

You may [unsubscribe](#) if you no longer wish to receive our emails.

July/August 2016

Vol 38, Issue 38

Illinois Conference UCC E-Newsletter



From the Conference Minister

Dear Friends,

I greet you in the name of God, who has transformed us into faithful servants and witnesses of the Christ.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:2

I give God thanks for you, your love of Jesus the Christ and your faithful witness and service to the Church. Thank you for your support of God's mission through the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.

May the transforming powers of our Maker renew our minds and understanding, guide us in wise decision-making and in doing God's will. None of us, no matter how faithful, can know all of God's will, which is good, pleasing and perfect. However, in the power of the Spirit, we are able to discern what is not good, pleasing and acceptable to God. May God give us wisdom in making good and pleasing decisions for our lives and for the sake of God's mission in the world.

Our Conference Annual Celebration was a wonderful and uplifting event. The Rev. Traci Blackmon delivered a prophetic message and call for justice and transformation. Rev. Blackmon led one of our energizers, served as main speaker and preached at the opening worship. If you were not present, you missed a wonderful event. The Ministry Leadership Team also lead an Energizer on Transforming the Local Church, a transformation strategy that we plan to use in discerning God's mission with struggling congregations. Deacon Otisa Evans was one of the preachers at closing worship.

I will pray for you, your family and congregation. Please include our conference, conference staff and our ministries in your prayers. We are in the midst of searching for two Associate Conference Ministers after the retirement of Rev.

Click below to

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

QUICK LINKS

www.ilucc.org

 Like us on Facebook

QUICK LINKS TO WEBSITES

[Chicago Metropolitan Association](#)

[Eastern Association](#)

[Fox Valley Association](#)

[Western Association](#)

[Prairie Association](#)

[Pilgrim Park](#)

[Tower Hill](#)

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Jazz Worship Service
Joan Collaso Trio, guests
Sunday, July 17, 2016, 10:30 a.m.
The Congregational Church
of Park Manor UCC
7000 S. King Drive, Chicago
Rev. Dr. Terrill N. Murff, Pastor

Stewardship Webinar
"Great Expectations"
Saturday, July 30, 2016
10:00 a.m.-11:15 a.m.

Jonathan Knight and Rev. Dr. Melbalenia Evans. We want to upgrade and sustain our camps as places where lives are transformed. Together, let us pray for strengthening of our faith, our covenantal relationships in the life of the whole Church and giving thanks for God's abundant love and grace.

I invite all of us to pray that God will lead us and our country in wise decision-making. Pray that as we exercise our voting rights, we may know that rejection of others based on race or religion, hate, divisiveness, building walls does not help in establishing healthy communities, nor does that honor the ideals that we say are ours as a people and a nation.

May God's love abide with us all as we serve the Christ,

Rev. Jorge L. Morales
Conference Minister

Note: Pictures from the Illinois Conference 52nd Annual Meeting can be seen on the [Illinois Conference Facebook Page](#).

Lead by Mr. Larry McCure
Register at
ilconfcarmen@gmail.com
[Click link here for more info](#)

UCC National Youth Event
July 26-30, 2016
Colorado Springs Resort Hotel
Lake Buena Vista, Fla.
Chicago contact:
Rev. Sarah Lohrbach
(815) 370-0261 or
Sarah.lohrbach@gmail.com

Jazz by the Jon Rarick Nonet
Sunday, July 31, 2016, 3 p.m.
United Protestant
Church of Grayslake
54 S. Whitney St., Grayslake
Free will offering

**Intro to Kingian
Nonviolence Workshop**
Aug. 3-4, 2016, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Chicago Theological Seminary
1407 E. 60th St., Chicago
To register contact:
Pam Smith at
psmith20@masonlive.gmu.edu

Missionworks 2016
Sponsor: Global Ministries
Music, prayer & worship resources
Learn about the Global Church
To register:
Globalministries.org/missionworks2016

Pruyne Lectureship
Free public lecture by
Renowned activist,
theologian Brian McLaren
Friday, Sept. 16, 2016, 7 p.m.
Workshop, Saturday, Sept. 17,
9 a.m.-3 p.m.
Fee \$30 includes lunch
First Presbyterian Church
2000 E. College Ave., Normal
Info & registration
www.pruynelectures.com/attend

**25th Anniversary AtiiM
Annual Conference**
Several prominent speakers
Oct. 5-6, 2016
Starved Rock Lodge &
Conference Center
Info: dfkniker@gmail.com

Rev. Dr. David Russell joins the Illinois Conference Staff

The Rev. Dr. David Russell has joined the Illinois Conference staff as Interim Associate Conference Minister for Stewardship and Church Viality. He replaces the Rev. Dr. Melbalenia Evans, who recently retired.

