



NEW BEGINNINGS E-BLAST



 JOIN OUR MAILING LIST

Can We Double the Strengthen the Church Offering?

Rev. Andrew Warner, CFRE, Generosity Outreach Officer and Office of Philanthropy, Technology, Identity, & Communication (OPTIC) United Church of Christ

Financial advisors always say, “past performance is no guarantee of future results.” As a philanthropic advisor, I’m ready to make that saying true about the Strengthen the Church Offering. We can all see the past performance: Strengthen the Church generates fewer donations than any of our other special offerings. But, if we work on it, we can do better this May.

The Strengthen the Church Offering – which conferences and the national setting equally share – provides crucial funding for innovating programming and initiatives. The case for this offering goes to the very heart of our mission as conferences and the national setting: the local church. We can make this case to our congregations and friends!

You might consider the following to get the word out so we can double the Strengthen the Church Offering.

- promoting materials to congregational leaders: [Strengthen the Church Offering 2021- May 23 worship service](#) and general information: [Strengthen the Church](#)
- a 1-3 minute recorded video about the use of STC funds in your conference to share with congregations.
- an e-mail appeal using your own donate page in the week beforehand.

Need help to apply the message about this offering in your conference contact me at (414) 758-6233 or at Warnera@ucc.org.

Illinois Conference Employment Opportunities

The Illinois Conference is hiring three support staff positions to be located at the Conference Offices in Westchester. Please share these job descriptions within your church communities and with individuals who might have an interest. Familiarity with UCC is preferred. Letters of interest and current resumes should be submitted to Rev. Molly Carlson at ilconfmolly@gmail.com by Friday, May 14.

Support Staff for
Operations

Support Staff for
Administrative
Assistance

Support Staff for
Communications and
Technology

“As I See It”

Rev. Melody L. Seaton, Stewardship Team Ministry Chair

While gathering clothing and other items to share with my local social service agency, I kept feeling it wasn't enough. But what was enough? I thought about asking family and friends to donate with me and that would be good. However, I soon realized that wasn't the reason for my feelings. I could add a financial donation and I'm sure it would be needed and appreciated, but again this wasn't satisfying my uneasiness. It wasn't long before I realized this was “Something For God To Do!” So, I stopped packing up the items and sent those feelings to this place in my mind that would allow the Holy Spirit to deliver from my heart the answer. And just like clockwork, the answer came when I wasn't focused on it.



As I resumed packing each item, it was no longer just things I had no more use for; they were again the items I once cherished. So, as they were placed in boxes and bags, I prayed for the people who would discover them. I saw women wearing my clothing to church or work and I thanked God. I saw babies wearing my grandchildren's outgrown clothing and I blessed the Lord. I saw families enjoying meals created from the appliances and I was humbled. There was a time my children and I were these people and now I could pass God's provision on.

³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Matthew 25 NRSV

Go Find Your Waterfall

Rev. Brandyn Simmons

During my sabbatical, I've been afforded the blessing of having some great hikes and seeing some great sights: Crestone, CO, Mesa Verde, Great Sand Dunes National Park, Royal Gorge, Rio Grande Gorge, and much more. As I have made my way around, somewhat planned, somewhat letting the Spirit (and my whims) guide me, I have found some real gems.



Climbing the highest sand dune in Great Sand Dunes National Park was like climbing a mountain that gave way under your feet with each step. Two steps forward and one step back for 750 feet. But oh, was it worth it.

Along the way, there were many times that we figured we had gone far enough and seen all there was to see. The winds were blowing fiercely, painfully pounding sand into any exposed skin. There were times when we felt like we might get blown off, but we kept on going.

[Read More](#)



A scholarship for a child in need, the best investment you can make

A special feature at our camps is God's mailbox. Children of all ages write down their thoughts and leave them to God. These messages are a testimony of the closeness our children feel when they are here at camp and surrounded by nature. Many of these messages start with a simple approach "thank you, God, for..." and some are heartbreaking asking God to "please help my (friend, mother, cousin, etc.)"

God's mailbox



The value of camp is a life changed, but for many parents sending a child to summer camp is not possible as it was not financially feasible. Your scholarship contribution creates an awesome camp experience a reality for those who otherwise would not be able to attend. Please consider the gift of a camp scholarship to a child in need, please help us help a child. This can be the best investment you will ever make!

Questions? Contact (815) 447-2390 or e-mail odmregistar@gmail.com.

[Visit Illinois Outdoor Ministries](#)

Call for Grant Writers

When Rev. Traci Blackmon addressed the Illinois Conference in March, she reminded us that not all feel called to take to the streets but that members of our congregations can respond as they feel called to witness for justice and peace.

