



Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

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January 2, 2026

Greetings to our Western Association Churches!

Your Western Association

Council is pleased to announce the opening of the application cycle for the annual Leonhart Grant in 2026.

The Helen Leonhart Fund originated with a generous bequest which awards annual grants to provide assistance with funding new projects, ministries, and initiatives in our Western Association congregations and related church ministries and organizations. Many churches in our Association have applied after identifying needs in their communities to which they creatively responded with assistance from this fund. Now is your opportunity to do likewise and discern how your congregation might be able to live into new callings and serve in your community with the help of additional funding through the Leonhart Fund. You can find additional information on this fund and its origin on the Illinois Conference website.

The timeline for the 2026 Leonhart Fund grant cycle:

- January: New link available for Leonhart Fund application on Illinois Conference website. Hard copies of all information will also be mailed to WA congregations.
- **March 1: Applications are due**
- March: Leonhart Committee meets to discuss and make recommendations.
- March Council meeting: Western Association Council will act on Leonhart Committee recommendations. Grantees notified by email.
- April: Checks requested from Conference Office.
- **Spring Association meeting: Grantees will receive their checks, be introduced, and will offer short presentations on how they will use the funds.**

As you begin discernment regarding your application, it is important to highlight that these grants are specifically intended to be used as seed money for a new project that your congregation is envisioning and imagining. We cannot wait to see the new ways God is leading and calling you in your ministries!

With peace and grace,

Your Western Association Council Leonhart Committee:

Bob Meinershagen

Ken Harding

Rev. Lauren Padgett

Irseula Webster