Rev. Russell and his wife, Gail, have two daughters and four grandchildren. They have lived in the Palatine area for 42 years.

The Russells call St. Paul's UCC, Palatine, "home." Rev. Russell began his pastoral career as Youth Minister at First Congregational Church UCC, Des Plaines, after graduating from Oberlin College. While at First Congregational, he earned a Master of Divinity from Chicago Theological Seminary.

He left church-based ministry to do community social service. For 12 years he was Executive Director at the Bridge Youth and Family Services in Palatine. During that time, he earned a Doctor of Divinity from Chicago Theological Seminary.



Rev. Dr. David Russell

In 1988, he returned to pastoral ministry as a Chaplain, first at St. Paul's House, Chicago, and then at the Hospice of Northeastern Illinois, Barrington. Having a desire to return to parish church, in 1991, he became pastor of Faith Community UCC, Vernon Hills, where he served for eight years. Then he served Congregational UCC, Arlington Heights, for four years. Next, he went to United Protestant Church (UCC and Methodist) in Grayslake for 10 years, until he retired in December 2013. In July 2014, he came out of that short retirement to serve as Interim Pastor of Little Home Church by the Wayside, Wayne, Ill.

Rev. Dr. David Russell says that his greatest passion as a pastor is supporting Christians and churches as they grow spiritually. When not serving the church community, he enjoys swimming, cooking, watching movies, good wine, dark chocolate, and, most of all, spending time with his family.

Rev. Russell said: "It is with joy and anticipation that I accept the privilege of serving the Illinois Conference in this interim capacity. I welcome the opportunity to connect with churches and pastors developing new relationships and maintaining old ones. Our network of the wider church deserves to be strong and spiritually alive. I personally look forward to meeting with many of you in the coming months."

52nd Illinois Conference Annual Celebration was inspirational

The theme of the 52nd Illinois Conference Annual Celebration was "Continuing Testament: Unleashing Our Ministry." The inspirational event was held June 17-18, 2016, at the Embassy Suites, East Peoria, Ill. All of the Illinois Conference associations were represented.

The keynote presenter, energizer facilitator and Friday evening preacher was the Rev. Traci Blackmon. She is Acting Executive Minister of Justice and Witness Ministries, United Church of Christ. Also, she serves as pastor of Christ the King UCC, Florissant, Mo. She has become nationally recognized as a voice for social change. Her words in her keynote address and her sermon corresponded with and motivated action on the Celebration's theme: "Continuing Testament: Unleashing Our Ministry."

Rev. Blackmon's Energizer was: Justice and Witness Ministries: A Call to Action. Much of her presentation and conversation was based on personal experience. For example, she immediately became involved when Michael Brown was shot in Ferguson, Mo., a few miles from her church. She believes that conversation must begin with a determination to listen and a willingness to be changed.

President Michael Linder presided at the Celebration. He became president March 17, 2016, when then President Vanessa Monroe moved to an interim Conference staff position. Rev. Kim Wood moved to Vice President. Early in the proceedings, Conference Minister Jorge Morales introduced and recognized the Illinois Conference staff, including Rev. Jonathan Knight and Rev. Dr. Melbalenia Evans, who recently retired. The Chalice Awards for significant contributions to the Illinois Conference were presented to Dr. Sammie Dortch, Rev. Betty Hornback, Teamous and Barbara Newberne and Rev. Robert Meisner.

Business of the Conference was carried out, including reports, 2017 budget, Necrology, and church and ordination anniversaries. Conference leadership was elected. The officers are: President, Michael Linder; Vice President, Rev. Kim Wood; Secretary, Kathy Hummel, and Treasurer, Len Adell.

The two days incorporated good fellowship, good words meant to lead to action, good music, good leadership and good participation by clergy and laity who chose to be present. The 2017 Annual Celebration will take place June 9-10, 2017, at Elmhurst College, Elmhurst, Ill. MARK YOUR CALENDAR.

--Jacqueline Moore



Conference President Michael Linder brings greetings.



Rev. Traci D. Blackmon, keynoter.



Rev. Traci D. Blackmon conducting an Energizer.



