

**Illinois Conference Annual Celebration**  
**November 3 & 4, 2023 at**  
**Yorkville Congregational Church**

**Call to Order** – the meeting on November 3<sup>rd</sup> was called to order at 12:45 pm

Rev. Molly Carlson opened the meeting with a prayer and words of greetings. Jon Prain recognized with appreciation David Holsten for his work as the past Conference President. The following people were also recognized: Rev. Terrill Murff for his leadership in Program, Innovation and Events (PIE), and for the team who helped organize and put together this gathering. Rev. Kathy Lawes for her work on Committee on Ministry (CoM) and leading Prairie and Western Associations. Rev. Shernell Edney Stilley for her work on Pastoral Transitions and leading Fox Valley and Eastern Associations. Rev. Yvonne Delk was greeted, welcomed, and recognized for bringing to the Conference's attention our failing to recognize the Fifth Stream of how we became the UCC. Jon Prain was thanked for his hard work as current Conference President and guests who are here today were recognized. A plug to visit the exhibit tables and buy Rev. Delk's book was mentioned.

Then Rev. Elizabeth Hartung was introduced who welcomed all to her church and greeted the volunteers and gave the logistics of the church building.

Rev. Carol Lange of the Annual Celebration Planning Committee (ACPC) reminded late comers to check in and get a "swag" bag with schedules, etc. She gave directions to the different workshops and said we would reconvene at dinner tonight and we would start tomorrow at 8:30 am with our keynote speaker, Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson.

At dinner, our OCWM partners were introduced and gave speeches. Rev. Waltrina Middleton announced CRS helped to sponsor the Annual Celebration and talked about the many firsts women have accomplished in the United Church of Christ. Rev. Molly Carlson, the Illinois Conference Minister, and committee members were all thanked and congratulated on a successful meeting.

There was a presentation and recognition of Church anniversaries, churches that have closed in the past year. Also new ordinations, ordination anniversaries, retired clergy and new clergy positions filled. Rev. Carol Currier-Frighetto was congratulated on her retirement. Rev. Dr. Bobbie McKay was given the Chalice award along with praises for all her hard work. Finally, the Annual Celebration committee was thanked for all their hard work on this year's celebration.

Rev. Shernell Edney Stilley gave the closing prayer and benediction before we were dismissed for the evening.

**Saturday, November 4, 2023**

**Call to Order** – Rev. Jon Prain called the gathering to order at 8:30 am.

Rev. Kathy Lawes gave the opening prayer.

Rev. Molly Carlson introduced our keynote speaker, Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson whose topic was Reimagine! the church based on the Conference’s theme of Repentance, Rekindling, Renewal.

Since we had some new people join since yesterday, Rev. Jon Prain introduced Rev. Molly Carlson, Our IL Conference Minister, thanked Rv. Shernell Edney Stilley, Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, and Rev. Kathy Lawes. He noted that our past General Minister, Rev. John Dorhauer was present and thanked David Holston and Rev. Chuck Maney for their service to the Illinois Conference as past Conference Presidents.

The business portion of the meeting was opened at 9:50 am.

**Quorum** – Nancy Fraley announced it was established there were 125 voting delegates from all five (5) Associations present and a total of 169 registered attendees, not including any last minute walk-ins.

Jon introduced the secretary Rev. Nancy Fraley, Rev. Dr. Thom Bower as parliamentarian, if elected, and Juanita Bradley as Vice President.

There were some test votes done since the meeting was hybrid and Jon wanted to make sure everyone as able to vote if they had that privilege.

Motion to appoint Rev. Dr. Thom Bower as parliamentarian for the 2023 business portion of the Annual Celebration. Bill McCarthy moved, and Selena Blackwell seconded

**AC 11-04 01                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

Motion to adopt the special rules for the 2023 Annual Celebration and business meeting. Selena Blackwell moved, and Wilbert Watkins seconded.

