



Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

STRONGER TOGETHER

1840 Westchester Boulevard, Suite 200, Westchester, Illinois 60154

MINISTRY LEADERSHIP TEAM

Rev. Molly Carlson
Conference Minister
E: MollyCarlson@ilucc.org
P: 708.701.0451

Rev. Kathy Lawes
Associate Conference Minister
E: KathyLawes@ilucc.org
P: 708.701.4962

Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff
Associate Conference Minister
E: TerrillMurff@ilucc.org
P: 708.701.4325

Rev. Shernell Edney Stilley
Associate Conference Minister
E: ShernellEdneyStilley@ilucc.org
P: 708.701.4933

SUPPORT STAFF

Naomi Else
Administrative Assistance
E: ConferenceAdmin@ilucc.org

Lynn Chindlund
Operations
E: LynnChindlund@ilucc.org

Rev. Sarah Lohrbach
Communications/Technology
E: SarahLohrbach@ilucc.org

OUTDOOR MINISTRIES

Pilgrim Park Camp
26449-1340 North Avenue
Princeton, Illinois 61356
P: 815.447.2390
E: PilgrimParkCamp@ilucc.org

Mitch Kloster
Site Manager
Pilgrim Park Camp
E: MitchKloster@ilucc.org

Tower Hill Camp
12173 Tower Hill Road
Sawyer, Michigan 49125
P: 269.426.3881
E: TowerHillCamp@ilucc.org

Rev. Tracy Heilman
Site Manager
Tower Hill Camp
E: TracyHeilman@ilucc.org

TPIRC PROGRAM

Rev. Melody Seaton
TPIRC Program Director
E: MelodySeaton@ilucc.org

Marz Rivera
TPIRC Program Coordinator
E: MarzRivera@ilucc.org

Official Request Letter

Thriving Congregations Initiative 2023
Lilly Endowment, Inc.
2801 N. Meridian Ave.
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Dear Grant Review Committee:

It is my deepest honor to submit this request for consideration for funding through the 2023 Thriving Congregations Initiative.

The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ believes it can make a substantive difference in the lives of congregations during one of the most fragile seasons of their lives. In our congregational polity, when a pastor leaves a congregation, the congregation has an opportunity to re-evaluate their mission and re-discover how God might be calling them to make a difference in their communities. However, our current realities amplify the normal anxiety of a congregation in transition and a sense of hopelessness can easily slip in.

As a regional judicatory body, we already help congregations in transition, but this grant would allow us to significantly amplify the targeted services these congregations need. In addition to direct support of congregations currently in transition, we will be building a library of resources and building partnerships that will continue to help congregations well beyond the life of this grant.

We are excited about the possibilities this grant would allow us to explore. We know that we share the Lilly Endowment's commitment to the importance of the local church and look forward to this new way to partner for a better world.

In Christ,

Molly

Rev. Molly Carlson, Conference Minister

Executive Summary

The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ is one of thirty-five regional judicatory bodies of the United Church of Christ (UCC). With 220 congregations, 60,000 members and over 500 clergy, the Illinois Conference serves the communities in the northern two-thirds of Illinois. The work of the Conference is to support our local churches through authorization and oversight of clergy, support through pastoral transitions, shared ministry and advocacy work, continuing education opportunities for clergy and lay members, conflict mediation and resolution, vision casting, and other forms of support and encouragement. Our vision is to be an interconnected network of communities that provide mutual support, wisdom and learning opportunities that further God's mission for the United Church of Christ in Illinois.

Our current Thriving in Ministry initiative, "Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations (TPIRC)", has taught us a lot about the types of supports our pastors and our congregations need to fully live into their mission. The opportunities to learn from each other, the connections to resources of the wider church, and the use of coaches has led many congregations to try new things, build a sense of hope and possibility, and experience revitalizing energy. This new proposal builds on these learnings while focusing on congregation experiencing pastoral transition.

The last few years have brought new challenges to congregations. In many places, participation is down, fatigue is up and a unified sense of mission is lost. When a pastor decides to leave, whether for retirement, another call, or at the request of the congregation, the congregation is faced with an opportunity to regain that sense of mission. However, more often, the anxiety and lack of resources has led more and more congregations to choose to close or consider part-time or lay pastoral leadership.

This proposal greatly expands the support that the Illinois Conference already provides congregations during the season of pastoral transition. This program will add a facilitated congregational retreat early in the transition process, retreat opportunities for transitional leadership, learning opportunities that bring together leaders from several congregations to learn together, additional support for profile development (which includes visioning work) which helps congregations find their next pastor, assessment and visioning support that matches the particular need of the congregation and more. This program utilizes learning communities and spiritual practices to transform this potentially fragile time for a congregation into a rich opportunity for clarity and growth.