Conference Minister Jorge Morales (left) with Rev. Robert Meissner, Chalice award recipient.



Rev. Vanessa Monroe (from left), Teamous Newberne, Barbara Newberne (Chalice awardees), Rev. Vertie Powers and Rev. Dr. Melbalenia Evans.



Elected Conference officers and standing committee chairs.

News from Eastern and Western Association

The Western Association shares both appreciation and sadness for Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ in Chillicothe who will be sharing in their final worship service on Sunday, Aug. 14, 2016. It is a bittersweet time for the remaining members of the congregation who came to this decision about the viability of their ministry in the community. This decision comes as the church also celebrates their 125th anniversary of their founding.

We are grateful for the faithfulness of this ministry in its community, for the many Clergy and lay leaders who have made this a viable and vibrant ministry over its years of existence. We are grateful for those who have made the decisions to share some its remaining resources to continue support for ministries begun in the Chillicothe community.

The Eastern and Western Associations are looking forward to welcoming the Rev. Dr. John Dorhauer, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, at their Joint Fall Association meeting. The dates are Nov. 11-12, 2016, and the place will be St. Paul's UCC in Pekin. More details will be forthcoming, but the invitation is open for anyone in the Conference to join us for this special opportunity. Watch future editions of E-News for specific details of John's visit.

Illinois Conference Angola Partnership Team travels to Angola

The Angola Partnership Team is pleased to share that a delegation team will be visiting from the Illinois Conference in Angola from July 28 - Aug. 10, 2016. The team will be led by Rev. Mike Solberg of Union Church of Hinsdale, one of our original team members in the first delegation in

2005. Joining Mike on this journey will be his wife, Janine, and four members of Trinity UCC in Chicago! The focus of this delegation visit will be in the areas of education and health care. The work of the Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola, our partner church, revolves around Mission Stations that were originally set up around the country by Congregational missionaries prior to 30 years of colonial and civil war. Rebuilding these centers of social and religious life has been a priority of our partner church in the past 15 years. The members of our delegation team will be assessing ways that we can assist in helping to reestablish the priorities of educational advancement and improvement and access to health care around the county. We look forward to learning of the ways we can make an impact as a Conference in meeting these particular needs in the coming months. The delegation team will share their experience at a Partnership Team gathering on Aug. 21, 2016, at 3 p.m. at the Union Church of Hinsdale. All are welcome to attend and learn more about our partnership possibilities!

Pride in the year of Orlando

Early Sunday morning on June 12 in Orlando, Fla., 49 people were murdered because they gathered in a club called Pulse on "Latin Night." Like so many places in the LGBT community, Pulse offered celebration and refuge.

I was asked by Rev. Dr. Jorge Morales, Illinois Conference Minister, to lead the Opening Prayer of the Illinois Conference gathering in recognition of the Orlando events. Preparing the



In Memory of the Orlando 49

prayer, I was overwhelmed by the victims' stories. They were mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, spouses and partners, business owners, bouncers, students, accountants, lawyers, Universal Studio and Disney World employees, drag artists, and more.

I used the image of "The Body of Christ." The apostle Paul wrote that every part of this Body is crucial and plays a role in the Body of Christ. Most importantly, when one part suffers, all parts suffer. For me, the Body of Christ is a precious reality, sometimes fragile, sometimes amazingly strong and resilient. The reactions I received demonstrated the power of this reality in the face of grief, sadness, and wounded-ness.

The events also influenced the 2016 Chicago Pride Parade. The parade led off with photos of the 49 victims, each with the heading "Never forget!" There was a minute of silence in their honor before the parade started. The pre-parade worship service of the Chicago Coalition of Welcoming Churches, which includes many Illinois Conference churches, honored the members of the Body of Christ in Orlando.

The events in Orlando empowered all parade participants to demonstrate the power of love. Love over hate. Love over death. Love over all who would make us ashamed. For the Christian community, love triumphant over the hate coming from some of our Christian brothers and sisters.

I closed my prayer in Peoria with the third verse of the hymn "O Love That Will Not Let Me Go." It is a lesson learned in this Pride month in the year of Orlando:

"O Joy, that seeks us through our pain,
To You we cannot close our hearts;
We trace the rainbow through the rain,
And know the promise is not vain that You will never depart."

Groups celebrate saving of the Tower Hill Camp woods

On a beautiful summer morning, Tower Hill Camp welcomed celebrants from the Illinois Conference UCC and the surrounding camp community. The gathering came to celebrate a great achievement, a mission completed. After a three-year campaign to "Save the Woods", the Tower Hill woods had indeed been saved!