**AC 11-04 02                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

Motion to adopt a covenant of hospitality and welcoming. Catherine Erwin moved, and Connie Leader seconded.

**AC 11-04 03                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

Motion to appoint Rev. Pam Keckler from Trinity in Deerfield as committee chair, assisted by Wilbert Watkins from Pilgrim in Oak Park and Ken Webster from St. Paul's in Pekin to serve as tellers if there was a need to count votes. Mark Binder moved, and Catherine Erwin seconded.

**AC 11-04 04                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

Jon announced there's a slight adjustment to the agenda to approve 2022 financial report as it's already with the auditors. He would like to add two (2) business items; to grant various people voice without vote and add Stewardship report before the Conference president's report.

Motion to accept the agenda as amended and corrected. Bob Poor moved, Rev. David Antieau seconded.

**AC 11-04 05                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

Motion to grant voice without vote to all registered persons. Bill McCarthy moved, Bob Tallitsch seconded.

**AC 11-04 06                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

Motion to approve minutes of 2022 Annual Celebration meeting. Jon asked for additions or clarifications.

Ernie Potter had a clarification – on page 9 under General Operating Budget for 2023 where it starts “those budgets include...“a beginning wage of \$20. An hour”... for staff which Conference Council approved. There wasn't a raise, only a beginning wage.

Motion to adopt the minutes as corrected. David Holston moved, Rev. Carol Currier-Frighetto seconded.

**AC 11-05 07                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

Motion to receive and place on file written reports of Conference staff, officers, committees, task forces, teams, and similar entities. Rev. Ted Engelsdorfer moved; Rick Peterson seconded

**AC 11-06 08                      vote on above motion                      PASSED**

**Report of Stewardship committee** presented by Kay Quinney-Burnard and Larry McCure Kay stated that OCWM is the largest funder of the Illinois Conference and supported by Friends of the Conference, grants, and fundraising. She thanked all the churches for their participation and reminded us that we used to have five (5) Associate Conference Ministers, a Conference Minister and a larger Support Staff. Even though support has shrunk due to less members and pledges in local churches, the work of the Conference has not changed, and is even more important now. As members of the body of Christ, we are all needed to spread the good news of

Jesus Christ and be disciples; to go out and share the love, forgiveness, and compassion, mercy and grace of Jesus Christ. She asked all to ask their churches to consider giving just a little bit more to the Conference. She suggested each church that is able to give \$500 more a year for a total of \$110,000. which would greatly help. She stated that if any church was unsure about what OCWM funds do for the local churches, the committee is willing to come and do a presentation. She acknowledged that some churches are unfamiliar with all the benefits of being part of the Illinois Conference does for the local church. She urged all to sign up for the weekly and monthly newsletters on the Conference website and to make sure the Conference office has the correct information. She said we are stronger together and by getting to know the other churches in our area, we can combine our mission and visions to be stronger together. Larry then spoke and encouraged us all to listen to our keynote speaker who advocated for embracing the new and letting go of the old.

### **Report of the Conference President**

Jon referred back to the January Conference Council meeting where there were motions to cut spending due to projected budget deficit of \$400,000. With an additional \$100,000 for unpaid bills but the Council was faithful, God provided! The Conference received two (2) generous gifts for a total of \$538 thousand and another from the US Government COVID relief fund of \$93K. Additionally, one of the properties that had been on the rolls for 15 years was sold! He reiterated that the Conference still needs OCWM funds from the local churches.

He went on to admit his shortcomings but asked that we trust each other to have good intentions. That we stand up against bad attitude and intent and do what is right and what the church is called to do. Look forward to what can be and make amends because we're stronger together. We should step up, help, and pray for each other. Of the 219 churches in our Conference, if each church could pray for 7-8 churches every day, we'd all be prayed for. It's hoped to have a list out in January. He proposed another January Conference Council meeting on an anti-racism plan and setting goals. Asked us each to give \$100 to Friends of the Conference to give more support to staff.

