

WESTERN ASSOCIATION REPORT TO THE 2025 ILLINOIS CONFERENCE ANNUAL CELEBRATION

The Western Association this year met at Pilgrim Park in a joint Spring Association meeting with the Prairie Association. This Fall the business meeting was at First Federated in Peoria. The Moderator for a second year visited all the churches in the Association with physical locations. This effort has been to try to get each local church to feel seen and know we as an Association know where they are and care. The Association Council continues to meet on Zoom monthly.

The Association has been blessed with the gift of the Leonharts which enables us to make grants each year to help churches with innovations and new mission outreach. This year the grants that were made included the following:

- ❖ St Peter's in Kewanee: \$600 to fund the creation of eight (8) Church World Service buckets for emergency relief;
- ❖ St Paul in Fowler: \$1500 for St Paul Snack Shack to be available at their playground for church and community children. The plan is for Sunday School children to replenish it as needed;
- ❖ Church of Peace in Rock Island: \$4000 to support their food pantry; And
- ❖ First Congregational in Springfield: \$10,000 to expand their digital presence to livestream and Zoom.

There are of course challenges in every year. Next year we will have to make some minor adjustments in the Western Association Constitution and By-Laws to make them more in line with the IL Conference Structure which goes into effect with the 2025 Fall Annual Celebration. There also is a continuing challenge of communication over financial issues with the Conference. In the last two (2) years (depending on how one counts) there have been 3-5 checks in the approximate magnitude of \$10,000 that have either been issued to or sent to the wrong church from the Leonhart Grants; an offering has yet, as of this writing, to be deposited into Western's account from our Fall 2024 meeting; for the second year there is some confusion over Conference receiving and paying Western's share of the Pilgrim Park Meeting (we have seen a withdrawal from our fund, but no income from what was collected and sent to the Conference). It is our hope that with the new structure such issues will lessen or cease to exist.

This report is one of my last official acts as the Moderator of Western Association (though with our structure I will remain as Vice-Moderator for the next year). I wish to thank the many people who work inside our Association and its churches for their assistance and patience in my two-year term --- and offer prayers for our incoming Moderator, Ursula Webster.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Mark C. Binder
Outgoing Moderator of the Western Association