Illinois Conference UCC

Annual Celebration & TPIRC Education Summit 2026 Report Booklet



Hope, Spring Eternal

'For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you hope and a future.'
Jeremiah 29:11-12

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2026 Annual Celebration & TPIRC Education Summit Schedule

Friday, November 6, 2026 – BWS Family Life Center

8:30 AM Check-in/Registration/Continental Breakfast

10:00 – 11:00 AM Opening Worship – Sanctuary

11:00 – 11:10 AM Break & Transition

11:15 AM – 12:00 PM Group A Workshops

- Taste and See (Cathy Wille & Rev. Nathaniel Craddock)
- Manual on Church (Rev. Melanie Oommen)
- Leading Well: An Inside-Out Approach to Self-Care (Dr. Jeanne Porter King)
- Faithful Stewardship in an Age of AI (Minister Zakiya N. Moton)
- The Male Spiritual Journey (Rev. T. Michael Rock)
- Honest and Honorable Conversations: Conflict Resolution and Communication Integrity for Ministry Teams. (Rev. C. Terrell Wheat)
- Faith in Place (Rev. Brian Sauder & April Parker)
- Metamorphosis: Supporting Churches in Seasons of Change (Rev. Shernell Edney & Rev. Dr. JJ Flag)

12:00 – 1:00 PM Lunch

1:15 – 2:00 PM Group B Workshops

- Leading Well: An Inside-Out Approach to Self-Care (Dr. Jeanne Porter King)
- Faithful Stewardship in an Age of AI (Zakiya N. Moton)
- The Male Spiritual Journey (Rev. T. Michael Rock)
- Honest and Honorable Conversations: Conflict Resolution and Communication Integrity for Ministry Teams. (Minister C. Terrell Wheat)
- Community Renewal Society (Rev. Dr. Waltrina N. Middleton)
- Metamorphosis: Supporting Churches in Seasons of Change (Rev. Shernell Edney & Rev. Dr. JJ Flag)
- Faith in Place (Rev. Brian Sauder)
- Creation Care Camp (Rev. David Russell)

2:15 –5:00 PM Celebrations
Business Session 1

6:30 – 9:00 PM Banquet *(advance ticket purchase required)*

Serbian Social Center
18550 Stony Island Ave, Lansing, IL 60438

Saturday, November 7, 2026 – BWS Family Life Center

8:00 – 8:30 AM	Check-in/Registration/Continental Breakfast
8:30 – 10:30 AM	Business Meeting Session 2 – Sanctuary
10:30 – 10:45 AM	Break
10:45 – 11:00 AM	New Officer Installation – Sanctuary
11:00 – 12:00 PM	Closing Worship/Communion – Sanctuary
12:00 PM	Departure (lunch on your own)

PROPOSED AGENDA
Annual Celebration Business Meeting (2026)
Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

Business Session Part 1 (Friday Afternoon, November 6, 2026)

1. Call to Order — Juanita Bradley, Conference President
2. Establishment of Quorum — Gilbert Martinez & Juanita Bradley
3. Opening Prayer
4. Test Votes
5. Appointment and Election of a parliamentarian for this meeting
6. Approval and Adoption of special Rules of Order and Meeting Covenant
7. Appointment/Election of Tellers (Persons to count votes, if needed)
8. Approval of the Agenda for the 2026 Annual Business Meeting
9. Approval of the Minutes of the 2025 Annual Celebration
10. Motion to receive, and place on file, written reports of the Conference staff members, Associations, Camps, Conference officers, Committees, Task Forces, Teams, and similar entities (with the exception of the financial, and nominating reports)
11. Report of the Conference President – Juanita Bradley (10 minutes)
12. Report of the Interim Conference Minister – Terrill Murff (10 minutes)
13. Nominating Committee Report and Elections — Tom Norwalk
14. Reports from Lily Grants:
    A. Thriving Pastors-TPIRC — Melody Seaton
    B. Thriving Congregations Transitions — Shernell Edney
15. The meeting shall be in recess until the call of the Chair on Saturday morning (November 7, 2026)

Business Session Part 2 (Saturday Morning, November 7, 2026)

16. Business Meeting called back into session Juanita Bradley, Conference President
17. A Time of Prayer
18. Financial Reports & Discussion Ken Webster & Scott Peterson
19. Presentation and Approval of the 2027 Budget
20. Any other business or announcements
21. Adjournment

COVENANT of HOSPITALITY AND WELCOMING
for the Illinois Conference, UCC

Seeking to be faithful together, we covenant with one another to be attentive to these guidelines as we make decisions for the Illinois Conference. In a spirit of trust and love, we will:

Give them a hearing (John 7:51)
Listen before answering (Proverbs 18:13)

1. Treat each other respectfully so as to build trust, believing that we all desire to be faithful to Jesus the Christ.
    - We will keep our conversations and communications open for honest exchange
    - We will not ask questions or make statements in a way which will intimidate or judge others
2. Listen. Listen. Listen.
    - We will try not to formulate what you want to say while someone else is speaking
    - We will NOT assume the motivations or experiences of others
    - We will seek clarification if needed
3. Be open to new learnings from various perspectives.

Hospitality: Extend Hospitality always to strangers and guests
"for I was a stranger and you welcomed me: - Matthew 25:35
"Do not neglect to show hospitality to stranger, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" – Hebrews 13:2

4. Receive invited guests with loving hospitality as someone invited to your own home or church.
5. Show a welcoming attitude of ministry to all guests.
6. Help to create and sustain a welcoming, hospitable respectful and caring environment, setting for the invited.

Speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15)

7. Share our concerns in a spirit of love and respect in keeping with Jesus' teaching.
8. Focus on ideas and suggestions instead of questioning people's motives, intelligence or integrity.
    - We will not engage in name-calling or labeling of others prior to, during or following the discussion.
9. Speak for ourselves only, expressing our own thoughts and feelings, referring to our experiences. We will avoid broad generalizations.

Maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:3)

10. Seek to stay in community with each other though the discussion may be vigorous or full of tension.
    - We will be ready to forgive and be forgiven
11. Respect the decision of the majority, and if we disagree with it and wish to change it, work for that change in ways which are consistent with these guidelines.
12. Include our disagreements in our prayers, not praying for the triumph of our viewpoints, but seeking God's grace to listen attentively, to speak clearly, and to remain open to the vision God holds for us all.

SPECIAL RULES FOR THE 2026 ANNUAL CELEBRATION BUSINESS MEETING

Debate and discussion during the business meeting shall conform to the following provisions:

A. Delegates, and others wishing to be recognized, shall obtain use of a microphone, address the presiding officer and identify themselves by name and local church (or other represented entity).

B. Pro and con microphones (and microphones for other purposes) may be designated by the presiding officer.

C. A Delegate may not speak on an issue and conclude by moving the previous question.

D. A Delegate may not present a combined motion to close debate on an amendment to a motion and to close debate on the main motion.