Summary Budget

Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
INCOME					
Lilly Endowment Grant	\$240,484.95	\$244,006.72	\$249,210.10	\$256,102.07	\$260,196.16
Il Conference General Operating Fund	\$77,251.55	\$80,017.11	\$82,603.53	\$85,284.34	\$88,063.22
Total Income	\$318,006.50	\$324,023.83	\$331,813.63	\$341,386.41	\$348,259.38
EXPENSES					
Personnel	\$229,297.30	\$236,796.63	\$244,586.43	\$252,659.22	\$261,032.18
Communications and Technology	\$5,500	\$4,000	\$4,000	\$5,500	\$4,000
Program Costs	\$60,500.00	\$60,500.00	\$60,500.00	\$60,500.00	\$60,500.00
Indirect Costs	\$22,720.20	\$22,720.20	\$22,720.20	\$22,720.20	\$22,720.20
Total Income	\$318,006.50	\$324,023.83	\$331,813.63	\$341,386.41	\$348,259.38

Rev. Molly Carlson
Conference Minister

Cristine Vesely
Treasurer

Proposal Narrative

Purpose

The purpose of this program is to enhance the vitality of congregations of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ during pastoral transitions. The time between the announcement of a pastor's departure, whether due to resignation, termination or retirement, and the installation of the next settled minister is a fragile time for congregations. Congregations often feel unmoored and struggle with issues of anxiety and wellness during these times of transition, but we believe there is an opportunity for congregations to be strengthened instead.

Commented [GU1]: Wording in rfp: mental health and wellness

As the Lilly Endowment writes in their Request for Proposals, "The pandemic accelerated and made more acute longstanding challenges that congregations have faced for many years." The longstanding challenge that we are identifying that has been accelerated and made more acute by the pandemic is the shortage of pastoral leadership. This proposal focuses directly on this area but other focus areas identified in the RFP that this proposal will touch upon include:

Commented [GU2]: Do you need to clarify - both congregational lay leadership and clergy?

- Developing or strengthening outwardly focused ministries that serve those in their communities, regions and/or across the globe
- Recognizing and addressing racial biases and prejudices in churches and their communities that perpetuate inequities and injustices.
- Fostering ministries that are relevant to the lives of congregants and, at the same time, connect congregants more deeply to God.
- Leveraging church buildings and other physical assets more effectively to advance the congregation's mission.

Commented [GU3]: Very clear how you bring in focus areas

This program will expand the support that the Illinois Conference staff already provide by working directly with congregations facing pastoral transitions to help them assess and adapt their ministries to their changing contexts. This program will help congregations clarify their mission and vision while connecting them with other congregations navigating the same transitions for collegial support, shared learning experiences and engagement of spiritual practices.

Commented [GU4]: Great Paragraph!

Through this program, the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ endeavors to achieve several measurable outcomes.

- 1) A shortened length of time between departure of former pastor and installation of new pastoral leadership.
- 2) Increased clarity of values and mission by members of the congregation in transition.
- 3) Increased participation in Christian practices including worship, hospitality and stewardship.
- 4) Increased awareness of local social and cultural community needs (outside of the congregation).
- 5) Increased engagement in community ministry.
- 6) Decreased rate of congregational decline.
- 7) Increased hopefulness for ministry and life.

We will evaluate these measures by using pre- and post- engagement surveys with congregations as well as keeping records of participation in our various offerings.

Rationale

Like the Lilly Endowment, the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ recognizes that “local congregations have been and will continue to be a primary form of Christian community. They are places where Christians gather regularly to worship, teach their religious traditions to their children and youth, extend care to one another and proclaim love for their neighbors through acts of service and hospitality.” However, the world in which our churches do ministry continues to change. The recent pandemic radically increased the rate of change resulting in congregations being unsure how to adapt.

At the same time, pastors are leaving the ministry resulting in an increasing number of congregations needing to adjust to the vacuum of leadership. Right now, 25%, or 55 of 220, congregations in this Conference are in transition and the length of time that churches are in transition is lengthening, often extending as long as 36-72 months. One major reason for this is the high level of burnout among clergy, consistent with other care-giving professions, resulting in a wide-spread shortage in clergy seeking a new call. In addition, there are not enough interim ministers trained and available to help congregations navigate the time of transition with exploration of their history, leadership, mission, connections and future. Without consistent pastoral leadership, congregations’ struggle to navigate this rapid change is amplified exponentially.

Conference staff have long held the responsibility to help congregations through times of pastoral transition. However, judicatory staffs continue to shrink while responsibilities increase. The higher number of congregations needing support and the higher level of support congregations need due to the issues named above are well beyond the threshold of current staff structures.

Finally, there are more and more congregations transitioning to part-time ministry or discerning closure. These congregations have an especially hard time finding pastoral leadership even as they are likely those with the most need. There are many creative options including merger, shared ministry, multi-point charges, etc., but exploring these issues with the individual congregation takes time and leadership to get to successful outcomes.

