

Illinois Conference Annual Celebration

November 1 & 2 2024

First Congregational Church

Western Springs – hybrid meeting Minutes

Business Session part 1 – Friday November 1

Call to Order – Jon Prain called the meeting to order at 2:53 after an inspiring worship service.

Establishment of Quorum – with the assistance of Conference Office staff, it was determined 208 people had registered, with 162 voting members in addition to the 10 people who had signed up and attended boundary training on Thursday. There were 26 visitors and/or speakers registered.

After an opening prayer, people were given an opportunity to test vote to make sure everything was working properly, particularly for the on-line attendees.

Appointment and Election of Parliamentarian for this meeting

Norman “Smitty” Williams was introduced as an experienced parliamentarian and a professional consultant, having served at the last 2 General Synods.

Hank Fairman moved to elect Norman Williams as parliamentarian for the 2024 Annual Celebration business meeting; Mary Newcomb seconded.

AC 11-1-01

vote on above motion

PASSED

Approval and adoption of special rules of order and meeting covenant.

Jon announced the special rules of order shall be the same as the last time. Speakers will be able to speak twice on an issue unless a question was put forth. To call a question, the speaker must do so from the neutral mike and then for the vote to count, must be passed by 2/3 majority.

Shaun Hillman moved the Illinois Conference adopt and abide by the rules contained in the document entitled: Special Rules for the 2024 Annual Celebration Business Meeting. Mark Binder seconded.

AC 11-01-02

vote on above motion

PASSED

Additionally, Jon asked “shall the members of the Illinois Conference adopt and agree to abide by the behavior guidelines contained in the document entitled: Covenant of hospitality and welcoming for the Illinois Conference, UCC.”

Bob Meinershagen moved we adopt the motion, Catherine Erwin seconded.

AC 11-01-03

vote on above motion

PASSED

Appointment/Election of Tellers

Shall the following persons serve as tellers for the 2024 Annual Celebration Business Meeting? Bob Meinershagen (Western), Catherine Erwin (Fox Valley), Carol Currier-Frighetto (Eastern), Michelle Hughes (CMA) and Jennifer Amy-Dressler (Prairie) Associations.

Juanita Bradley moved and Ramona Bamgbose seconded.

AC 11-01-04 vote on above motion PASSED

Jon offered an addition to the proposed agenda for the addition of a motion for the Illinois Conference adopt an emergency resolution to acknowledge and affirm Faithful Stewardship of Our Whole Lives (OWL) and Advocacy for the comprehensive sexuality education as 13b.

Dave Bateman moved we adopt the proposed agenda for the 2024 Annual Celebration Business meeting be adopted as amended, Carol Currier-Frighetto seconded.

AC 11-01-05 vote on above motion PASSED

Shall the minutes of the 2023 Illinois Conference Annual Celebration be adopted as presented? Sue Harvey so moved; Wilbert Watkins seconded.

AC 11-01-06 vote on above motion PASSED

Motion to receive and place on file the written reports of the Conference staff members, Associations, camps, Conference officers, committees, task forces, teams and similar entities (with exception of financial reports, budgets, nominating committee and Camp Forward reports).

Terrill Murff amended his report to include Mark Binder, Jr. as an active participant on the Annual Celebration committee. Gilbert Martinez moved to accept and place on file the written reports as amended; Connie Leader seconded.

AC 11-01-07 vote on above motion PASSED

Conference President's report

Jon Prain stated he started in January 2018 as vice moderator and how the Conference has struggled and changed during COVID and the multiple changes that have taken place during his tenure. He thanked Tom Norwalk, the council, committees and many others for their support, cooperation and hard work. There's more work that needs to be done; we need to treat each other better, work on antiracism, and LGBTQIA+ recognition and support. He's proud of the unanimous vote to appoint Terrill Murff as Interim Conference Minister, how Council was able to express their feelings and support each other, even in disagreements. He encouraged us to continue to work at being the Illinois Conference, keep each other accountable and that together, we are *Stronger Together*.

Interim Conference Minister's report

Terrill Murff stated he doesn't like to be in the spotlight, and prefers to work in the background. He thanked God for the leadership of Jon, and recognized how difficult the work can be at times, but that when we work together, there's joy. He encouraged us to see Jesus in each other and build trust with one another. He is glad for the hard work of Molly Carlson, Jon Prain, Bob Poor, et. al. for setting up a fantastic foundation for future growth. He noted that many churches want more connection with the Conference and said it is valuable to be able to talk with and hear each other.

Terrill is thankful for the MLT, and called the other two (2) Association ministers his sisters. With three (3) daughters and his “sisters”, he’s learned how to listen more meaningfully, even when the conversations are difficult and how to stay graceful with each other when disagreeing. He asked (rhetorically) how can we rebuild trust with those who have been hurt by church and that we need to find ways to hear each other differently. Moving forward, he wants to rebuild trust, love each other, change the toxic culture and build on God’s love and care for a healthier church.

He thanked Chuck Maney for his assistance in moving the Conference forward and for his non-anxious presence. Terrill said we need to learn to be thermostats that control the temperature of the spiritual atmosphere rather than thermometers.

