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## Message from the Interim Conference Minister

Rev. Justo González II

Gracias: It has been an honor to serve among you.

Like all things there is a beginning, a middle and an end. The lights are dimming on my time among you. Soon, the Reverend Molly Carlson, newly elected Settled Conference Minister, will team with you and others to move the Light of God forward. I know Molly. She will be a gift to the conference.



It has been an honor to serve among you. I thank you for your love, support, and profound welcome. And James and I am most grateful for how you embraced me during an excepted and unwelcome journey towards open heart surgery.

My time here has been joyful, frustrating, and challenging. I have had the time of my life. That does not mean that I embraced or enjoyed the political nature of the Illinois Conference or how a few people seem to enjoy creating chaos in an attempt to separate and divide you. I have, however, enjoyed meeting you, being in your congregations, having coffee, desserts, or a meal together. I am in awe of you and the gift that you are and have been with me. May you laugh more, celebrate and dance as God desires.

Let me repeat what I have been saying for the last two years. **There is no them and us. There is only us.** You are the Illinois Conference. If you do not like the direction of the conference then it is time to stand up, speak your truth and give your time, talent, and treasury to make sure that “we” are leading and not just a few. Apathy is not an option.

[Read More](#)

## I Am a Pastor

Rev. Kim Wood, Acting Associate Conference Minister

*I am a pastor.*

*I'm not perfect – far from it.*

*I make mistakes. I have flaws.*

*I don't have all the answers.*

*I am a pastor.  
I delight in your joy. I ache with your sorrow.  
I shed tears. And laugh uncontrollably.  
Sometimes I do both at the same time.*

*I am a pastor.  
Fully human – definitely not divine.  
Minister. Clergy. Chaplain. Preacher.  
The setting may be different, the tasks may be different  
But the call is very real...to serve and love faithfully in the name of  
Jesus the Christ,  
And to invite you to do the same.*



This is a time like no other we have known. I have said it so many times the words run the risk of ringing hollow, but I'll say it again: We are living in an unprecedented time. Navigating being church is an ongoing task, and the twists and turns continue to come at alarming rates.

[Read More](#)

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## Thank You Tracy for Your Many Years of Service

The Illinois Conference wishes to acknowledge that Tracy Diehl has been a phenomenal partner, an excellent bookkeeper, and a colleague that has served the Illinois Conference well.



Tracy began her journey with the United Church of Christ in 1998. She has worked as Executive Secretary at First Congregational UCC of DeKalb and as Secretary at Community Congregational UCC of Elburn and Association Assistant in the Prairie Association Office. Since 2010, she worked hand in hand with our Illinois Conference Controller as bookkeeper.

Tracy has moved on to other endeavors.

We Thank you Tracy Diehl for her years of service to the Illinois Conference.

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## Welcome to the Illinois Conference UCC Familia (Family) Karen M. Boyk, Bookkeeper

Karen M. Boyk joined our conference staff as the new Bookkeeper effective June 17, 2020.

Karen will be working closely with James Lee, the Manager of Financial Operations to perform accounting/bookkeeping duties and to provide our stakeholders with the most efficient accounting information, reporting and customer service.



Prior to joining the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ, Karen was the Fund Accounting Manager at Christian Brothers Investment Services, Inc. She has over 25 years of accounting, banking, and finance experience, having worked with many religious and not for profit organizations.

When Karen has free time, she loves spending time with her husband and two dogs hiking, fishing, and enjoying nature.

On behalf of the Illinois Conference of the UCC, Welcome.

## Risk Being Human

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

Ah, to be or not to be - human, that is. It seems simple because we already *are* human, but it's not a question that's as easy as it would seem.

There are so many facets to being human that we disregard or try to push away. So many feelings, thoughts, actions. They're all a risk. But what would it look like to take it on - to actually *risk being human*?



A while back, Richard Rohr, Thomas Keating, and some of the other great contemplatives of our era got together as they realized that they would not be around forever. They saw the need to begin thinking about passing the mantle to a new generation of contemplatives and to start the conversation about what the new iteration of contemplative thought and practice would look like and what its benefits would be. I have been blessed to be among those entrusted to receive that mantle and carry on the legacy.

Myself and two others - Kelly Deutsch and Amy Piatt - have been tasked with creating a webinar, podcast, virtual study space, and retreats around this theme: *Risk Being Human*.

