

Report to the 2024 Illinois Conference Annual Celebration

Rev. Kathy Lawes

Associate Conference Minister for Authorization and Oversight
with Pastoral Care Responsibilities for Prairie and Western Associations

Greetings and Thanks

Grace and peace, Illinois Conference United Church of Christ. It is with profound thanks that I greet you in the name of Jesus, the head of the church. Having returned from sabbatical just six weeks ago, I want to lift up the names of those who stepped in and stepped up to cover many of my responsibilities: the chairs of our five Committees on Ministry (COMs): Revs. Ted Engelsdorfer, Regena Glenn-Caldwell, Barbara Lohrbach, Liz Patz/Hope Molozaizy, and Tim White, along with the numbers of each COM; colleagues in Conference ministry: Revs. Shernell Edney Stilley, Terrill Murff, and Diane Weible; Association Moderators: Revs. Mark Binder and Hank Fairman; Conference support staff: Ms. Naomi Else, Ms. Sarah Lohrbach, and Ms. Luran Smith; and, former colleagues Rev. Molly Carlson and Ms. Lynn Chindlund. Thank you, Illinois Conference United Church of Christ for the gift of sabbatical leave and for the warm welcome you've offered upon my return.

Associate Conference Minister Responsibilities

In my call to this position, I seek to respond to the pastoral care needs of our colleagues in ministry and, when appropriate, to support our local church pastors in the congregations they serve, with special attention to the Western and Prairie Associations. Conference-wide, I staff the five Association Committees on Ministry which, at times, extends those pastoral care responsibilities to authorized ministers in the Chicago Metropolitan, Eastern, and Fox Valley Associations. The relationships that have been built with these COM members have blessed me with great appreciation for the many ways we live out our faith and our lives in covenant with one another. Flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness are key assets I hope I bring to the table. I will be adapting to some new responsibilities of staffing some of our congregations and pastors in the Search and Call process in the months ahead, so I extend a "thanks in advance" to those who communicate to my colleagues and me the pastoral needs that arise – as I used to tell the local funeral director in Elburn, I'd rather hear about an issue or need thirteen times than not hear about it at all.

Herding Cats. Bring Nametags

Perhaps you've heard ministry leadership likened to the task of herding cats. Now that my son cares for two black cats under our roof, the metaphor seems even more appropriate to me. The cats don't listen to a word I say. Herding cats, however, is easier when we wear name tags and are (at the least, minimally) acquainted with one another. To that end, the Committees on Ministry will roll out the Clergy Annual Review form in early 2025 – in a fillable PDF format created by Ms. Sarah Lohrbach – so that our COMs and Association Councils and support staff are truly up to date with the contact information, standing and status, boundary awareness training completion dates, etc., of our authorized ministers. It is my hope that completing this very basic report will be an easy annual task for our clergy.

Anti-Bias Training

We are moving as a denomination into requiring anti-bias training for our authorized pastors and our Conference staff is committed to providing this essential training for our local churches as well. As our Committees on Ministry make decisions about curriculum, frequency, style of

training (in-person? online?), etc., our pastors will be notified in the “Faithful Fridays” Conference newsletters as well as via the contact information provided in the Clergy Annual Review forms of these learning opportunities.

Compliance with Boundary Awareness Training Requirements

Compliance with the requirement that all authorized ministers complete Boundary Awareness Training every three years has been hit or miss in recent years, and the closings of the Association offices resulted in some lost records. To address this, at the end of 2023 and at the behest of our then-Conference Minister Rev. Molly Carlson, the Committees on Ministry gave all authorized ministers a December 31, 2024, deadline to complete the training; those failing to meet this requirement are subject to the removal of their authorized ministerial standing. Please take advantage of one of the several opportunities available to do this before year’s end.

Manual on Church

The hot-off-the-presses *Manual on Church* will be introduced to the Illinois Conference at the Conference Annual Celebration. Focusing on church relationships, our understandings of both covenant and local church autonomy, and mission, this companion piece to the *Manual on Ministry* will bring clarity and guidance to us as we navigate the intricacies, challenges, and joys of being The Church together. I look forward to becoming well-acquainted with this resource and sharing it with our local churches.

Thanksgiving for Rev. Jon Prain

Rev. Jon Prain, pastor and teacher of the Federated Church of Avon in the Western Association, has served our Conference in a hands-on capacity as our Vice President for a two-year term, and now he is completing a two-year term as Conference President. These four years brought innumerable changes and challenges in the Conference: welcoming a new Conference Minister; the death of 30+ year Conference support staff member Connie Owen; a new governance proposal; overhaul of personnel policies; a deep dive into our financial picture; the hiring of new support staff; the calling of a new ACM; the resignation of the Conference Minister; and, the appointment of an Acting CM followed by the calling of an Interim CM. This list is but a fraction of the work Jon has attended to; it does not include the creation of how many agendas for how many meetings; reviewing minutes and following up on matters identified in those innumerable meetings; more Zoom meetings than one can count; situations that tested the bonds of covenant; and, others that tested Jon’s patience and perseverance. Jon has put countless miles on his trusty little sedan, and he has shown up – time and time again – on the phone to check in to see how a staff member is doing; in person (generally with a smile and warm hug or handshake and a pun to make one groan); at Pilgrim Park, Tower Hill, Westchester, and countless churches in the Conference in his role as President. To each situation/meeting/worship service/challenge, Jon brought faith, prayer, and patience. I thank Jon for taking on this extremely challenging position and completing a full term with grace, vision, and perseverance. Thanks for checking in on me. Thanks, Jon, for loving the Church of Jesus Christ and all the unruly unherdable cats in our Conference.

Thank you, gracious God and the Illinois Conference United Church of Christ,
Kathy Lawes