about the group behind the gifts.](#)

[Churches help forgive more than \\$5M in medical debt for nearly 6,000 Chicago families](#)

[St. John UCC gets ready to flip the switch to solar power](#)

[Churches polled on legalization of marijuana](#)

[SecondFirst Church reaches mural fundraiser goal](#)

[From the Pulpit: April blizzards, May showers and June flowers?](#)

## [WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAM TO PLANT FORTY TREES IN SOUTH SIDE NEIGHBORHOODS](#)

[St. John's UCC-Harmony welcomes new pastor](#)

[Princeton church offers free laundry loads each month's third Thursday](#)

[Moline church raising money to restore century-old stained glass windows](#)

[First Congregational marks 150 years](#)

[Plainfield church to celebrate 185 years Oct. 13](#)

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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**

October 24: [Whispers of Advent: An Advent Lectionary Sermon & Worship Seeds Preparation Zoom Event](#), 11:45 a.m.-1:45 p.m. RSVP at [ilconfkimberly@gmail.com](mailto:ilconfkimberly@gmail.com) by Oct. 23 at 3:00 p.m.

October 26: [Strengthening Ties: LGBTQ+ Allyship and Community-Building](#), 10:00 a.m. at Congregational UCC, Arlington Heights.

October 27: [Installation of Rev. Laurie Hill](#), 4:00 p.m. at St. John UCC, Lincoln.

October 27-28: [Spanda Retreat](#), 4 p.m. at Tower Hill Camp, Sawyer, Mich.

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## **Upcoming Events**

November 2: [Prairie Association Fall Meeting](#), First Congregational Church, Sterling. More information to follow.

November 2: [Clergy Boundary and Ethics Training: Faith Trust Institute](#), 9:00 a.m. at Chicago Theological Seminary, Chicago.

November 4: [Clergy Ethics Training 201](#) offered by the Western Association, 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. at First Congregational UCC, Springfield.

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

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



**Clergy Wellness Retreat on March 19-21, 2020.**

This wellness retreat is jointly sponsored by the Pension Boards and the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ, stay tuned for future information. In the meantime, block out those dates.

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