E. No one may speak to the same debatable motion (or speak to the same matter being discussed by the assembly) more than twice-- except to answer questions from the floor or to answer questions from the presiding officer.

F. Unless brought by a committee (or other recognized body of the Illinois Conference), a maximum of two minutes for the first speech is allowed to the maker of a motion. If a motion (or report, or presentation) is being brought by an Illinois Conference committee or other body recognized by the Illinois Conference, the presiding officer shall establish the length of the initial speech or initial presentation to be made on behalf of the committee. (See also, Item “M”). All subsequent speakers are limited to two minutes each.

G. During timed floor debates (and during timed periods of discussion) speakers will be informed that their allotted time has expired and they will be asked to relinquish the microphone. (If they continue to speak, the microphone may be turned off).

H. When time restrictions on speakers are required by these Special Rules, an extension of time may be granted by the presiding officer to the following persons:
    a. Speakers requiring translation into English from another language (time needed for the translation shall not be counted in the time allotment) and speakers who require sign language translation;
    b. Speakers whose fluency in English is limited and for whom translation is not available;
    c. Speakers with conditions which negatively affect mobility and/or speech.

I. Opportunity will be provided for two Delegates speaking in favor and two Delegates speaking in opposition to a motion before an amendment can be made.

J. A motion to limit or extend the time allocated for debate (or to limit or extend the time allotted for a period discussion) is, itself, undebatable; such motion requires a second and two-thirds vote unless decided by general consent.

K. Non-delegates, not otherwise authorized to speak, may speak only by two-thirds vote of the assembled Delegates.

L. In order to expedite the proceedings (and in order to eliminate unnecessary additional voting), when someone "Calls the previous question", before recognizing that motion, the presiding officer will first seek to otherwise QUICKLY ascertain if the assembly is ready to proceed to a vote on the motion or amendment that is already before the assembly (without having to conduct a formal vote on a "motion to call the previous question"). See also, Item "M", below. Also note, a person must first be recognized by the presiding officer and "have the floor"—before making a "motion to call the previous question". (You can't just shout out such a motion at anytime-- from anywhere in the room—and expect the assembly to address your motion).

M. A decision made by the presiding officer can be overturned in the following manner:
a. There is a motion and second made "to appeal [from] the decision of the chair".
b. A brief discussion can then take place.
c. If the motion to appeal the decision of the chair passes by a 2/3 (two-thirds) majority vote, the decision of the presiding officer is overruled.

N. Voting shall conform to the following provisions:
a. Most items can (and will) be determined by a voice vote. (Example: "All in favor signify by saying 'Aye' –opposed 'Nay'".
b. The presiding officer may also state these (or similar) words: "If there is no objection – (pause) --so ordered". During the pause, the presiding officer will listen and look – in order to ascertain if anyone is objecting. If no one objects, the matter is approved (without a formal vote being taken).
c. Votes shall be decided by the Delegates present and voting. Abstentions shall not be counted in the total. (Example: On a motion, if 75 delegates vote "Yes", 25 delegates vote "No", and 12 delegates "Abstain" –the total votes cast will be 100—not 112. Thus, a "simple majority" would be 51 votes and "a 2/3 majority" would be 67 votes).
d. If the presiding officer, or any delegate, wishes for the actual votes to be counted— all they have to do is to immediately call for a "division of the house" or "division". The presiding officer will conduct the vote again—and have the delegates stand, or raise their hand (or use some similar way) to indicate their vote. The official tellers will count the votes.
e. In order to have a [paper] ballot (sometimes called a "secret ballot"), there should be a motion and second to have a paper ballot. The motion is not debatable. If a majority vote to have a [paper] ballot—a [paper] ballot will be held. The tellers shall distribute, collect, and count the ballots.
f. There shall be a "teller" committee. The committee members (and chairperson) of the teller committee will be appointed by the presiding officer and approved by a simple majority vote of those delegates who are present and voting. The teller committee shall distribute, collect, and count the ballots. The tellers shall also count the votes if there is a "division of the house" and votes are to be counted. The chairperson of the teller committee will inform the presiding officer of the vote count and the presiding officer will announce the vote totals.
g. Voting by electronic means shall be permitted. The presiding officer, in consultation with technical advisors, shall determine the electronic voting method to be used. The electronic voting method may change (or evolve) during the course of the meeting in response to changing situations and in response to "lessons learned" during the meeting.

Illinois Conference Annual Celebration
October 31 – November 1, 2025
Business Session Part 1; October 31, 2025

After the group The Many opened worship with song and praise, we were dismissed to learn at various workshops, followed by lunch and more workshops.

Emily Mitchell welcomed the gathered at 2:38 pm and we celebrated church and clergy anniversaries, recognized members in discernment, new ordinations and new calls to our Conference. Rev. Terrill Murff gave out certificates to over 50 churches who have given to the 5 for 5 campaign and we mourned the closing of churches and clergy deaths of the past year.

Call to Order
Juanita Bradley called the meeting to order at 3:02 pm.

Quorum
It was established a quorum was present.

Opening prayer
Rev. Andrea Lasticly opened the meeting with prayer.

Test Votes
Since we had an agenda to vote on, several test questions were asked to make sure everything was in working order; it was.

Appointment and election of a parliamentarian for this meeting.
Shall Mr. Norman Williams serve as the Parliamentarian for the 2025 Annual Celebration Business meeting?

AC 10-31 01	**vote on above motion**	**PASSED**

Approval and adoption of Special rules of order and meeting covenant
Shall the Illinois Conference adopt and abide by the rules contained in the document entitled “special rules for the 2025 Annual Celebration Business Meeting?”

AC 10-31 02	**vote on above motion**	**PASSED**

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?”

AC 10-31 03 vote on above motion PASSED

Appointment and election of tellers (person to count votes, if needed)
Shall the selected persons serve as tellers for the 2025 Annual Celebration Business Meeting?

AC 10-31 04 vote on above motion PASSED

Approval of the Agenda for the 2025 Annual Business Meeting
Shall the proposed agenda for the 2025 Annual Celebration Business Meeting be adopted (as amended)?

Jon Prain moved "that the proposed agenda be amended by inserting the following item of business between #12 (report of the Interim Conference Minister) and #13 (Nominating Committee Report and Elections) as follows: "discussion/action regarding clarifying our understanding of determining maximum term limits (and eligibility to serve) in Conference positions – under the new Illinois Conference Constitution and Bylaws." Ernie Potter seconded. There was no discussion.

AC 10-31 05 vote on above motion PASSED

Approval of the minutes of the 2024 Annual Celebration
Shall the minutes of the 2024 Illinois Conference Annual Celebration be adopted as presented? Harlette Washington moved, Lindsey Svetlick seconded.