This program seeks to address the needs of congregations in pastoral transition. We see those needs as:

- A lack of active lay leadership within the congregations partially in response to enhanced dependence on pastoral leadership since the pandemic
- A decreased sense of ownership of mission or purpose among the members of the congregation
- An increase in perceived irrelevance of the church as illustrated by the Pew Foundation research that indicates that over 50% of American do not affiliate with any faith tradition
- An increase in societal trauma as a result of the dramatic political polarization of our country, the shared experience of the COVID pandemic, the increase in mass shootings, race related violence, and, as was recently announced by the Surgeon General, a national epidemic of loneliness.
- An increasing shortage of pastoral leadership for both interim and settled ministry
- An increase of fatigue in volunteers, community members and clergy

Commented [GU5]: 55 of 220 congregations in this conference. Maybe 25% OR "55 of 220 congregations"

Commented [GU6]: AWESOME SENTENCE

Commented [GU7]: Two sentences

Commented [GU8]: creative options?

Commented [GU9]: exploring these issues with the individual congregation takes time and leadership resources to get to successful outcomes

Commented [GU10]: Love the extra bits you put in about loneliness - community of practice to the rescue!!

- Increased anxiety within the congregation due to the impending changes, a fear of the unknown and the discomfort of the liminal space

Commented [GU11]: Love this whole list. Very good "problem statement"

To help address these needs, we will provide more resources for each individual congregation in transition. We will also create opportunities for congregations in transition to come together with other congregations in transition for learning and sharing of ideas including but not limited to opportunities to gather in Communities of Practice and Spiritual Retreats where we will focus on developing Christian spiritual practices.

Commented [GU12]: AMAZING, concise, overarching statement

Program Design

This program, which supplements the support currently offered by the Conference, will be available to every congregation that separates from their pastor as of January 1, 2024. Congregations already in transition will be invited to participate in the group activities but will not be eligible for the other supplemental support which allows for this program to ramp up to full capacity. We expect that 100 congregations will begin a period of pastoral transition during the five-year life of this grant (2024-2028).

Commented [GU13]: Which allows for this program to ramp up to full capacity

All aspects of this program will be coordinated by the Associate Conference Minister (ACM) for Pastoral Transitions. To support their work, this grant will fund a full-time support staff for pastoral transitions. However, this program will be fully integrated into the general structure of the Conference. The other staff ACMs and the Conference Minister will provide congregational care and direct support as assigned. The Conference Minister, as head of staff, will have oversight for all aspects of this program.

Every element of this program is designed to nurture congregational learning. The opportunities for individual congregations bring groups within the congregation together to explore vision, mission, community needs, and leader development with an eye toward finding the best pastoral leader for the next season of the congregation's life. The multi-congregation opportunities focus on practical skill building and deepening Christian Practices while gaining wisdom and insight from other communities. These opportunities will bring additional insight to participants by introducing outside perspectives and building relationships based on shared experience that could provide long-lived support beyond the season of transition.

Commented [GU14]: Great paragraph, focused on group learning and support

General Timeline for our work with individual congregations (current services that will continue are marked with an asterisk *):

- 1) Service of Release for former pastor* ACM for Pastoral Transitions
Conference staff will participate in worship with the congregation on the departing Pastor's last service. A liturgy of release will be led by Conference staff, followed by a time of fellowship focused on connection between congregation members and conference staff.
- 2) Congregational Retreat Led by member of MLT¹
The first step of this enhanced program is a full one-day retreat that will be tailored to the individual congregation and take place as soon after the departure of the previous pastor as is

¹ MLT – Ministry Leadership Team which includes Conference Minister and three (3) Associate Conference Ministers including the ACM for Pastoral Transitions

practical. At least the full leadership of the congregation should be included if not the entire membership. The content will include an overview of the process and resources available to the congregation through the transition process. In addition, various Christian practices will be incorporated including prayer, hospitality, singing our faith, discernment, healing and testimony. Each congregation will have slightly different needs depending on their sense of grief, abandonment, conflict, purpose, etc.

- 3) Search for Interim or Interim Consultant* ACM for Pastoral Transitions
With the shortage of interim ministers, not every congregation will find an interim. Working with the Conference staff, each congregation will be supported in finding the best pastoral support for their transition.

- 4) Standardized video and in person consultation ACM for Pastoral Transitions
The second step of this program is to streamline the initial process of standard education which is currently provided by the ACM for each congregation. To streamline the process, we will produce videos that communicate most of the information. These videos will include guidance and best practices for congregations through the search and call process. We will partner these videos with a shorter, live consultation to address the specific issues of the individual congregation.