Do you have members of your congregations who are called to write grants? There are various sources of funds available for example, the American Rescue Plan that can be used for a variety of community-based projects and programs that can promote community, justice, and peace. Grants can be made for projects of individual congregations, for the Chicago Metropolitan Association (CMA), and for the Illinois Conference. Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) Qualification applications are essential for the state of Illinois grants, so expertise with these applications is especially useful.

If you have names of willing and skilled (and especially successful) grant writers, please contact leaders of the CMA Justice and Witness team: Rev. Harriet Dart (harriardt@gmail.com) or Nancy Heil (nancyjo336@gmail.com).

General Synod 33 News

We are ready to journey together into our first-ever virtual General Synod on July 11 – 18, 2021, where spirits will be uplifted, and connections to the Divine strengthened. Hearts and minds will be opened to the issues that inform the development of Resolutions, and knowledge and skills will be honed through workshops. Actions will be taken to make the world a better place.



Training Opportunities and Resources

Lawful Assembly Podcast

Rev. Craig B. Mousin, Wellington Avenue UCC, Chicago, Associate Pastor for Immigrant Justice and DePaul University Ombudsperson

A podcast about the intersection of law, religion, and activism. It is hosted by lawyer and activist Rev. Craig B. Mousin, founder and former Director of the Midwest Immigrant Rights Center and an Adjunct Faculty member at DePaul University's College of Law and The Grace School of Applied Diplomacy.

Recent Episode 13: A Call to Resettle Refugees

Funeral Assistance for COVID-19 Related Funerals

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

FEMA is accepting applications for funeral expenses paid after Jan. 20, 2020, for deaths caused by COVID-19. They are only accepting applications by phone. Online applications are not accepted.

You may visit [COVID-19 Funeral Assistance](#) for information about the program. After you read the information and gather the necessary documents, call 1 (844) 684-6333 to apply for this assistance. The phone line is open Monday through Friday, from 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET. At this time, there is no deadline to apply for COVID-19 Funeral Assistance.

COVID-19 Funeral Assistance

Pacific Asian American Ministries Sunday information

United Church of Hyde Park, Chicago

The United Church of Hyde Park in Chicago would like to share their Sunday materials from PAAM (Pacific Asian American Ministries). They hope this service could encourage more UCC congregations to integrate PAAM into their regular ministries.

[PAAM service video](#)

[Hymn: See the birds as they fly / □□ □□ □□ □□ / □□□□□□□□](#)
(English, Korean, Taiwanese)

[Reflection](#) (based on the experience from a Korean member)

Please contact Charing Wei-Jen Chen, Ph.D. Student, Chicago Theological Seminary, if you have any questions or concerns at cilcpy@gmail.com.



Mental Health Sunday: May 16

United Church of Christ Mental Health Network and The United Church of Canada

As the month of May approaches, many congregations are preparing for Mental Health Sunday on May 16, part of the designation of May as Mental Health Awareness Month. To assist in your liturgical preparation, we offer this new resource, Radical Belonging: Mental

This downloadable resource, available in both a PDF and a large print Word document, is for any congregation of any denomination that wishes to become a place of radical belonging. It was created in prayer and partnership between the United Church of Christ Mental Health Network and The United Church of Canada, with generous contributions by Rev. Dr. Sarah Lund, the United Church of Christ's Minister for Disabilities and Mental Health Justice. ...

[Visit Mental Health Sunday to download Radical Belonging](#)

UCC Grant Assistance is Available

Pension Boards - United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCMBA)

Each year, the United Church Board for Ministerial Assistance (UCMBA), the philanthropic arm of the Pension Boards, administers direct support for the servants of our church who may find themselves in need of financial relief.

Eligible UCC members and their spouses/partners can receive assistance in the following ways:

- [Pension Supplementation](#)
- [Health Benefits Supplementation](#)
- [Emergency Grants](#)

For questions and eligibility criteria for the above grants, please contact Josefina Wallen-Bell, Grants Administrator, at (800) 642-6543, ext. 2714 or jwallenbell@pbucc.org.

[Click here for additional Ministerial Assistance](#)

Attend organizing training and get involved in building racial and gender equity

Community Renewal Society - The Policy & Organizing Team

Community Renewal Society (CRS) is happy to announce a host of virtual events in May aimed at engaging our community.

[LBGTQIA+ Work Training](#) - Saturday, May 8 at 9:00 a.m.

[Art Confronting Injustice](#) - Monday, May 10 at 7:00 p.m.

[Building a Faith In Action Team Training](#) - Saturday, May 15 at 9:00 a.m.**

[Leader and Volunteer Meeting](#) - Thursday, May 20 at 6:00 p.m.