AC 10-31 06 vote on above motion PASSED

Emily noted that on page 9, the nickname of Mr. Williams be removed. Ernie noted that on page 15, first line, the amount Conference gives annually to the camps should be $50 thousand instead of $500 thousand. Another change regarding the budget, noted on page 16, remove "the rate of", and balance "the" budget.

Shall the minutes of the 2024 Illinois Conference Annual Celebration be adopted as corrected?
Harlette Washington moved to accept the minutes as amended, Lindsey Svetlick seconded.

AC 10-31 07 vote on above motion PASSED

Motion to receive, and place on file, written reports of the Conference staff members, Associations, Camps, Conference officers, committees, task forces, teams and similar entities

(with the exception of the financial reports, budgets, Nominating committee report, and Camp Forward report).

Shall the written reports of the of the Conference staff members, Associations, Camps, Conference officers, committees, task forces, teams and similar entities (with the exception of the financial reports, budgets, Nominating committee report, and Camp Forward report) be received by the Conference and placed on file?

Mark Binder moved, Catherine Erwin seconded.

AC 10-31 08 vote on above motion PASSED

Report of the Conference President – Juanita Bradley
Juanita asked the people to review her report on page 17.

Interim Conference Minister's report – Terrill Murff
Terrill thanked the Ministry Leadership Team (MLT); Michelle Hughes, Kathy Lawes and Shernell Edney Stilley for all their hard work and dedication. He referenced his report on pages 18-20 in the booklet for details and said he's been focused on stabilizing our Conference, building trust and collaboration within the Conference. He recognizes the pain and trauma we've gone through and seeks to be a healing and empathic leader and build that within other leaders. He thanked God for the work of the many who have filled the atmosphere with love and looks at the church as a source to embody and build a foundation of love. He thanked everyone.

Jon Prain's agenda item motion on discussing and clarifying our understanding of term limits
Jon Prain moves the following "when calculating maximum term limits -- and when calculating eligibility to serve in any positions in the Illinois Conference – all periods of service in any Illinois Conference positions – PRIOR to the conclusion of the 2025 Annual Celebration/Annual Meeting – shall NOT be used when determining maximum term limits nor in determining eligibility to serve in Conference positions. (The terms of Conference President and Conference Vice President shall be exempt from the provisions of this motion, as they are already specifically covered under other exemptions in the Constitution and Bylaws)". Harlette Washington seconded the motion.

There followed a lively discussion with questions for clarification. People wondered about term limits and when the new Constitution and Bylaws take effect. Term limits are: people are eligible to serve 2 terms of 2 years each with 1 year break. The new Constitution and Bylaws begin with this Annual Celebration. Due to the difficulty of finding volunteers, people can serve again, even if they've served prior as all is reset. Eric wants to move forward with new governance and said

the Nominating committee has the responsibility for the entire slate, not Associations who have their own responsibilities.

AC 10-31 09 vote on above motion PASSED with 2 opposed, 1 abstained

Nominating Committee Report and Elections – Eric Quinney-Burnard
Eric explained the committee wasn't given adequate time to recruit enough people to fill all the positions. The report is on pages 34-38. They have names but are looking for more diversity, and are asking leadership to nominate people who are gifted, called but hiding. He said sometimes, people are transformed when their gifts are called out and leaders express confidence in their abilities. If anyone has a nominee, to write down their name, phone number, email, Association and what their gift is and send to Eric. He asked for an extension to fill in the rest of the slate until January. Someone asked if the nominations should be brought to the Board of Directors instead of the Association/committee, but the Board is scheduled to only meet 4 times a year.

In order to facilitate a smooth transition from the former Constitution and Bylaws to the new Constitution and Bylaws, the Illinois Conference authorizes the members of the 2025 Illinois Conference Nominating Committee to continue the task of finding and recommending nominees to fill any vacancies on the proposed slate of nominees through January 31, 2026. Such nominees shall be presented to the Illinois ~~Counci~~l Conference Board of Directors or the respective committees or teams for a simple majority vote of approval and appointment to their offices.
Harriett Dart moved to empower the existing nominating committee to complete the vacancies as possible through January 31, 2026. Mark Binder seconded.

AC 10-31 10 vote on above motion PASSED

Shall the Illinois Conference elect the persons named in the report of the nominating committee and those nominated from the floor to the offices and terms listed?

Eric Quinney-Burnard moved to accept the slate as presented. Terri Smith seconded.

AC 10-31 11 vote on above motion PASSED
Shawn Hillman noted that his name is listed as Rev. but he is not ordained (from Eastern Association nominee).

Presentations
TPIRC – Melody Seaton said Little Home Church By the Wayside in Wayne shared the benefits of being part of TPIRC in their workshop. They work together and inspire mutual respect

between the pastor and the congregation. They took advantage of all the program offers and Melody said it's not a cure all for everything but promotes best practices and listening to what's helpful. The Holy Spirit will reveal what needs to be done to become successful, but the church has to be willing to change, adapt and do the work. Melody introduced the rest of the staff for the program.

Transitions – Shernell Edney Stilley introduced herself and her background and said the Conference received a grant to help congregations going through transitions; from the time a pastor announces their leaving until a new pastor is hired and in the pulpit. The program has healthy tips on how to go from "me to we" and become a better church. She said their table has butterfly papers infused with seeds that within 4-6 weeks will sprout and she hopes that churches will contact www.metamorphosisilucc.org for assistance. She suggested people browse the website, tease out new mission ideas and plant the seeds with intention. The program is an option to look into the mirror and see potential.

Terrill introduced our partner organizations that support health and invited anyone to feel free to reach out to them for help with mental and spiritual wellness and also congregations with trauma; there is a chaplain available to connect with for virtual care and support.

The meeting shall be in recess until the call of the Chair on Saturday morning (November 1, 2025).

Saturday November 1, 2025
Session 2

Juanita Bradley called the business meeting back in session at 9:05 am.

Jon Prain opened with a prayer.

Presentation and approval of Camp Forward Implementation – Amy Wildermuth
Amy introduced the team and said they have recommendations the team would like to implement. They have worked to separate the two camps into individual 501(c) 3 entities, and hopes the Conference will continue to provide strong relationships with the camps.

Pilgrim Park will become its own independent 501(c) 3 entity with continued ties to the Conference and have articles of incorporation to become the Pilgrim Park Association. This will necessitate transferring the property to PPA from the Illinois United Church of Christ Conference with its own bylaws. Therefore, the new name will be Pilgrim Park Association.

The specific purpose of the incorporation is to administer facilities, provide spiritual care and have opportunities and activities to include, but not limited to, those associated with the UCC. If the camp ever dissolved, the property would return to Illinois United Church of Christ Conference.

The new bylaws will guide how to run the new Association. There will be 9 members on the Board, with 3-year term with the option to run for 2 terms with a 1-year break before being eligible again. To start, one will begin with a 3-year term, another with 2-year term and another 1-year term to implement the proper rotation of members. 2 will be ex-officio of Conference, 1 as Conference Minister or delegate, 1 the president of Illinois Conference governing body.