- 5) Profile Development Coaches
The third step of this program is assigning each congregation a coach for a 6-session engagement to assist the congregation in developing a clear congregational profile that describes their congregation in depth. This is a tool that is used to help match candidates to the congregation. The profile requires that congregations reflect upon and clearly state their mission, vision, community engagement, experience with conflict, and emerging challenges. Utilizing coaches will help speed and deepen the needed self-reflection required to complete the profile. The Illinois Conference currently has a large cohort of trained coaches². This program will provide additional, specialized training for several coaches to be matched with congregations for a 6-session commitment to help them complete their profiles.

- 6) Conflict Mediation (only where needed) Coaches
This program additionally provides coaches to provide conflict mediation that some congregations need to resolve active or historic conflicts within the congregation. This program will provide additional, specialized training for several coaches to be deployed for 3- to 6-session commitments with congregations needing some facilitation through conflict.

- 7) Financial Assistance for Specialized Consult with Partners Partners
The Illinois Conference has established partnerships with several organizations with specialized expertise in some specific issues that congregations in transition are facing. Through this program, we will be able to provide financial assistance to congregations through micro-grants of up to \$1000 for them to be able to take advantage of these resources.

Commented [GU15]: Can you clarify exactly how this is more than what you do now, since you state you already have a large cohort of trained coaches

² Coach training was a significant element of our Thriving Pastors In Revitalizing Congregations program that was funded by a Lilly Endowment grant in 2019.

- a) Congregations discerning whether to end their public ministry can have access to an abundance of resources from the national setting of the United Church of Christ.
- b) Congregations struggling with issues related to their building can work with Sacred Places³, a non-profit organization with offices in Chicago, dedicated to sound stewardship and active community use of older sacred spaces.
- c) Congregations working on clarifying their mission (or their “Why?”) can work with Church Building and Loan Fund⁴ and their vitality assessment or with Convergence⁵ and their training opportunities.
- d) Congregations considering lifting up pastoral leadership from their midst can work with one of several partners offering lay ministerial training, opening up a path toward licensed or even ordained ministry within the UCC.
- e) Congregations needing additional support in another area can apply to use funds to hire a coach or consultant to help the congregation navigate the particular issue they are facing.

8) Completing a Letter of Call* ACM for Pastoral Transitions
 When a final candidate is selected, Conference Staff will work with the search committee and/or the church board/council/consistory to develop a fair letter of call. Conference Staff will share the Conference Guidelines for Clergy Compensation and explain some of the intricacies particular to clergy compensation.

9) Installation of New Pastor* MLT
 Once the new minister is called, has arrived, and has received ministerial standing within the Association, the ACM for Pastoral Transitions will work with the congregation and the Association Committee on Ministry to schedule and execute a service of installation.

This Program Creates New Opportunities for Congregations To Learn Together that include:

- Live (synchronous) Boundary Awareness training for Congregations.
 This training will be built on the new Code of Conduct for Congregations which is currently in draft form but due to be completed late this year as part of the new UCC Manual on Church. Some discussion will also be included on the Ordained Ministers Code so that local church members have a better understanding of the ethical boundaries expected of clergy, particularly the limitation on former ministers. This will be offered 3-4 times a year exclusively for congregations in transition and any members of any congregation involved in this program will be able to participate.
- Live (synchronous) Bias Awareness training for congregations
 As the world changes rapidly around us, congregations need to become more aware of their internal biases and how they pertain to their local social and cultural context. This training will help congregations not only become more clear about who they might be open to calling to be their next pastor but should help them better understand who they might be called to serve.

Commented [GU16]: Reorganize this paragraph somehow to begin with what is new, and then say that this is built on currently used boundary awareness training for clergy. Start each bullet point with what is new

Commented [GU17]: Can you say something about how this pertains to their local social cultural context

³ [Partners for Sacred Places preserving heritage, faith, and community - Partners for Sacred Places](#)

⁴ [Plan — United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund \(cblfund.org\)](#)

⁵ [Home : Convergence \(convergenceus.org\)](#)

This will be offered 3-4 times a year exclusively for congregations in transition and any members of any congregation involved in this program will be able to participate.

- **Monthly Live Webinars**

This program will include the development of a library of recorded webinars on a variety of topics specially selected to support congregations in transition. Each month, a new webinar will be produced. This webinar will be offered live and a recorded version will be added to our library, resulting in 50-60 webinars. These will include topics like: church finances, governance, demographics, hospitality, UCC identity, building use, grant writing, evangelism, building membership, church growth, revitalization, shared space, visioning, capacity building, navigating church conflict, etc.

Commented [GU18]: Each month, a new webinar will be produced. This webinar will be offered live and a recorded version will be added to our library, resulting in 50-60 webinars available to congregations on demand. These will include topics like:...

- **Annual Retreats**

As part of this program, three 24-hour retreats will be planned annually. These retreats will focus on in-person relationship building and developing Christian spiritual practices. Each year one retreat will be designed for active interim ministers, one retreat will be designed for pastoral leaders brand new to their call, and one retreat will be designed for members of search committees or church board/council/consistory.

Commented [GU19]: what is that christian practices verbage??