What began with a group of area residents raising concern about Tower Hill's need to log a wooded section of camp, grew into a major effort to preserve the acreage. Through a close working relationship among the Illinois Conference, Deer Creek Open Space Association, Chikaming Open Lands, Southwest Michigan Land Conservatory, and Berrien County Foundation, the "Save the Woods" project became a reality. Through the dedication and generous donation of individuals, churches, and organizations, the "Save the Woods" campaign became a success. Thirty-two acres of forest and wildlife habitat will forever remain in its natural state, to be enjoyed by campers and community alike.

Rev. Dr. Jorge L. Morales (from left), addressing the audience at Tower Hill Conservation Easement celebration and expressing gratitude for a very successful easement campaign: with him are Larry McCure and Douglas Pompey.

Through the dedication and generous donation of individuals, churches, and organizations, the "Save the Woods" campaign became a success. Thirty-two acres of forest and wildlife habitat will forever remain in its natural state, to be enjoyed by campers and community alike.

The celebration was hosted by Deer Creek Open Space Association. A wonderful brunch was served by the Tower Hill staff. Marshall Hall was transformed into a beautiful setting with natural decorations representing camp foliage. Illinois Conference Minister, Rev. Dr. Jorge Morales, opened the celebration with prayer and well wishes. Other presenters included Robert Beemer and Clyde Rode, Larry McCure, ODM Chair; and Douglas Pompey, Tower Hill Site Manager. Following the brunch, Bob Tatina led a tour of the newly-established Tower Hill Conservation Easement.

The conservation easement campaign benefits Tower Hill in many ways. In addition to preserving the beauty and integrity of the camp grounds, the project raised much needed funding. In turn for the agreement to conserve the land, Tower Hill received \$486,000. The Outdoor Ministries Committee is already working on how to steward these funds in the best interest of the camp and its guests. Strategic planning has initiated ideas for crucial renovation and innovation of this 93-year-old camp facility.

The celebration not only closed an amazing endeavor but also expressed the deep gratitude of the Illinois Conference for this extensive effort and the pledges of time and money from so many individuals, churches, and organizations. It is the hope of all who are committed that Tower Hill Camp may continue to minister to God's Creation as a place of retreat, respite and renewal.

The Illinois Conference Council votes on Wendy's boycott

The Illinois Conference Council has voted to be in solidarity with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Boycott of Wendy's fast food chain.

For 10 years the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, a farm-worker organization based in Immokalee, Fla., has been asking fast-food chain Wendy's to join the Fair Food Program. This partnership among growers, farm workers, and retailers is a worker-designed program governed by a Code of Conduct with a zero-tolerance policy for slavery and sexual harassment and a grievance procedure. But for 10 years, Wendy's has refused to join the Fair Food Program. So in March 2016, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers called a consumer boycott of Wendy's.



The Florida Conference at its Spring Gathering on April 29-30, 2016, endorsed the boycott. The United Church of Christ Board of Directors also endorsed the boycott of Wendy's.

Our Illinois Conference Council voted to endorse the boycott while meeting in Peoria on Saturday, June 18, 2016, at the Illinois Conference Annual Celebration.

We call on our pastors and congregations of the Illinois Conference to support the Immokalee Workers, to inform congregants not to eat or purchase Wendy's food products.

Summer update from the Environmental Task Force of the Illinois Conference UCC

*"By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."
(John 13:35)*

Actions of Love in Pursuit of Climate Justice

On May 15, the Illinois Conference was well represented at the "Break-Free from Fossil Fuels" protest held outside the BP Whiting Oil Refinery. Rev. Scott Oberle, along with several members of First Congregational UCC in Downers Grove and other members of the Illinois conference, UCC participated in this public event to be a visible sign of the urgent need to end the era of Fossil Fuels.

Speaking of being a visible prophetic sign of God's love in the world, the good and faithful members of Wellington Ave UCC dedicated their new Solar Panel installation at their worship celebration on June 19.