Tower Hill already has bylaws and will need organizational change to make it independent with continued ties to the Illinois Conference, which will require revision of the existing articles of Incorporation. Their Board of trustees will change from the current 6 members to 9 members, with updated language and have the same term limits as Pilgrim Park Association.

They also will have 3 Board Trustees from the Ill. Conference and 2 ex-officio members. It will be known as the Tower Hill Camp Association. The other 6 members will be selected by the current Board from each Association.

The covenant between Illinois Conference and both Camps will be revisited every 5 years and will include advertising and fund-raising support. All the documents for the above can be found at https://tinyurl.com/3nkbta7b.

Amy Wildermuth moved the following proposals be approved.
Shall the Illinois Conference approve the transfer of property to the newly formed Pilgrim Park Association?

AC 11-01 01 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Shall the Illinois Conference endorse the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws of the new Pilgrim Park Association as reflective of the Illinois Conference's desired new relationship with the Pilgrim Park Association?

AC 11-01 02 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Shall the Illinois Conference endorse the covenant between the Illinois Conference and Pilgrim Park Association as reflective of the parties' hope to maintain a relationship with mutual commitments and obligations to one another?

AC 11-01 03 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Shall the Illinois Conference approve the revised purpose of the Tower Hill Camp Association as reflected in the revision to Article III of the proposed amendments to the Articles of Incorporation for the Tower Hill Camp Association?

AC 11-01 04 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Shall the Illinois Conference endorse the amendments to the Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws as reflective of the new relationship between the Illinois Conference and the Tower Hill Camp Association and, by this amendment, encourage the current Board of Directors to vote to approve them?

AC 11-01 05 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Shall the Illinois Conference endorse the covenant between the Illinois Conference and the Tower Hill Camp Association as reflective of the parties' hope to maintain a relationship with mutual commitments and obligations to one another?

AC 11-01 06 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Shall the Illinois Conference authorize the Conference Board of Directors to approve any necessary technical or non-major changes to the language of any documents as we go through the filing and approval process?

AC 11-01 07 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Shall the Illinois Conference ratify the following members for the Pilgrim Park Association and Tower Hill Camp Association Board of Trustees?
Pilgrim Park Association: Hank Fairman 1 year term, renewable for 3 more years
John Rogers 2-year term, renewable for 3 more years, Karen Karczewski 3-year term, renewable for 3 more years.
Tower Hill Camp Association: Ernie Potter 1 year term, renewable for 3 more years, Michelle Hughes 2-year term, renewable for 3 more years, Michael Cusack 3-year term, renewable for 3 more years.

AC 11-01 08 vote on above motion UNANIMOUS

Financial Report and Discussion – Scott Peterson and Rocky Sheneman
Scott announced that Rocky was unavailable today. During the last 18 months, there have been a lot of changes and they have worked hard to smooth out and strengthen the processes. He then went into details about the financial report.

The summary of financial position reveals our assets are down 1.8% and we had to withdraw from our reserves to be able to continue to function. We had investment gains of 6.5%. Due to the Camps transfer of property, we will lose some of our fixed assets, as we will act as custodian for the fund and not able to use.

Scott then focused on page 29, he said the details of the report are correct, however, the totals are not. The end of year beginning balance for 2024, the was $4,857,283.12 and as of August 31, 2025, the ending balance was $5,081,356.38.

The Conference Council has access to accounts 501 (CC directed UCF), 502 (ICUCC sold properties and 802 (General Operating – Council directed) with a 5% draw of the balance over the past 3 years. We've withdrawn $300K as scheduled, with 2 payments to the camps of $50K each, leaving $200K to cover budget expenses,
leaving us with a 3-year reserve which needs to be addressed. In recent years, due to loss of income, we've had to exceed the 5% draw with approval from the Council.

Summary of Activities, OCWM depends on local church support and continues to be down. Due to our agreement with National, 20% goes to them and we keep 80%, 100% of Friends of the Conference stays with us. We've taken $200K from sold properties to help pay expenses.

TPIRC and Lilly grants are restricted funds and will last until the grant is used up; the qualifications for them is the Conference must commit an equal amount ($126K) which is included in the 2026 budget. However, we must account for how the money has been used. Ernie Potter pointed out that some of the percentages listed on page 31 are off. Due to the fact the Council relinquished vehicles to MLT staff last year, that expense will no longer be applicable. They will continue to get mileage reimbursed.

Larry McClure then talked about the Stewardship Committee report. Since giving is down within the Conference, Larry said the team is ready and willing to help individual churches, however, none have called the Conference office. He asked us to please contact them so they can be of assistance.

Scott then moved that the Illinois Conference receive and approve the 2025 financial report as presented.

AC 11-01 09 **vote on above motion** **UNANIMOUS**

Shall the Illinois Conference adopt the proposed budget for the year 2026?

AC 11-01 10 **vote on above motion** **PASSED 2 opposed**

Other business or announcements
New officers as per the new Constitution and Bylaws were installed.

Donors to the Annual Celebration were thanked for their generous contributions which helped to reduce the costs to participants. Benna Bell won a praycation and will be notified. Jon Prain and the technical people were thanked, as well as the Annual Celebration and TPIRC planning team.

Larry McClure moved to close the business meeting, seconded by multiple people. Terrill Murff prayed and meeting was adjourned at Noon.

Respectfully submitted,
Nancy Fraley

Report to the Illinois Conference United Church of Christ
Rev. Kathy Lawes | Associate Conference Minister (ACM)

What's old is new again.[1]

Grace and peace, siblings in Christ of the Illinois Conference! May the risen Christ guide our days and ways, our thoughts and actions, our hearts and minds and spirits.

A year ago, I started this report with, "A lot can change in a year!", citing the addition of Rev. Michelle Hughes to our staff and identifying anticipated changes to my job description. Now we have bid Michelle farewell with our thanks, and my assortment of tasks and priorities again shifted. My responsibilities are:

- Staffing the Committees on Ministry (CoMs) of the Eastern, Fox Valley, Prairie, and Western Associations (my staffing of the Chicago Metropolitan Association's CoM concluded in September with ACM Rev. Shernell Edney stepping into the role). Among my tasks associated with the CoMs are providing support to Members in Discernment (MID); supporting the authorization process of persons called to ministry; supporting Fitness Review processes; participating in services of pastoral installations and leave-taking, Ecclesiastical Councils, and ordinations; offering pastoral care to *some* congregations and pastors in transition (primarily those in smaller communities seeking part-time pastors and/or considering yoking, sharing a pastor, and other imaginative means of identifying pastoral leadership in their tightly-knit smaller membership worshiping congregations (notably, this task includes the idea of "raising up" pastoral leadership from within a congregation, a process which our Committees on Ministry wholeheartedly support with their time, presence, mentoring, financial resources, and educational/training opportunities);

- Staffing the Association Councils of the Eastern, Prairie, and Western Associations; and,

- Providing pastoral care to pastors and congregations of our five (5) Associations, focusing primarily on ministers whose pastorates have been curtailed by health issues and/or family challenges; maintaining contact, albeit limited, with retired pastors and surviving spouses; and being as supportive as possible of key lay leaders facing difficult decisions (such as selling a parsonage, considering closure, moving to part-time ministry, financial concerns, insurance questions, and evaluating the pastor, etc.).