- **Communities of Practice**

This program will also organize monthly gatherings for three Communities of Practice. These 1.5-hour gatherings will be hosted by the ACM for Pastoral Transitions via ZOOM and will focus on relationship building, wisdom sharing, and developing spiritual practices. Each Community of Practice will bring together individuals from across the Conference with a named commonality. One group will be for newly called ministers, one for interim ministers, and one for search committee members/church leadership.

- **Coaching for Congregations exploring shared ministry**

This program will provide individual coaching services to assist individual congregations during this time of transition. An increasing number of congregations are exploring options regarding shared ministry. From mergers to multi-point charges, creative solutions for pastoral leadership and congregational vitality abound. Most often these conversations emerge during times of pastoral transition. Congregations exploring these options need extra support in clarifying their vision, exploring their hopes and discerning a path forward. This program will also provide additional training for a subset of our current pool of trained coaches to be able to work closely with these situations.

Commented [GU20]: I edited and rearranged this paragraph. Does it make sense to you

Collaborations and Partnerships

This plan is dependent on a significant amount of content development. The Illinois Conference will rely on our various partnerships to provide expertise for this content. We have several well-developed partnerships that will be critical in developing content and providing direct support to our congregations in transition. Their expertise will be invaluable to helping congregations thrive through transitions. By

formalizing a referral process and contracting with these partners for specific content creation, a more robust pipeline between their organization and our local churches will be built resulting in sustainable paths for support for our congregations.

Commented [GU21]: sustainable/??

Some of these partners and how they might help are listed below:

- *Church Training Center*: [Church Training Center | Equipping Effective Church Leaders](#) provides consulting, coaching, and training for church leaders, focused specifically on council leadership, strategic planning, budgeting for mission, financial oversight and healthy administration that supports effective ministry. Church Training Center will be a valuable partner for developing webinars on practical topics for congregations.
- *Community Renewal Society*: [Community Renewal Society \(CRS\)](#) is a UCC affiliated, faith-based, community organizing and public policy organization that works with congregations in and around Chicago to address issues of racism and poverty. CRS will partner with us on anti-bias training and leader development.
- *Convergence*: [Home : Convergence \(convergenceus.org\)](#) Convergence supports the reshaping of organizations, congregations and leaders engaged in an age of movement from “organized religion” to “organizing religion” driven by the values of an inclusive, progressive theological vision for a more just world for all. Convergence will be a good partner for coach development, vision/mission consulting, congregational assessments, and more.
- *Church Building and Loan Fund* [United Church of Christ Church Building & Loan Fund \(cblfund.org\)](#) CBLF transforms communities by helping the Church live into God’s economy. They help congregations plan, raise, finance, and build these transformative projects. CBLF will partner with us on building related issues, legacy planning (church closures) and congregational visioning.
- *Partners for Sacred Places* [Partners for Sacred Places – at the intersection of heritage, faith, and community \(PSP\)](#) PSP is the only nonsectarian, nonprofit organization dedicated to sound stewardship and active community use of older sacred places across America. They provide capital campaign training and fundraising strategies, along with technical assistance, and grants to congregations and other local organizations across the United States via the [National Fund for Sacred Places](#). They have many exciting programs ranging from [Arts in Sacred Places](#) to [Playing and Preserving](#), and customized regional programs to provide congregational training, consulting, and convenings. PSP will be particularly helpful with our congregations that are struggling with building use issues.
- *Faith INFO*: [The Faith Education, Innovation and Formation \(Faith INFO\) Team - United Church of Christ \(ucc.org\)](#) The Faith INFO team is a ministry of the national setting of the United Church of Christ that equips local congregations with resources to teach and to preach for all ages; curating and creating materials where needed. They hold focus on key constituents like youth and young adults, Congregations of Color and Ethnic Identified Congregations, New Church Plants, and how to support local churches in micro-grants. Faith INFO will be an especially helpful resource for our small and rural congregations.
- *Nehemiah Trinity Rising*: [HOME | ntrising \(nehemiahtrinityrising.org\)](#) is a faith-based, not-for-profit corporation dedicated to building peace. They provide education about restorative justice practices, skills for using such practices, and develop organizational relationships for the implementation of restorative justice practices in different various settings - schools, churches,

Commented [GU22]: Did you define UCC or is that obvious to lily

Commented [GU23]: Almost all of these partners you end each bullet with “this thing will partner with us by doing this or that.” Some do not end with the clarity of what you want each partner to do. Make sure each one has a last bit about what that partner will provide in this program

detention centers, prisons, etc. - as a way of transforming relationships, changing mindsets about conflict and healing our communities. Nehemiah Trinity Rising will help with our Anti-Bias trainings and in creating additional webinars on restorative justice practices.

