

Prairie Association, Illinois Conference UCC Annual Report 10/25/2024

Friends in Christ,

As it is with our Conference, so too with the Prairie Association: This has been a year of change.

The Prairie Association and Western Association met for the second year for a joint Spring Meeting at Pilgrim Park on 4/20/2024, under the theme: “Stronger Together: Thriving Congregations in Small Towns and Rural Communities.” We enjoyed a video presentation from the STAR Coalition (Small Town and Rural Churches), and their progress towards a resolution of recognition at the 2025 General Synod. We were inspired by the Rev. Phiwa Langeni, and the work of the UCC’s Center for Analytics, Research & Development, and Data (CARDD). And we give thanks to our many presenters for sharing their experience, knowledge, and Spirit-passions.

The 2024 Fall meeting was cancelled, and a revised method visioned by the Executive Council and Committee on Ministry to accomplish our governance obligations. The meetings were held through hybrid means on 10/23/2024 and 10/24/2024, counting the cumulative Delegates to meet quorum. The pressing business was a Resolution on “Re-Covenanting as the Prairie Association,” including the suspension of the Executive Committee. Action to affirm the Resolution carried, and a process for governance and ministry renewal will begin shortly.

Part of this re-covenanting will include reviewing the Association meeting frequency and purpose. The shift of the Illinois Conference Annual Meeting to the fall has necessitate the change of our business meeting from Spring to Fall. We have continued to receive feedback on, and felt the impact of this shift, realizing reduced participation because of crowded schedules. From our delegates, I report their desire that the Association and Conference take time to calendar together, spacing our meetings out in a manageable way.

The Executive Council remains committed to the transition of the Association’s leadership into re-building an agile, vital, and engaged ministry presence across our large geography. This is one of the motivators to setting the Council aside, and forming the Colloquium for re-covenanting. This fall, we discovered that the contact lists for the local churches, authorized ministers, and retired ministers was incomplete and out of dat. With the changes in ministry leadership over the past four years, we (and our whole conference) have work to do to strengthen our means of communicating. I give thanks to our Committee on Ministry for their renewed drive to ensure that these relationships are strengthened through the Association’s governance transition.

In completing my term in this office, I bear witness to the changing face of the Prairie Association. I look forward to the outcome of the Conference’s governance restructuring, and its cascading effects within our Associations. Combined with rebuilding the connections, we truly will be “Stronger Together” in our mutual ministry in Christ’s service.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Hank Fairman, Moderator, Prairie Association