Few, if any, of these tasks can be completed by an individual, and I am very grateful to the chairs of the CoMs who have skillfully and adeptly carried multi-faceted responsibilities with grace: Rev. Dan Sather (CMA), Rev. Eric Quinney-Burnard (Eastern), Rev. Ruth Farrell (FVA), Rev. Jennifer Amy-Dressler (Prairie), and Rev. Tim White (Western); I'm also very thankful for the faithful and effective leadership of our very fine Association moderators: Mr. Shawn Hillman (Eastern), Revs. Hank Fairman and Muriel Jahn (acting on behalf of the Prairie Association), and Ms Ursula Webster (Western). Additionally, I thank Mr. Bob Tallitsch, member of Moline: Hope UCC, who has provided invaluable support and insights in coordinating the Fitness Review process across the entire Conference, including driving hours across our Associations to meet in person with CoMs and people involved in the adjudication of Fitness Reviews.

I'm grateful for colleagues in Conference ministry: Interim Conference Minister Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, ACM Rev. Shernell Edney, Ms Naomi Else, Rev. Sarah Lohrbach, Ms Lauran Smith, Outdoor Ministry Site Directors Rev. Tracy Heilman and Mr. Mitch Kloster, and staff persons Ms Tara Cade, Ms Jeri Edelberg, Mr. Matt Martinkus, and their marvelous summer staffs. Join me, please, in a hearty shout-out to Tara Cade who retired as the Pilgrim Park Administrator after **32 years** of service. Thank you, Tara!

I also offer heartfelt thanks to Illinois Conference siblings who provide me with support, insight, and presence; and, to the congregations whose consistent support of Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM) makes possible the ministries of our Conference staff – your generosity is deeply appreciated and <u>never</u> taken for granted. Thank you.

Finally, I must acknowledge that this past year has been…well, difficult. A lot of changes and time pressures. I've risen to the challenge in some settings and totally bombed in others. I'm aware of the grace and understanding shown me when I've fallen short of your expectations and my own good intentions. I look forward to the year ahead with hope – and to strengthening our ministries *with* and *for* you in supporting our congregations and pastors. I also anticipate a time of renewal and reconnection at the Conference Annual Celebration at Covenant UCC in South Holland when I can share my gratitude with you in person. Or on Zoom at some point. Or the phone. Those work, too.

With love and gratitude,

Rev. Kathy Lawes

Illinois Conference UCC Ministry Council

2026 Annual Report

In 2026, the Ministry Council began organizing its work to strengthen ministry across the Illinois Conference and its local churches. The year's central accomplishment was establishing a regular Council meeting structure and clarifying how the ministry teams can serve the Conference, its Associations, and congregations. The initial Ministry Team formation struggled with low participation, scheduling conflicts, and insufficient membership to fully initiate actions for the Illinois Conference and local churches. The Council also identified a key challenge: teams need clear communication, reliable contact information, active participation, and shared expectations to carry out their missions effectively.

At the October 17, 2026 Ministry Teams meeting, the Conference reaffirmed and oriented participants to the Ministry Teams structure established by the Conference Constitution and Bylaws. The meeting introduced the four (4) primary teams and expected them to begin meeting independently to set their own workflows and goals.

Accomplishments and organizational progress

The Ministry Council established monthly meetings, scheduled for the first Wednesday of the month, to support the team's needs and eventually move to quarterly meetings as needed. The Council selected Rev. Michael Jones as chair and Rev. Duane Lahti as recording secretary and began preparing agendas and meeting records to support ongoing coordination and reporting to the Board of Directors. Members discussed how to connect the Council with existing subcommittees and Conference efforts, including Outdoor Ministry, disaster relief, and Tuthill.

The Council also worked with the Nominating Committee to address gaps in team membership and participation. Members identified missing contact information, limited responses, and difficulty reaching quorum as practical barriers. They began pursuing updated member lists, preferred contact methods, and followed up with nominated members. The group proposed a joint gathering of ministry team members to confirm who remained interested, clarify expectations, and help teams begin planning together.

Communication and shared tools were another important focus. Members discussed using existing channels such as Faithful Fridays and Constant Contact to provide reports and newsletters to Associations and churches, and to establish a consistent technology and document-sharing approach. The Council also sought better access to Zoom meetings and recordings to support participation and continuity.

The October 17 meeting clarified the accountability structure: ministry teams coordinate mission implementation and report to the Ministry Council, which the Illinois Conference Board holds accountable. Teams were encouraged to shape their own working style, set their meeting schedules, and form task forces or subgroups as needed. Outdoor Ministries (ODM) was placed under Wider Engagement.

Ministry teams: focus and current work

- **Community and Vitality** develops leadership, supports pastoral excellence, and deepens relationships among local churches and Associations. Discussion identified narrative budgeting and online giving as possible areas of work. At the October 17 meeting, Pat, Joycelyn, and Emily served as acting leads or supports, while Rev. Martin Nussbaum was absent. The Finance team is working with Community and Vitality as the "relationship arm of generosity and stewardship."

- **Justice and Witness** focuses on advocacy and action for a more just, equitable, and inclusive world. The team explored ways to share information through existing Conference communications and discussed the difficulty of scheduling meetings and reaching enough members to proceed effectively. Participants also considered sharing information related to a civility press conference. Rev. Duane Lahti was identified as chair, with Amanda, Ursula, and Mark serving on the team.
- **Church Connections** supports care and connection among congregations, pastoral leaders, and the Conference structure. Its early work centered on forming the team, clarifying available shared resources, and understanding the Conference's technology and support capacity. The Council identified Douglas Roberts as Chair.
- **Wider Engagement** connects the Illinois Conference with the wider United Church of Christ and ecumenical partners. The Council began clarifying the team's responsibilities and identifying connections with related efforts, including Outdoor Ministry, Tuthill, and disaster relief. ODM is now aligned under this team. Rev. Michael Jones was identified as chair.

Finance team update

At the October 17 meeting, Ken Webster reported that the Finance Committee, formerly FAB, transitioned to four (4) task forces: accounting and narrative budgeting; property; investments; and a visionary team focused on the Conference's direction into the 2030s. Ken remains available to answer ministry team's questions. The regular level of interaction between Finance and the other ministry teams remains to be defined.

Priorities going forward

The Ministry Council intends to prioritize building a sound foundation so teams can move from organization to sustained ministry. This includes confirming membership and contact information, supporting recruitment, setting workable meeting patterns, and clarifying team responsibilities and expectations.