Evaluation: Outcomes

The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ desires to see an increase in vitality of congregations during the time of pastoral transitions. We expect to see more engaged congregations with a strong sense of their identity and purpose. The vision of the Conference is to be an interconnected network of communities that provide mutual support, wisdom, and learning opportunities that further God's mission for the United Church of Christ in Illinois. We expect this program to result in new relationships between congregations that will continue beyond the period of transition. Our expectation for congregations is that they will enter into a new pastorate with a strong sense of mission and identity and tools that will help their new ministry partnership thrive.

Commented [GU24]: love this. Are you measuring how relationships continue beyond the transition?? Continued longer term measurement of engagement? Just curious

Evaluation: Performance Indicators

Quantitative Measures

- Length of time between departure of former pastor and arrival of new pastor
- Number of individuals participating in each activity/event
- Number of congregations participating in the program
- Percent of eligible congregations participating in each activity/event
- Rate of congregational decline based on Average Worship Attendance
- Rate of congregational engagement based on Average number of community contacts per week (number of bodies on campus plus number of people directly served off site or virtually).
- Number of successful ministry calls
- Number of new shared ministry arrangements
- Number of congregations that closed during the time of pastoral transition

Qualitative Measures

- Members clearly express the mission and vision of the congregation
- Congregational awareness of the local community social/cultural needs
- Engagement in community ministry as reported through anecdotal evidence
- Hopefulness for future of their congregation within their local community
- Level of anxiety

Commented [GU25]: Maybe anxiety, wellbeing? Maybe hopefulness for future of their congregation withing hteir local community?

Evaluation: Plan

In order to evaluate the efficacy of this program, we will collect data from the very beginning and quarterly publish a scorecard that reflects our results. The initial results will focus on participation measures and initial qualitative measures but it will take time to gather more complete information on the qualitative outcomes.

Commented [GU26]: Some may not take a few years, like mission and vision should be increased after your one-day event. You could do a questionnaire thing on the one day event for info on that.

Every congregation entering into the program will be asked to complete an initial self-assessment that will capture members' articulation of the mission and vision of the congregation, their awareness of

community needs outside of the congregation, and their sense of hopefulness versus anxiety. A final self-assessment, collected after a call has been accepted and an installation is scheduled, will capture the same information after experiencing the full program. We will ask each participating congregation to track weekly worship attendance and community engagement numbers during their entire season of transition. Throughout the program participation numbers will be tracked to allow us to measure the involvement from each congregation in the various elements of the program as well as the time it takes for each congregation to move through the process.

The ACM for Pastoral Transitions will be responsible for collecting and analyzing this data and providing quarterly reports to the Conference Minister and Conference Council. Annually, a more detailed report will be created to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the program.

Communication

Our communication plan is based on three primary approaches

- 1) Leadership buy-in
Prior to even submitting this proposal, substantial conversation has been had with the Conference Council, the entire staff and our covenant partners. Each constituency has had an opportunity to contribute to the plan development through to final edits. The Council and staff will be engaged as we move to our implementation phase.
- 2) Conference wide-awareness
We currently publish both a weekly and a monthly e-newsletter that is distributed to all our churches and several individual members. We will use these platforms to communicate throughout our Conference. We will also develop a press release to share the news of our program across the UCC.
- 3) Onboarding new congregations
The primary method of onboarding new congregations will be through direct conversation at the time of the announcement of a pastor's departure. We will schedule the initial congregational retreat which will be a time when the whole process is outlined. We will provide a written description of the process and review expectations – both our expectations and those of the congregation.

Sustainability

Our experience with our Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations program funded by a grant from the Lilly Endowment has informed our approach toward building a sustainability plan for this funding request. Rather than creating a program based on resources that are both staff dependent and used only once, we are imagining a program that develops resources that both lighten the load on staff as well as continue to be useful to support congregations.

By continuing to support 50% of the Associate Conference Minister position, The Illinois Conference will maintain pressure for giving to our General Operating budget to support this. In addition, we are already working to develop new income streams. The five years of this grant support should give us enough

Commented [GU27]: Not all of these are listed in your quant/qual bullet list

time to develop those income streams to be able to continue to support the ACM position beyond the life of the grant. A successful experience with this program will increase awareness of the relevance and importance of the Conference which will increase congregational giving in the long run. We anticipate that at the end of the life of the grant, we will no longer need the additional administrative support provided during the lifecycle of the grant for data tracking, webinar production, and related services.

Commented [GU28]: Just wondering - would the success of this program increase awareness of the relevance and importance of the conference and hence increase congregational giving in the long run for conference support? Not sure this goes there, but wonder if you need to expand on how you are developing new income streams?

Commented [GU29]: love

We plan to begin offering access to these trainings to congregations throughout our Conference (and maybe beyond) for a minimal cost after they are entered into our library of resources. This will bring in some ongoing funds to help us maintain and supplement these offerings into the future. If other elements like the initial congregational visioning retreat, the ongoing Communities of Practice, the Anti-Bias and Healthy Boundary offerings prove to be of benefit, they can be absorbed into the workflow of the existing Conference Staff or additional funding can be developed. Still other elements such as the annual retreats and consultation services could be offered at negotiated low rates with partners with whom we will have built years of goodwill and experience.