### **Report of the Conference Minister, Rev. Molly Carlson**

Molly started in August of 2020 when our Conference was in crisis and financials were a mess. They've done amazing work together and project we're about 95% done but there's still more work to do. But financials are only one piece of the puzzle, the next stages will be to make some decisions. There's a lot of talk about lack of trust wherever she's gone and said trust is a big issue. Since she's started, it's clear governance structure and decision making are important issues. There's a hard-working team on governance structure to reimagine a new way to strengthen our Conference. They've actively held "listening sessions" and invite conversations around the Conference. She stressed it's okay to try new things and fail, then modify and implement. To let go of fear and reimagine.

We also had a staffing crisis, we currently have ½ the staff we had 10 years ago. They can't do all the same things so have to decide what we will or can do and what we can't do. She praised

the staff for all their hard work and finding creative ways to serve the churches and pastors. She said the staff has been in discernment and proposed some ideas that have yet to be implemented.

Molly mentioned we have about a dozen covenant partners willing to work with us. One from the National setting is here, Andy DeBraber who tells us that we must present positives to others when asking for additional funding resources. We have made improvements and have a story to tell, now we must fund the programs.

All churches are stronger together when they work with the Conference, but Molly understands the reality is the churches don't recognize that. She encouraged us to reach out to the Stewardship Committee to find out what the Conference does for us and how we can work together. They have a great program they can share with the local church. If something is broken, it's up to all of us to fix the covenant we have with each other.

Molly invites requests to appear at churches and said she's been to over 60 of them already and looks forward to visiting the rest. She stated she looks at how she spends her time through five (5) culture changes which were developed as she spoke to various people in the Conference. These are: 1) trust and transparency, 2) broad engagement, 3) develop a culture of innovation and experimentation, 4) make steady progress, 5) develop a culture of optimism and vision. Another program she wants to work on is becoming an antiracist church and said it's an ongoing work. **She asked us to imagine by working together through the 6 lens how we could improve.** If we work on our brokenness and build up and work together, we can do more because God has more work for us to do.

### **Presentation by Camp Managers; Mitch Kloster and Tracy Hellman**

Mitch started off introducing himself and said he's been manager at Pilgrim Park for 15 years as of October 1, 2023. The camp started in 1946 with 11 acres and has grown to 155 acres. Tracy introduced herself and said Tower Hill just celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It started in 1923 when society was coming out of the 1918 pandemic. She tries to honor the forebears who weren't just keeping something going but building something new. When someone attends camp, they're stepping into the sacred and can learn to recognize the sacred all around.

Youth camps are a great learning experience and discover they're not alone. They learn independence and new skills and can be leaders. The camps offer a lot of different activities that help them have fun and learn new skills and lifelong friends. Tracy invited clergy to attend *Praycations* and promoted how beneficial they are. They've been so successful; the camps are going to find ways to continue to keep them going.

Mitch and Tracy talked that being in nature and worshipping outdoors are important; it makes one feel connected to nature and God. About 1,300 people from other groups besides churches use the camps also. Mitch presented some hopes they have for improving the camps, including using solar. When religious organizations use solar, they can recoup about 50% back. The camps can be an experimental site for that.

Tracy and Mitch stressed how the parks have had a meaningful impact on people and the Conference. They want to hear how they can offer different programs and continue to be relevant. They want to hear what our dreams and hopes are, so don't be afraid to contact them.

### **Nominating Committee report and Elections**

Eric Quinney-Burnard said he's been doing this for the last four (4) years and started before the COVID Pandemic. As he's reached out to people, he feels a lot of people won't call back because his area code is 508. Yet when he does reach them, he has a nice long conversation to build relationships and connect their gifts with a particular ministry. He wants to empower people to listen to God and ask themselves where does their gift fit into ministry? Once they understand the big picture, they get excited and feel empowered to do ministry. Therefore, he asked for a motion to approve the list of names presented.

Jon asked if there were any nominations from the floor, hearing there were none, Bob Tallitsch moved to close nominations and Mary Newcomb seconded.