Following the October 17 meeting, team leaders were asked to schedule initial meetings and establish regular meeting cadences. Team members were asked to exchange contact information, and all teams were encouraged to begin envisioning how to carry out their ministry goals within the new framework. Specific meeting dates and times remain for each team to determine.

The Council also intends to strengthen communication between teams, Conference leadership, the Board of Directors, Associations, and local churches. With that groundwork in place, it will support each team in defining objectives consistent with its mission, identifying resources and partners, and reporting progress regularly. The Council's direction is to keep the ministry teams' work connected to local churches' needs and the shared mission of the Illinois Conference.

Respectfully Submitted,
Rev. Duane A. Lahti
Recording Secretary.
Ministry Council of the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ.

ILLINOIS CONFERENCE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
2026 ANNUAL REPORT

This inaugural year has been a period of organization, learning, and purposeful engagement for the Human Resources Committee. As a newly formed committee, we have focused on understanding our responsibilities, supporting the Conference's new organizational structure, and laying a foundation for consistent, thoughtful personnel oversight.

A central priority has been helping ensure that committees adhere to the Employee Handbook and live into the new structure. This work involves developing a shared understanding of how established policies guide our responsibilities, relationships, and decisions. We continue working to ensure each Human Resources Committee member understands the handbook and can provide appropriate oversight and guidance. Through this ongoing process, we seek to promote clarity, accountability, fairness, and consistency throughout our work.

During this reporting period, the committee has also engaged in significant responsibilities related to leadership evaluation and transition. We are completing the evaluation of our Interim Conference Minister, Terrill Murff, using the Conference Minister Performance Review. This process provides a structured opportunity to assess leadership, recognize contributions, clarify expectations, and identify areas for continued growth and support.

The committee completed an exit interview with the Designated Associate Conference Minister, Michelle Hughes.

Additionally, the Human Resources Chair is working with the Board of Directors to select the Search Committee for the Illinois Conference Minister.

While we have measured the scope of our activity during this first year, the responsibilities we have undertaken have addressed important aspects of organizational life: policy adherence, leadership accountability, staff transitions, and preparation for future leadership. These efforts are helping the committee develop its capacity to serve with care, sound judgment, and a clear understanding of its role.

In the coming year, we will continue deepening our familiarity with the Employee Handbook, strengthening our understanding of the new structure, and providing appropriate guidance within the committee's assigned responsibilities. Our goal is to support a working environment in which expectations are clear, individuals are treated with dignity, and personnel practices reflect the mission and values of the Illinois Conference.

We are grateful for the hard work and dedication of our Ministry Leadership Team (MLT), support staff, and camp staff. Their service sustains the Conference’s daily work and extends its ministry across our communities.

We also appreciate the Executive Council's collaboration as we continue developing the committee’s work.

With gratitude for the foundation established this year, the Human Resources Committee looks forward to a productive year of continued learning, faithful service, and meaningful contributions to the life of the Illinois Conference.

To God Be the Glory!

Respectfully Submitted,
Regena Glenn-Caldwell
Chair of Human Resources Committee

Prairie Association, Illinois Conference UCC
2026 Annual Report

Friends in Christ,

The Prairie Association continues to re-vision and re-covenant our ministries as one body in Christ across the northwest corner of Illinois.

The "change" we noted in past years continues, as long-term pastors retire and move on to new ministries; and as congregations look to their futures, determining the most impactful ways to bring the Spirit's energy into their communities.

We mark the beginnings and end of searches for new ministry leadership. We honor that other searches were set aside, with the local churches focusing on discerning God's still-speaking revelation for their mission and ministry. And we give thanks to long-standing congregations that have found their future midwifing other ministries in their closings.

At our latest count, the Prairie Association is a covenant community of 34 congregations across the geography of our twelve counties. Our Committee on Ministry (with thanks to Rev. Jennifer Amy-Dressler and the team) reports these statistics:

Authorizations in Ministry
Rev. Becky Erbe – Ordained and Installed at Second/First Church – Rockford
Brian Eide – Licensed, departed St. Paul's UCC – Hinckley, serving Garden Prairie UCC
Dale Sandell - Licensed, serving Ebenezer-Salem UCC - Pearl City; installed 10/18
Jim Brown - Licensed, serving Sheffield UCC
Continued Authorizations
Jack Briggs, First Congregational UCC-Lee Center
Jim Brown, First United UCC-Sheffield
Beth Carson, St. John's UCC-Belvidere
Alex Garncarz, Zion UCC-Peru
Jon Graham, First Congregational UCC-Spring Valley
Karen Karczewski, First Congregational UCC-Cherry/ First Congregational UCC-DePue
Mike Slutz, UCC-Hollowayville
Transitions
Rev. Martha Langford – Installed as Senior Pastor at Second/First Church – Rockford
Rev. Joe Gastiger – Installed as Pastor at Mayfield Congregational – Sycamore
Rev. Nancy Fraley – Concluded Interim at Union Congregational - Somonauk
Christopher Hamm – Departed Salem UCC – Lena
Betty Delgado – Retired, Trinity – La Salle
Rev. Dina Lauman - Retired, Garden Prairie UCC
Jon Omerod – Concluded Interim/Supply, English Congregational UCC- Big Rock
Church Affiliation
No additions or departures

Like our Illinois Conference, the continued renewal in governance and ministry continues.

This Spring, the Association delegates gathered at Federated Church – Sycamore, focusing on:
"A Reaffirmation of Community:" How we restart living out covenant by gathering together
We took inspiration from the Exile's return to Jerusalem, and the re-affirmation of the Torah, as reported in Nehemiah 8:5-8:
"Then Ezra praised God, the great God, and all the people responded,
"Oh Yes! Yes!" with hands raised high." (MSG)

Our goal was to produce a vision statement for Shared, Covenanted Ministry within the Prairie Association. At the end of our day, we did just that:

GOD'S vision for the Prairie Association is: *Healthy Churches in healthy relationships.*

What does that mean?
It means we've got our work cut out for us. It means that our attention to community and communication is our first task. It means that we will continue to support the Conference's governance transition and honor our covenant of representation. It means prayerfully supporting the ministry of the Conference Ministry Leadership Team and Staff Team in their work, and honoring the mutual accountability that supports our member churches. It means working through past struggles and into the life-giving future that we know God intents for our covenant community.

Specifically, we named these focus areas for the next period of our ministry together:

- We want to build connections between our congregations with similar mission engagements.
- We will work to connect our pastors through Communities of Practice, and our church leaders gathered in peer groups for training and fellowship.
- We will support our Committee on Ministry in their maintenance of a system of robust, functioning oversight of our authorized ministers, including Boundary Training, Racial/Cultural Sensitivity Training, and continuing education and practice.
- We want to see the Conference and Conference Ministry Team fulfill the implementation and staffing of the new model of governance.
- We look forward to a called and settled Conference Minister, and the team that will gather around them to support their work in building healthy relationships.
- It means that we will continue to listen closely to the Spirit's flame-filled inspiration on how to be more agile, while not suffering from pragmatism.