Commented [GU30]: If they can be absorbed, why do you need the grant to pay for them now?

Finally, after several years of churches experiencing the additional supports and vitality this grant provides, new leadership should be available throughout our Conference to help continue the commitment to thriving congregations during pastoral transitions.

Organizational Capacity

The Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ is a regional judicatory body of the United Church of Christ. We consist of 220 congregations, nearly 60,000 members, over 500 clergy and occupy the northern 2/3 of the state of Illinois including two outdoor ministry sites. We are urban, rural and suburban. We have large, mid-sized and small congregations. We have congregations over 180 years old and brand-new congregations. Even though the majority of our congregations are predominantly white, we have several multi-racial/multi-cultural congregations as well as many that primarily serve a particular racial or ethnic community.

Commented [GU31]: This is a great paragraph which really celebrates your diversity

We are led by Rev. Molly Carlson, our Conference Minister, and three Associate Conference Ministers. We are guided by a Conference Council which is a representative body of our five Associations and several standing committees. Members of our Council are voted on either by their individual Association or by the delegates from our member churches to our Annual Meeting. All council members are also members of congregations affiliated with the Illinois Conference UCC.

We operate with an approximately \$2.3M annual budget. This includes a \$1.3M general operating budget that is primarily funded through gifts from individuals and congregations from within the Conference and supplemented with income from endowment funds. In addition, each of our outdoor ministry sites operate an approximately \$400K budget that is supported by site use and individual donors. Finally, an additional \$200K goes to fund our Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations program that is funded primarily from a Thriving Congregations grant from the Lilly Endowment in 2019.

The United Church of Christ is built upon the balance between autonomy and covenant. The local church is the primary unit in our midst. However, being a part of a wider organization provides support and sustenance through the struggles and the celebrations of the local church. Each individual congregation has its' unique mission. Our SHARED work is to help each congregation benefit from our

COMMON identity and purpose. We are STRONGER TOGETHER. The Illinois Conference strives to be an interconnected network of communities that provide mutual support, wisdom, and learning opportunities that further God's mission for the United Church of Christ in Illinois.

We are uniquely suited to implement this program due to the depth and breadth of relationship we have with our congregations. We already work with them through their pastoral transitions, but this grant would give us the opportunity to provide much better support while developing resources that will help all our congregations well beyond the lifecycle of this grant.

Program Timetable

Early 2024 we will set up the program including searching for and hiring a new support staff person. Congregations that enter into pastoral transition as of January 1, 2024 will be eligible to participate in the program. As this will be a slow start, there will be some time to ramp up to full capacity. We anticipate that 20 congregations will begin their time of transition in 2024. We will have our first retreats late in 2024. By the end of 2024, all elements of the program will be up and running.

New churches will be added to the program in each consecutive year. It is expected that beginning as early as mid-2025, some congregation will complete the program and begin enjoying the new pastoral leadership. Congregations will remain in the program and continue to participate in all aspects of the program until the completion of a successful call.

We anticipate that during the lifecycle of the grant an estimated 100 congregations will participate. However, we expect that the total number of congregations active at any one time will plateau between 50-55.

Line Item Budget

Income						
Lilly Endowment Grant	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 1,250,000.00
ILUC General Operating	\$ 77,521.55	\$ 80,017.11	\$ 82,603.53	\$ 85,284.34	\$ 88,063.22	\$ 413,489.75
TOTAL Income	\$ 327,521.55	\$ 330,017.11	\$ 332,603.53	\$ 335,284.34	\$ 338,063.22	\$ 1,663,489.75
Expenses						
Human Resources						
009-500100 - Salaries/Wages	\$ 150,822.70	\$ 155,347.38	\$ 160,007.80	\$ 164,808.04	\$ 169,758.51	\$ 800,744.43
Benefits						
009-500210 - Annuity Contribution	\$ 20,132.00	\$ 20,735.96	\$ 21,358.04	\$ 21,998.78	\$ 22,658.74	\$ 106,883.52
009-500250 - Insurance Benefits	\$ 48,324.60	\$ 50,713.29	\$ 53,220.59	\$ 55,852.40	\$ 58,614.93	\$ 266,725.81
Professional Expenses						
009-500310 - Vehicle Operation	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 15,000.00
009-500320 - Travel (Hotel/Airfare)	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 15,000.00
009-500350 - Hospitality	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 3,000.00	\$ 15,000.00
009-500380 - Prof. Development	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
Outside Services						
009-500520 - Computer Support	\$ 1,500.00	\$ -	\$ -	\$ 1,500.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00
009-500450 - Mentors and Coaches	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 12,000.00	\$ 60,000.00
009-500620 - Webinar Content	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 18,000.00	\$ 90,000.00
009-xxxxxx - Microgrants	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 100,000.00
009-xxxxxx - Retreats	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 8,500.00	\$ 42,500.00
Communication						
00-520100 - Digital Tools	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 2,000.00	\$ 10,000.00
009-520200 - Telecommunications	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
009-xxxxxx Print Communications	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
Ministry Support						
009-580500 - Food Expenses	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
009-580600 - Resource Material	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 1,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
009-580900 - Miscellaneous Program Expense						
Indirect Expense						
009-590100 - Indirect Expense	\$ 22,727.20	\$ 22,727.20	\$ 22,727.20	\$ 22,727.20	\$ 22,727.20	\$ 113,636.00
Total Expense	\$ 318,006.50	\$ 324,023.83	\$ 331,813.63	\$ 341,386.42	\$ 348,259.38	\$ 1,663,489.76
Net	\$ 9,515.05	\$ 5,993.28	\$ 789.90	\$ (6,102.07)	\$ (10,196.16)	\$ (0.00)