[Introduction To Organizing Training](#) - Saturday, May 22 at 9:00 a.m.**

***The cost for this training is \$25 for individuals from CRS Member Congregations and \$35 for individuals from Non-Member Congregations. Check to see if your congregation is a member or learn more about membership.*

In the Media

[With a verdict, troubled reflections](#)

[Whatever the pandemic decisions, educators deserve our praise and thanks](#)

[SUSTAINABILITY: Imani Green Health Advocates](#)

Employment Opportunities

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

[First Congregational UCC in Elgin seeks Administrative Assistant](#)

[Off the Pews seeks Executive Director](#)

[Christ Church UCC in Des Plaines seeks Church Administrative Assistant](#)

Conference and UCC Calendar for May

May 1: [World Labyrinth Day at Kimball Avenue Church Oasis](#), 9:00 a.m. Masks required, social distancing protocols followed. The Oasis is ADA Accessible.

May 1: [Chicago Metropolitan Association Spring Meeting](#), 12:00 p.m.-2:00 p.m. via Zoom. CMA Spring Meeting Documents: [CMA Ballot Spring 2021](#)

May 1: [World Labyrinth Day at St. Luke's Christian Community Church, Morton Grove](#), 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. church parking lot.

May 2: [Uptown Rally Against AAPI Racism](#), 12:00 p.m. at Buddhist Temple of Chicago, 1151 W Leland Ave, Chicago.

May 5: [Collective Healing: the Saving Power of Community \(Roundtable Offerings\)](#), 12:00 p.m. A Just Harvest invites you to a call to awareness. Moving past the injustice and trauma of 2020 and instead toward abundance, healing, and change will require all of us. The healing work we must all do together will be discussed by Keynote Speaker Rev. Traci Blackmon and Rev. Dr. Danielle Buhuro, Richard Wallace, and three more mystery panelists.

May 5: [State of Global Racial Justice](#), 1:00 p.m. via Zoom. Sponsored by the United Church of Christ.

May 5: [Stronger Together as One Conference. The best conversations to learn from each other](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. Rev. Dr. Thom Parrott-Sheffer, Chair of the Tuthill Commission, will be our guest speaker. Meeting ID: 899 3000 2174, Passcode: 965913, dial by your location: (312) 626 6799 (Chicago).

May 10-14: [2021 Courageous Church Summit - 20 Presenters Over 5 Days](#), via Zoom. Sponsored by FaithLead: Convergence Online Learning 2021. Reimagining Our Common Ground for the Collective Good.

May 12: [Stronger Together as One Conference. The best conversations to learn from each other](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. Rev. Michelle Hughes, Project Director for Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations (TPIRC) will be our guest speaker. Meeting ID: 899 3000 2174, Passcode: 965913, dial by your location: (312) 626 6799 (Chicago)

May 19: [Stronger Together as One Conference. The best conversations to learn from each other](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. Rev. Lorrie C. Reed, Ph.D., Executive Director for School for Ministry Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Illinois and Wisconsin will be our guest speaker. Meeting ID: 899 3000 2174, Passcode: 965913, dial by your location: (312) 626 6799 (Chicago)

May 22: [Bowen Family Systems Theory Educational Group for Religious Leaders](#) (course begins). Your journey companions are the Rev. Dr. Penny Taylor, LCSW, and the Rev. Dr. Bill Ressler, LCSW from the Center to Awaken Kindness.

May 23: [Strengthen the Church \(STC\) suggested offering date](#). The Strengthen the Church (STC) Offering reflects the shared commitment of people across the United Church of Christ to cooperatively build up the UCC.

May 25: [What Does it Mean to be a Spiritual Leader During Times of Crisis?](#) Six Monthly Sessions on the 4th Tuesday of the Month, beginning May 25, from 1:00-3:00 p.m. (May 25, June 22, July 27, Aug. 24, Sept. 28, Oct. 26). Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) Educators from Advocate Aurora Health invite you to an opportunity to reflect on our times and what it means to be a leader.

May 26: [Stronger Together as One Conference. The best conversations to learn from each other](#), 3:00 p.m. via Zoom. Meeting ID: 899 3000 2174, Passcode: 965913, dial by your location: (312) 626 6799 (Chicago)

Upcoming Events

July 8-10: [United Church of Christ Musicians Association Conference 2021: Brave New World](#), This conference will be offered in an all-virtual format. [Registration](#) is open!

July 11-18: [2021 General Synod 33 - Rooted in Love](#). Registration opens on May 1, 2021.

Update on Illinois Conference Offices

Illinois Conference staff has returned to the office on a limited basis. 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.

Visit our website



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THE ILLINOIS CONFERENCE UCC E-BLAST is published by the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ, 1840 Westchester Blvd., Suite 200, Westchester, IL 60154. The Rev. Molly Carlson, Conference Minister; Carmen Torres, Editor. Copy may be sent to: ilconfcarmen@gmail.com.

This communication is made possible by your contributions to

Our Church's Wider Mission

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