Our recent Fall Business Meeting celebrated these commitments and reiterated that this ministry of healthy relationships is exactly what God is calling us to do and be in 2027 and beyond.

God is still speaking, and still forming the Prairie Association, and that is worth celebrating! May we be the change that we are needed to be, and keep listening to our God's Still-speaking voice,

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Hank Fairman,
on behalf of the Delegates of the Prairie Association

WESTERN ASSOCIATION, ILLINOIS CONFERENCE UCC

2026 ANNUAL REPORT

Over the past year, our Association has experienced both challenges and successes. 2026 has been my first year as moderator and it has been a learning experience. I am deeply grateful to the Association Council members for their assistance and support.

The annual Spring meeting was planned for April 18 at First Congregational UCC in Canton but had to be cancelled due to unforeseen circumstances. The Council decided not to reschedule the meeting but to gather in the Fall for the Association business meeting instead.

Thanks to the generous bequest from the Helen Leonhart Estate the Association was able to award grants again in Spring 2026. It has allowed us to support mission causes and special projects of the Western Association and its member churches and partners that otherwise would not have been possible. In 2026 the Council disbursed a total of $25,200 in grants to support local church initiatives and innovative community programs. Grants were awarded to five (5) Association churches:

Bethlehem UCC in Sutter received $10,000 for a shelter building and solar panels to be used for VBS and other church activities.

Community UCC in Morton received $3,200 to develop a community giving garden in partnership with giving gardens in Macomb.

St. John’s UCC in Minier received $2,000 to increase visibility and outreach in the community, particularly around food distribution.

Salem UCC in Quincy received $5,000 to be used to launch a one-year concert ministry initiative as part of outreach to the wider community.

The Federated Church in Avon received $5,000 to set up a local food distribution site in collaboration with the Abingdon United Methodist Church.

The Leonhart Committee received a larger number of grant applications this year than in the past and unfortunately not all of them could be funded. It is heartwarming and inspiring to see that in spite of declining membership our churches are more active than ever and looking forward to the future. The grants will be available next year, and applications will be sent out in January 2027.

Sadly, I do have to report that Jacksonville Congregational UCC in Jacksonville closed in the Spring.

The Western Association Fall Business meeting took place on Zoom on October 3, 2026. The Council felt that it was more convenient to meet virtually by making it easier for people to participate and eliminate 3–4-hour travel time for many of our churches.

During the meeting the Association adopted amendments to the Bylaws to align with the new Bylaws of the Illinois Conference and approved the new slate of nominees for Association Council and Committee on Ministry. The five (5) 2026 Leonhart grant recipients presented inspiring reports on their projects, and we also received a report from First Congregational UCC in Springfield who received $10,000 in 2025 to expand their digital presence in the wider community by upgrading their streaming capabilities.

As moderator my main goal is to build relationships with our Association churches by visiting them in person and having meaningful and honest conversations about their accomplishments and their needs. So far, I have joined ten (10) churches for Sunday worship and want to thank all of them for their warm welcome.

Looking forward to the coming year, the Western Association Council is committed to helping our churches thrive by being true to our Mission Statement:

“We are called to witness the grace of God expressed by Christ Jesus with encouragement, assistance and resourcing to local congregations.”

Respectfully submitted,

Ursula Webster

Moderator of the Western Association

2026 Report of the Illinois Conference President
Juanita Bradley

My term as Illinois Conference president ends at the conclusion of this celebration. There have been some good times during these past four (4) years, two (2) as vice-president, and there have been some really hard times.

There's the on-going work with the camps, but I'm happy to say that Tower Hill is now doing exceedingly well on its own. Princeton Park is still in need of assistance, but I'm hopeful that they will get to where they need to be soon.

Now we come to the new Governance, the new Constitution and Bylaws, that call for a change in our working structure. First, there's the Board of Directors (BoD), no longer the Conference Council (CC), well that didn't hurt much. We did well with that change mainly because it took less people to fill it than the Conference Council needed.

Next, the Standing Committees, there were a couple of glitches, but they were smoothed out after a while. However, I believe you will see a pattern as I go along.

We are now at the Ministry Teams, and things came close to a screeching halt. I thank Gilbert Martinez, Jon Prain and later Emily Mitchell for their mighty efforts to help get these Teams up and running. However, despite our efforts, there was almost zero participation for months. There are four (4) Teams, three (3) of them had a chairperson, but almost every effort to meet turned up void. There was no chair for the fourth Team and it had a vacancy, I called a friend, Michael Jones, who had just returned to the Illinois Conference after serving in the Wisconsin Conference. I invited him to fill that vacancy and he accepted. There was also the Ministry Council which was not functioning because the chairs of the four (4) Teams are members of that Council. Michael became chair of the fourth Team and was voted by the other Team chairs to be the chair of the Ministry Council. In essence, we started a little backward, Michael and I talked and we used the Ministry Council to call together all four (4) Teams. Emily, and Tom Norwalk joined us as we met with the Teams and we finally made some headway.

So, as you can see, the pattern is a lack of participation. We're trying to work out the reason for it. We believe that sometimes it's a lack of communication, but we're unsure what else is the problem. I would ask all who have not read the new Constitution and Bylaws, to please read them because we voted them in, but they will only work if we participate in the process.

Now add to all that the anxiety many are feeling around the fact that they believe there is an urgent need for a settled Conference Minister Immediately. However, because we understand the desire to move things along, Emily and I worked with members of the Finance Committee, the Human Resources Committee, the Nominating Committee and several members of the Board of Director to start the process. We sent out requests for suggestions from Conference members for people to be a part of this committee, but for several weeks we got very little response. I then spoke about this dilemma to every Committee, Team and person I had an opportunity to. Soon thereafter, we got a pretty comprehensive group and from that group I'm proud to say that we have a search committee for the next settled Conference Minister in place.

With all of this, I would not have wished it away for anything because I believe it was a calling on my life. I grew up in a Baptist church and the first United Church of Christ I joined I didn't even know that it was not a Baptist church for several months. However, when I learned that it was a different denomination, I set out to learn what it is all about. And I stayed, which brought me to this place today. And, as you know, I didn't get here all by myself. I had people along this journey who were willing to help me and pointed me in the right direction. Once I got here, I was able to work with people who have historical knowledge of the UCC and were willing to share it; there were also the ones who were learning as I was learning. There are too many to attempt to call out, some have moved on to other places, some are no longer with us. But to those who are still here, I want to say that I'm grateful that I've been blessed to have gotten to know you and to have worked with you.