Jon thanked Chuck Maney, Bob Poor, Cristine Vesely, Juanita Bradley and Ramona Bamgbose for their hard work; saying they’re a team who often worked 40-60 hours a week.

David Holstein sent his greetings to the gathering from on-line.

After a short break, we reconvened to address the additional motions; one on STAR and the other OWL. They each need 2/3 vote in order to pass. Conference Council recommends they both be adopted.

STAR coalition

Harriet Dart introduced herself as the chair of Justice & Witness committee in CMA. She then spoke on the Small Town and Rural Coalition (STAR) amendment and explained how rural life is very different from city life and often internet is difficult to receive. Western, Eastern, and Prairie Associations are part of our Illinois Conference covenant and often assumptions are made that are not true, so the Associations tend to get ignored. When National distributes materials to the churches, they are often not appropriate and the small town and rural pastors have to interpret how to apply them to their situations. The floor was opened for questions/comments.

One questioned whether UCC would create a new group or ministry that would take funds from other resources? All funding is in place, they just need a formal acknowledgment. There will be a General Synod resolution that would approve any money before it is spent.

Another said that this is a needed resolution because often the church is the only voice in the community and independent advocacy is important. Someone else added that as smaller churches seek to be more inclusive, there aren’t enough resources for them and they feel like they don’t have a voice within the larger church. Another added that small city churches are just like the rural churches, yet they continue to thrive and be present in the community, and supported this resolution. Others online also expressed their support. The Justice and Witness committee presented the following motion.

“Shall the Illinois Conference declare its support for the prudential resolution from the Kansas-Oklahoma Conference Board of Directors that is currently entitled: The Small Town and Rural Coalition United Church of Christ requests to be recognized as a formal group?”

AC 11-01-08

vote on above motion

PASSED unanimously

Emergency resolution on Faithful Stewardship of OWL

The second item on the emergency resolution, (13b) was brought forth. Jon said the Executive Committee had to decide whether to bring this to the body but it is up to the gathered people to decide if they want to discuss it. Therefore, the Executive Committee asks whether it should be discussed? The motion from Executive Committee is:

“Should the delegates of the 2024 Annual Celebration consider “an emergency resolution of the Illinois Conference to acknowledge and affirm the resolution faithful stewardship of Our Whole Lives and Advocacy for the comprehensive sexuality education in faith communities through interfaith collaboration. A resolution of witness be presented at General Synod 35?”

AC 11-01-09

vote on above motion

PASSED

Hank Fairman led the discussion on the emergency resolution. He stated its been six (6) General Synods since Illinois Conference has put anything before a General Synod, and that it's been a 50-year journey to become radically inclusive. We should celebrate the work that's already been done and keep doing it. OWL is one of the best teaching tools on human sexuality and Hank recommends we take it to our churches. OCWM helps to support it, and Hank feels this program has changed lives. For more information, the Illinois Conference UCC website has a link for more information. The floor was then opened for discussion.

Someone asked “why are we doing this”? If not passed, OWL would continue to do their work, however, it wouldn't let others know we're in favor of it. Someone else said the conversations started over 30 years ago, however because of many being afraid to talk about our bodies, it's been difficult to have honest conversations, especially with youth. Many have also left the UCC because of fear of what this might mean. Someone else raised the point that anyone who has taught this course has been rewarded with a sense of joy due to affirmation of God's love.

A question was raised, what happens if we don't pass the resolution? Nothing, National Church would still offer the program as each church chooses what curriculum they teach. The curriculum is offered on-line; however, one must be trained before they can teach it.

Next motion is: “Shall the Illinois Conference adopt” an emergency resolution of the Illinois Conference UCC to acknowledge and affirm the resolution faithful stewardship of Our Whole Lives and Advocacy for the comprehensive sexuality education in faith communities through interfaith collaboration. A resolution of witness be presented at General Synod 35?” (On-line results: 19 yes, 2 no; in house: 75 yes, 1 abstain) Therefore, it is deemed to have been passed.

AC 11-01-10

vote on above motion

PASSED

This portion of the business meeting is recessed and to be followed by the banquet/social at the Holiday Inn Countryside. We will reconvene tomorrow, Saturday at 8:30 am with our keynote speaker.

After dinner, Rev. Deborah Owens was posthumously awarded the Chalice award. Rev. Barbara Lohrbach was also presented (in person) with a Chalice award. We heard presentations from the United Church Fund and Tuthill, on finance and one from the Tuthill committee before we heard closing remarks.

Saturday, November 2, 2024

After our guest speaker, Rev. Rhina Ramos gave an inspiring speech, the Illinois Conference Annual Celebration was called back into session at 9:34 am by Jon Prain and opened with a word of prayer.

Nominating Report and elections

Santina Poor presented a slate of nominees and expressed her hope and desire that committee chairs would encourage those nominees to show up and participate in the work of our Conference. Santina then moved that the Conference nominating committee report (on page 47 of the AC booklet) slate be approved. The question was raised if there were any nominations from the floor, seeing there are none, Eric Quinney-Burnard then moved nominations be closed. Ramona Bamgbose seconded.