Budget Narrative

Income

To support this program, the Illinois Conference is requesting \$1.25M from the Lilly Endowment to be spent over the course of five years. In addition, the Illinois Conference intends to contribute 50% of the cost of the Associate Conference Minister's salary, benefits and professional expenses from our General Operating Funds. The income is distributed in a such a way that increases each year of the program to match the increased staff costs over the life of the program.

Staff Expenses

This program includes staff support consisting of a full-time Associate Conference Minister (ACM) and a full-time support staff position. Staff expenses include salaries, benefits (pension, healthcare, dental, death and disability and social security offset), travel and continuing education consistent with current personnel policies of the Illinois Conference. In calculating the amounts for these positions, we started with the current year salaries within our organization (\$90,000/y for an ACM and \$24.51/h for support staff). We assumed a 2% cost of living adjustment (COLA) for 2024 and an additional 3% adjustment per year through 2028. The premium costs started with current actuals and assumed a 5% increase per year. We currently provide a 14% annuity/pension contribution for our employees as well as social security offset (for clergy) and a death and disability benefit through the United Church of Christ Pension Board. These amounts account for the Human Resources and Benefits sections of the budget.

The Professional Expenses section includes costs for these staff to travel to churches, to participate in continuing education opportunities and to engage with the wider church. The categories match our full general operating budget. Vehicle Operations includes mileage reimbursement, tolls, parking, and miscellaneous expenses for local travel. The Travel line includes airfare, hotels, and per diem expenses for further travel. Hospitality includes expenses related to hosting guests – usually pastors or church leaders – for a meal or a snack while working directly with them. Finally, Professional development includes books, publications, webinars, courses, and other resources to furth the professional development of our staff.

Participating Congregation Support

There are two major categories of congregational support: monies that will go directly to the congregation through either a sub-granting process or direct services provided by an outside individual or agency. As outlined in the program, each congregation will work with a trained coach for six weeks to develop their congregational profile or work on very specific issues such as conflict or shared ministry. This budget assumes that 20 congregations a year will need this service at \$600 a piece. Additional specialized training for our coaches will also be applied to this line. The program also calls for the development of monthly webinars. This budget includes \$1500 for each of 60 webinars with the expectation that \$1000 will be designated for the presenter and \$500 for the video production and distribution. Microgrants of up to \$1000 will be available to churches to pay for services with our various ministry partners such as vision development, property assessment and use, legacy (closure) consideration and planning, lay leadership development or other specific purposes. The budget for this is based on an assumption of 20 congregations per year receiving \$1000 each. This program also includes three retreats per year: one for interim ministers, one for ministers new to their call, and one

for search or council chairs. These 24-hour retreats cost \$100 per person. The budget is calculated expecting 25 participants in each retreat and \$1000 for the leaders. Finally, there are line items for Food Expense and Resource Materials which are monies designated to support the initial congregational retreat offered to each congregation and specific books or other resources determined to be of help to the local congregation. These moneys could also be used to offset expenses for snacks or resources for the retreats.

Operational Expenses

This program will incur various operating expenses that are reflected in the budget. The line for Computer Support assumes the purchase of a new computer in years one and four while Digital Tools covers software, webinar platform, etc. As the ACM will work from a home office, telecommunications covers home internet and a cell phone while the support staff person will work from our centralized office and share internet and phone service already present in the office. Finally, money is budgeted for print communications to include items that might be mailed but also informational items that will be designed and distributed during congregational visits.

Indirect expenses are also an anticipated part of operating this program. This line accounts for 10% of our total budget and covers items including but not limited to: Shared legal and accounting services; Office space and property insurance; Office wifi, ZOOM, Constant Contact, copies, office supplies; Payroll services, bank service charges, online giving platform; Worker's Comp and FICA.

Current Year Operating Budget