On June 21, we launched the internet radio program: Telling It Forward - hosted by Rev. Dr. Terry Gallagher. "Telling It Forward" is a ministry of Ecological Justice which uses the art of storytelling to envision the path forward to a sustainable future on this one Earth that we must share with all of God's Good Creation. "Telling It Forward" will use stories both ancient and new to convey the radical Gospel truth that our God has called us to living a life of compassionate sacrificial love. Each of the twice monthly 30-minute broadcast features current climate justice news and a special guest to share their personal stories of involvement and visions of the future. The initial program guest was the Rev. Jim Antal, Massachusetts Conference Minister, UCC. You can connect to current and past programs at the "Telling It Forward" face-book page or via the First Congregational UCC Family Network at <http://uccfn.org/radio.html>

Interested in getting involved?

Join the Environmental Task Force by e-mailing sinclairgallagher@hotmail.com.

Follow the [Environmental Task Force Facebook](#) page to stay updated with the latest

information.

LEEAP announces 2017 funding cycle

Our Conference Local Evangelism, Envisioning and Planting/LEEAP extends to our churches and associations an opportunity to request funding (in the form of loans and grants) for new church starts and the revitalization of existing congregations.

If you and/or your church wish to submit a request, please contact the Illinois Conference at (708) 344-4470; e-mail ilconfcarmen@gmail.com and request an application form. The application can also be downloaded by going to the Illinois Conference website (www.ilucc.org). The deadline for request for calendar year 2017 is Sept. 1, 2016.

A revitalization project must originate from the congregation and have broad congregational support. The project must provide a clear and compelling vision of how it will aid the church in discerning and/or implementing what God is calling the church to be and to do that is new and innovative.

LEEAP does not provide funding for existing budgets and programs, building accessibility, computers and equipment, and in-place staff (except for new church planters).

LEEAP does the evangelistic mission of the church through new church development and the revitalization of existing churches.

Download LEEAP funding process - criteria by [clicking here](#)

Download LEEAP 2017 Funding applications by [clicking here](#) or you can download in Word format by going to the Illinois Conference website at www.ilucc.org.

Note: Before you proceed to make a grant request and submit an application for funding, please make sure you have read the funding criteria and have spoken to Conference LEEAP staff.

150 hymnals are available

Westchester Community Church has 150 hymnals to donate to a church in need. The Hymnal for Worship and Celebration has a copyright 1986 by Word Music. Contact the church office if interested at (708)865-1282.

Leadership re-imagining donation acknowledgements

The Illinois Conference is in the midst of updating our accounting processes, which includes the revision of our letters of acknowledgement for contributions sent to the Conference. We are grateful for every gift that is shared with us, and it is important to us that our acknowledgment accurately reflects our gratitude. Confirmation of your gifts can be provided by contacting either Bill Serritella, Conference Controller at (708) 344-4470, or Tracy Diehl, Conference Bookkeeper at ilconftracy@gmail.com. Thank you for your patience during this time of transition.

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

Conference Minister Jorge Morales: ilconfjorge@gmail.com

Interim Associate Conference Minister (Stewardship and Church Vitality)

David Russell: ilconfdavid@gmail.com

Associate Conference Minister (Prairie\Western) Kathy Lawes: ilconfkathy@gmail.com

Associate Conference Minister (Eastern\Western) Tom Norwalk: ilconftom@gmail.com

Interim Associate Conference Minister (Fox Valley): Vanessa Monroe: ilconfvanessa@gmail.com

Associate Conference Minister (CMA) Vertie Powers: ilconfvertie@gmail.com

Conference Controller Bill Serritella: ilconfbill@gmail.com

Tower Hill Camp: towerhillcamp@gmail.com

Pilgrim Park Camp: odmregistrar@gmail.com

Illinois Conference support staff:

Naomi Else: ilconfnaomi@gmail.com

Carmen Torres: ilconfcarmen@gmail.com

Wayne MacPherson (CMA): ilconfwayne@gmail.com

Tracy Diehl (Prairie): ilconftracy@gmail.com

Connie Owens (Western): ilconfconnie@gmail.com

Accounting (Conf.): ilconftracy@gmail.com

Please visit the Illinois Conference website at www.ilucc.org.

The Illinois Conference now is on [Facebook](#); look for us.

Also, [online giving](#) now is available on the website.

THE ILLINOIS CONFERENCE UCC E-NEWSLETTER is published by the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ, 1840 Westchester Blvd., Suite 200, Westchester, IL 60154. The Rev. Jorge Morales, Conference Minister; Jacqueline L. Moore, Editor; Carmen Torres, Editorial Assistant. Copy may be sent to: ilconfcarmen@gmail.com.

This communication is made possible by your contributions to

Our Church's Wider Mission.