AC 11-02-01 vote on above motion PASSED

Shall the Illinois Conference elect the persons named in the report of the Nominating committee (with the exception of the General Synod delegates) to the offices and terms listed?

AC 11-02-02 vote on above motion PASSED

General Synod Delegates

Santina then moved the Illinois Conference accept the slate for the class of 2025-2028 delegates as presented. The question was raised if there were any nominations from the floor, there are none.

Monica Howell moved we close the nominations, Catherine Erwin seconded.

AC 11-02-03 vote on above motion PASSED

The committee then recommended “the Illinois Conference accept the slate of General Synod delegates for the class of 2025-2028 and authorize the Conference Council and Interim Conference Minister appoint any remaining (unfilled) delegate positions.”

AC 11-02-04 vote on above motion PASSED

Illinois Conference Revised Constitution and By-laws

Jon said there are over 250 positions in our Conference and 40 on the Council that are not easily filled. It’s not good practice to fill a position just because of a quota and during the 2020-’21 year, Council started to look at how to address this. Previously, any request was delayed in committees and urgency was lost. As an example, Tower Hill needed to have some work done immediately but due to the constraints of committees, it was tied up.

Conference Council appointed a committee to look at the process and start clean. Barbara Lohrbach initially led the committee with the assistance of Benna Bell, Gloria Cox, Kathy Hummel as secretary, Molly Carlson, Jon Prain and Juanita Bradley. Hank Fairman took over when unforeseen circumstances caused Barbara to step down. Later, Mary Newcomb finished the work when Hank took his sabbatical.

Amy went on to explain the Conference annually gives \$500 thousand to each camp but is recommending a 5-year gradual decrease in funds, allowing the camps to financially split from the Conference. They would keep their insurance and health benefits. We would still have a connection, with an annual giving Sunday for the camps, and access to programs shall continue.

Discussion followed. Ernie Potter believes the camps need to have continued support. Someone asked what if this is not passed? The land at Tower Hill will not be used as a camp, but we have a chance to revisit the documents and relationship, and there will be no immediate change. Chuck Maney apologized that the Conference didn't provide the budget or tools the camps needed for better support but pledged to work with them in the future. Another voiced a concern regarding finances, and was assured the money is safely managed by three (3) different accounts by the Council (FAB). Several told of how the camps have changed lives and because their first experience was at Church camp, have entered seminary. The question was called and after a prayer, vote was taken. 132 yes and 1 opposed.

AC 11-02-08

vote on above motion

PASSED

Financial Reports

Bob Poor and Cristine Vesely have rebuilt the financial team and straightened out the finances. A new financial company was hired in June and the transition is moving along well. Both Bob and Cristine's terms are up, however, Cristine will continue to be available behind the scenes if needed. A new software system has been implemented and the new finance manager may have some questions. A new financial handbook was written in 2021 and some of the policies need clarification. It was hoped that a new staff spending policy would be written, however due to the amount of change in the Conference, it was not accomplished but hoped that could be done in the near future.

Bob presented the 2024 budget found on pages 48 – 53 in the handbook. The Conference has \$4.5 million invested with a 5% yearly draw from restricted accounts in order to keep a balanced budget. He reiterated we have the necessary amount of money needed in an account for the camps.

All previously held properties have been sold, therefore the (property) committee has been put on hiatus. OCWM is a priority and the expected \$1.1 million was not attained in 2024, therefore, it has been reduced for the 2025 budget as found on page 51. The Conference has received a second Lilly grant for TPIRC 2025 and pastoral transitions is fully funded by Lilly.

Juanita Bradley moved to accept the financial report for the first half of 2024, Chuck Maney seconded.

AC 11-02-09

vote on above motion

PASSED

The 2025 budget was discussed next. Conference \$1.23 million total budget and \$1.22 million in expenses. With a 5% draw of \$49 thousand from investments and \$20 thousand from miscellaneous income, it is expected we will be able to keep a balanced budget. Bob explained the camps, TPIRC and pastoral transitions budgets. Someone asked how many years can we

withdraw from savings to balance the budget? At the rate of \$250 thousand, approximately four (4) years. Chair asked if we were willing to adopt (accept) all five (5) budgets as presented?

Hank Fairman moved that we receive and refer to audit the proposed budgets for 2025, Wilbert Watkins seconded.

AC 11-02-10

vote on above motion

PASSED

Other Business/announcements

Jon praised the gathered body for the increased trust in the Illinois Conference and said without it, we wouldn't have been able to vote in acceptance with such high numbers for the proposed motions.

Kathy Lawes then spoke about how since 2010, when she was given the Pastoral responsibilities for the Association, she has had a close relationship with Jon. She praised him for his wisdom, belief and dedication to prayer and suggested we continue that (prayer) into all future Annual Celebrations from now on. He was then presented gifts from the Conference for his service.

Juanita Bradley was called up to be given the ceremonial banners, a signed copy of Robert's Rules of Order and the gavel with a wooden box to keep it in. She thanked God for the opportunity to serve then thanked her mentors and supporters, Jon and CMA. Conference officers were then installed before the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Fraley