**11-04-09**

**Vote on above motion**

**PASSED**

Jon asked for a motion to adopt the list of names as presented in the Annual Celebration handbook for nomination. Bill McCarthy moved, and Selena Blackwell seconded.

**11-04-10**

**vote on above motion**

**PASSED**

### **Financial reports and discussion**

Treasurer Cristine Vesley presented the Financial, Administration and Business (FAB) report as found on page 57-58 on the Annual Celebration handbook. The committee had eight (8) goals they wanted to accomplish this year and achieved seven (7) and deferred one (1). She said she's proud to say they have reduced overdue debt and are current with payments to agencies. The committee has implemented several new policies and created a sustainable draw from funds. They have reviewed the financial policy and procedure handbook and will continue to keep it updated. One way the Conference has cut expenses; it's not in the property business and revised the automobile policy so the Associate Conference Ministers (ACM's) now own their own cars, among other measures.

A goal they wanted to accomplish was to hire a new permanent financial manager but are currently in an audit and decided to wait until mid-2024. It was difficult to find a professional audit firm who was willing to work with a non-profit but did hire Porte Brown who is currently doing a deep dive into the books for 2022. The expectation is they will do a financial review for the next two (2) years with another full audit after that.

Bob Poor presented very quickly the budgets for 2023 as well as the proposed budget for 2024. (See handbook pages 18-37).

Jon asked for a motion to approve the 2023 financial reports as presented. David Antieau so moved and Bob Tallitsch seconded.

**11-04-11**

**vote on above motion**

**PASSED**

Some questions were asked and answered and the 5% draw was explained. A motion from committee was made that the four (4) proposed budgets for 2024 be approved as presented.

**11-04-12**

**vote on above motion**

**PASSED**

We had a Necrology video followed by a prayer from Molly Carlson.

### **Outdoor Ministry High Performance Team**

See the report on pages 70-79 of the handbook. Jon Prain announced that a vote would take place as to the camps' future next year.

### **Governance Task Force team**

The Illinois Conference Council established a governance task force to review and revise the IL Conference constitution and bylaws. They haven't significantly changed since being instituted in 1964. Members of the team were thanked for their hard work and the many hours they put in. They conducted listening sessions, asked for comments and ideas for improving the governance system. They wanted to discern the mission of our Conference, what we are called to do and be and what can be accomplished. It's important to build a governance model that will support and empower the work of the churches and Conference through a shared sense of ownership. They looked at Vision and Mission, Administration and Ministry and the value of interconnection and accountability.

The current decision-making quorum is 100 delegates from all five (5) Associations but there's not 100% participation. Current Conference ministry board is 40 members with vote and nine (9) with voice only. A poll suggested the ideal board would be composed of 10 – 24 Board of Directors with overlap from ministry teams; with a minimum of five (5) members per team, with one (1) member representing each Association. They could then form action groups who could expand the work of the ministry team.

The board of Directors would be composed of four (4) officers, two (2) representatives from each Association, the Conference Minister or CEO who would have voice but no vote. Four (4) standing committees would be empowered to name two (2) people from each Association who would be elected to a 2-year term, renewable one time. The Nominating Committee's key new role would be to maintain standards of diversity and inclusion and empower ministry teams. The goal is to get as many people as possible involved and have flexibility, diversity and be widely represented through the Conference.

The committee will be holding four (4) listening sessions via Zoom in January 2024 and encourages everyone to participate and make your wishes known. They want to be done with the work by early summer 2024 and present to each Association's Spring Meeting before finalizing any changes. Then it would go before the Conference Council and presented for vote at the Annual Celebration in 2024. If passed, implementation would begin in 2025.

Someone then asked for a prayer before lunch, but Jon suggested we sing the doxology instead. Worship is scheduled for 1:45 pm.

Jon asked for a motion to adjourn, which everyone agreed to.

**11-04-13 motion approved and passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Fraley  
Secretary