[Read More](#)



### ... do you have a special memory to share?

Can you help me "share the memory"? I'm Mike Cusack from Pilgrim Faith Church (Oak Lawn, Ill.) helping with some fund-raising ideas. What we need is a memory of yours from Pilgrim Park or Tower Hill that has helped, changed, or enhanced your life. This "memory" needs to be a short 70-word (or so) snapshot of this memory. Can you share your memory with me? I'd rather not have memories shared on this page just yet, so please send them to me and we can e-mail / discuss. I can be reached at [mkcusack1@gmail.com](mailto:mkcusack1@gmail.com).

...do you have a special memory to share?

**Pilgrim Park  
Memory Stroll**

We are creating several fundraising advertising concepts to help Pilgrim Park.

The unforeseen absence of campers and activities for the past four months (and looking towards the remainder of the year) has created a financial deficit. What does Pilgrim Park mean to you, and what does it mean for your family?

We need your help... and your voice could be the motivation needed to help Pilgrim Park meet financial goals that are critical to keep our camp open for future generations. Please e-mail your special story / memory to: [mkcusack1@gmail.com](mailto:mkcusack1@gmail.com)

...do you have a special memory to share?

**Tower Hill  
Memory Stroll**

We are creating several fundraising advertising concepts to help Tower Hill.

The unforeseen absence of campers and activities for the past four months (and looking forward towards the end of the year) has created a financial deficit. What does Tower Hill mean to you, and what does it mean for your family?

We need your help... and your voice could be the motivation to help Tower Hill meet financial goals that are critical to keep our camp open for future generations. Please e-mail your special memory / story to: [mkcusack1@gmail.com](mailto:mkcusack1@gmail.com)

## “Out of the Box” Camp

Our children and youth campers won't be coming out to Pilgrim Park and Tower Hill for summer camp this year, so we're going to bring the camps to you!



We have developed an “[Out of the Box](#)” camp experience that will include daily hands-on devotions, daily lessons with activity, and some of your favorite camp swag. \$50.00 will provide a full week of learning, growing, and engaging with our faith.

Individuals can order “Out of the Box” camp kits for your children, your grandchildren, your neighbors. Churches can order “Out of the Box” camp kits for your Faith Formation program, as an alternative to Vacation Bible School, as outreach to your neighborhoods.

You can sign up and purchase at <https://pilgrimpark.campbrainregistration.com/>.

View "Out of the Box" contents [here](#).

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## Reopening Guidance for Faith Communities

[Faith and Health Partnerships](#) | [AdvocateAuroraHealth](#)

### Advocate Aurora Health Living Well Community Webinars

[Facility Sanitizing/Proper Cleaning Procedures](#). See [FAQ](#).

[Legal Liability in Re-Opening](#). See [FAQ](#).

[Capacity Management/Safe Distancing inside Facilities](#). See [FAQ](#).

### Centers for Disease Control Resources:

[Interim Guidance for Communities of Faith](#), such as ways to promote social distancing, promote healthy hygiene practices and intensify cleaning, disinfection and ventilation.

[Checklist for Community and Faith Leaders](#) to prepare for the possibility of a COVID-19 outbreak in their communities.

[FAQs for Administrators and Leaders at Community- and Faith-Based Organizations](#)

[Reopening Guidance for Cleaning and Disinfecting Public Spaces, Workplaces, Businesses, Schools, and Homes](#)

### Humanitarian Disaster Institute Resources:

[Deciding When & How You Should Return to Church In Person: A Practical Guide for Church Members](#)

[Guide to Reopening Church Services](#), a research-based resource that offers a step-by-step approach for resuming in-person ministries.

[Church Reopening Checklist](#)

Blog post: [Reopening with Research](#)

[The Black Church in Action Against Racism During COVID-19](#)

### Additional Resources:

[Considerations for Returning to In-person Worship](#), Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Sojourners: [8 Questions Your Church Needs to Ask Before Reopening](#)

Slate: [Services Will Be a Completely "Touchless Experience": How churches are thinking through their reopening plans](#)

In addition, we have compiled a variety of resources that we hope will be helpful as you plan to welcome congregants back and resume your faith community programming and activities. [See "Safely Opening Our Doors" here.](#)

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## Illinois Conference Pandemic Relief Loan Program

### The Loan Program Basics

The United Church of Christ Cornerstone Fund Pandemic Relief Loan program is available to churches in participating Conferences, including the Illinois Conference.



While loan amounts and terms can vary by Conference, the Illinois Conference program is offering a limited number of 12-month, interest-only loans of up to \$5,000 at a rate of 2.50%. Loan applications are required and are due by July 15, 2020.

[Download Application](#)

[View additional information on the Cornerstone Fund](#)

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## Developing a Case Statement (Extravagant Generosity)

A case statement can help congregational leaders name the reasons to support their congregation. Andrew Warner and guests Dave Sigmund and Kim Vasko of the UCC's Three Great Loves initiative will review the concept of a case statement and describe key questions pastors and leaders can use to articulate the case for support of their church. While the discussion connects to the Three Great Loves Stewardship Materials, you can use this introduction to a case statement with any annual campaign.



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## Open and Affirming Webinar Series Returns

Our webinars are designed both for Open and Affirming congregations and for churches taking their first steps towards an ONA covenant. We're offering eight webinars as part of our "Summer of Hope" program. All webinars are at 6:00 p.m. Central Time and run for about 90 minutes. Webinars use the Zoom application. Dates and a link to the registration page for each webinar are provided below.

ONA	ONA	1-TO-1	ONA	TRANS	TRANS	TRANS
101	AND THE BIBLE	CONVERSATIONS ABOUT ONA	201	101	201	FAMILY

ONA webinars can help your church grow in numbers and spirit

Contact Andy Lang at [ed@openandaffirming.org](mailto:ed@openandaffirming.org) or Kimi Floyd Reisch at [ona@openandaffirming.org](mailto:ona@openandaffirming.org) for more information.

[Click here for registration for each webinar](#)

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## How to Talk About Planned Giving During Difficult Time

United Church Funds

This is a time of great emotional and financial upheaval that we're all facing. You may wonder if now is the appropriate time to have a conversation with members of your congregation about planned giving. In this three-minute video, Don Hill of Don Hill Consulting shares four elements to keep in mind when approaching members of your congregations.



[Click here](#) for additional information.

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## In the Media

[Thousands gathered for marches and other events throughout Chicago to commemorate Juneteenth. Here's how the day unfolded.](#)

[Congregation honors church's 99-year-old 'institution'](#)

[Here are some Chicago-area religious services to stream online](#)

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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 July

July 1: [Abuse Prevention: Creating a Safe Environment](#), 1:00 p.m. Central. Join Insurance Board for our Live Webcast. Learn about resources and new tools to protect those in your care.

July 7: [Psychological First Aid Training for Faith Community Leaders](#), 1:00 p.m. Psychological First Aid is designed to equip faith leaders with the skills they need to provide supportive and practical assistance to children, adults and families who have recently experienced tragedy and traumatic events. If you have questions, contact [Amy McNicholas](#), Faith and Mental Health Specialist, Advocate Aurora Health.

July 8: [A Clergy Conversation on Spiritual Care Response for a Global Pandemic](#), 10:00-11:30 a.m. The webinar will be led by Rev. Dr. Danielle Buhuro, an ACPE Certified Educator currently serving at Advocate South Suburban and Trinity Hospitals. This webinar will explore critical questions for providing healing and liberating spiritual care and theological reflection around COVID-19.

July 18: [Conflict Transformation Skills for Churches](#): Sessions include "Finding Renewal in Conflict" and "How to be Effective when People are Angry," among others. Groups are especially encouraged to register for this event!

July 24-25, 2020: [Virtual Gathering: 2020 National Youth Event](#). Many of our original NYE presenters are excited to be able to put together meaningful content which will be shared via the web and will include live chat features during and after each premier. More details and registration are soon to come and will be found on the [NYE website](#).

July 21: [Healthy Congregations](#): Participants will learn how to keep anxiety within their congregations from becoming infectious, put limits on invasive behavior, manage reactivity, focus on strengths, and more! Members of groups can save \$40-\$50 per person, compared to the regular individual rate, for any of these three events!

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## Update on Illinois Conference Offices Gradually Re-Opening

Illinois Conference staff has returned to the office on a limited basis starting Wednesday, July 1. Half of the staff are in the office on their schedule days to allow for physical distancing. When not in the office, staff will continue to work from their homes. The office will remain closed to the public until further notice. Please remember you can always reach us by [e-mail](#) and let us know how we can be helpful.

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## Illinois Conference New Beginnings E-Blast Update

There will only be one edition of the New Beginnings E-blast in July. We look forward to connecting with you again in August!

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