As I say goodbye for now, I want you to know that I will miss all of this and I will miss you. And as we leave this place, I pray for traveling grace for you. And I'd like to leave you with this, it carries me everywhere I go: Joshua 1:9.

Faithfully submitted,
Juanita Bradley

STATE OF the ILLINOIS CONFERENCE
Interim Conference Minister
2026 Report

“Hope, Spring Eternal”

Jeremiah 29:11–12 | October 2026

For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” — Jeremiah 29:11

Greetings to the members of the Illinois Conference.
It continues to be my honor, privilege, and blessing from God to serve as your Interim Conference Minister, a role I have held since September 2024. I begin this report by celebrating the faithful and steady leadership of Juanita Bradley as she concludes her tenure as President of the Board of Directors.

President Juanita has guided the Illinois Conference through a significant period of governance transition that has brought both operational and organizational change. Throughout this process, she has cultivated a culture of calm, collaboration, and thoughtful leadership. Her unwavering commitment, wisdom, and grace have helped position the Conference for continued growth and effectiveness in ministry. On behalf of the Conference, I extend heartfelt gratitude for her service and leadership during this important season in our shared life together.

A CONFERENCE AT A CROSSROADS

As I present this State of the Conference report as Interim Conference Minister, I recognize that the Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ is navigating a significant season of leadership transition, organizational healing, governance implementation, and financial sustainability. Yet, amid these challenges, “hope springs eternal.”

Jeremiah reminds us that God’s promise of hope is not dependent upon present circumstances. It is rooted in God’s faithfulness and the assurance that a future remains possible.
The Illinois Conference possesses meaningful assets: committed congregations, dedicated clergy and staff, experienced leadership, established partnerships, and opportunities for renewal. Our challenge is to align these resources with our mission and transform them into a sustainable foundation for ministry.

OUR PRESENT REALITIES

Leadership and Organizational Culture

We are working to rebuild trust, strengthen accountability, and address organizational challenges while preparing sustainable leadership beyond the interim period. Through trauma-informed

principles and empathetic leadership, I have sought to acknowledge the impact of past organizational experiences, encourage constructive communication, and cultivate a healthier, more collaborative culture.

Governance and Accountability

Implementation of our revised governance structure continues to provide opportunities to clarify responsibilities, strengthen relationships, improve communication, and establish effective decision-making. Our success depends upon shared responsibility, role clarity, and collaboration among the Board, Associations, Ministry Leadership Team (MLT), and Conference staff.

Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability remains one of our most significant challenges. At the current budget pace, the Conference has approximately three years of cash reserves. This reality requires careful stewardship, responsible financial oversight, alignment of resources with mission, and thoughtful planning for long-term sustainability.

Staff and Congregational Vitality

Healthy staff relationships, effective communication, pastoral support, and stronger connections across our five Associations remain essential. The vitality of the Conference depends upon strengthening the relationships and leadership capacity that sustain our congregations and shared ministry.

I thank God for the ministry of Rev. Michelle Hughes who retired in June of 2026. Rev. Michelle’s excellent leadership and Pastoral support to the Fox Valley and Chicago Metropolitan Association Councils and Committees on Ministry and the six (6) CMA Clusters during her tenure. The MLT and Illinois Conference will miss Rev. Michelle Hughes' contributions.

STRENGTHENING OUR FOUNDATIONS

Throughout 2026, my ministry as Interim Conference Minister has focused on strengthening the organizational, relational, and spiritual foundations of the Illinois Conference.

My leadership has been guided by six (6) strategic priorities:

- **Pastoral Care:** Strengthening relationships with pastors, congregations, staff, Association leaders, and Conference leadership through pastoral presence, accessibility, and responsive engagement.
- **Staff Development:** Supporting Ministry Leadership Team collaboration, professional development, shared ministry practices, conflict resolution, Search and Call, pastoral care, and ministerial accountability.
- **Governance Implementation:** Working collaboratively with Conference Leadership, Association Councils, Human Resources, and Finance to support role clarity, communication, accountability, and organizational alignment.

- **Financial and Operational Stewardship:** Maintaining engagement with Conference financial leadership and Jitasa to support financial reporting, budget monitoring, administrative effectiveness, and responsible stewardship.
- **External Partnerships:** Representing the Conference through ecumenical, theological, health care, and community partnerships, including Advocate Health, Community Renewal Society, theological institutions, and community initiatives addressing justice and well-being.
- **Congregational Ministry:** Maintaining preaching, worship leadership, and congregational engagement, particularly throughout the Fox Valley and Chicago Metropolitan Associations as I provide coverage for the Associations that were part of Rev. Michelle Hughes portfolio.

An important accomplishment was facilitating a Ministry Leadership Team retreat with the assistance of a nationally recognized church leadership consultant. This initiative provided opportunities to strengthen collaboration, assess ministry practices, and establish a framework for ongoing Associate Conference Minister development.

I have also increased engagement with support staff, Conference leadership, and Association Councils to strengthen communication, coordinate responsibilities, and encourage shared ownership of the Conference's mission.

TRAUMA-INFORMED LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH

Recognizing the impact of organizational history and leadership transition, I have sought to provide a consistent, spiritually grounded, and non-anxious presence.

My leadership emphasizes empathy, transparency, accountability, clear expectations, constructive conflict engagement, and opportunities for concerns to be addressed appropriately.

Trauma-informed leadership does not eliminate difficult decisions or accountability. Rather, it seeks to ensure that these responsibilities are exercised thoughtfully, consistently, and with appropriate attention to their impact on people and the institution.

I believe organizational healing requires both relational care and structural accountability. Our work is to strengthen the practices and relationships that support a healthier, more resilient Conference.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

As we move into the next phase of transition, our priorities must include:

1. Strengthening governance effectiveness and communication;
2. Developing staff capacity, collaboration, and accountability;

3. Rebuilding relational trust across the Conference;
4. Advancing financial and operational sustainability;
5. Maintaining congregational presence and community partnerships;
6. Preparing for a successful transition to settled Conference leadership.

My commitment is to help prepare the IL Conference with clearer governance, stronger relationships, more effective organizational practices, and a realistic understanding of its financial, personnel, and missional responsibilities.

The measure of this interim period will not be whether every challenge has been resolved, but whether we have strengthened the Conference's capacity to address those challenges faithfully and constructively.

HOPE, SPRING ETERNAL

The Illinois Conference is not defined solely by its present challenges. We are also defined by God's continuing promise, the faithfulness of our congregations, and our willingness to work together toward a better future.

As Interim Conference Minister, I remain committed to strengthening the people, relationships, and organizational practices that sustain our ministry and prepare us for the future.

I am grateful for the opportunity to serve our pastors, congregations, staff, and leaders. Together, we continue the work of building a healthier, stronger, and more sustainable Conference.

Hope for healthier leadership.
Hope for stronger congregations.
Hope for renewed relationships.
Hope for sustainable ministry.

And above all, hope grounded in the faithfulness of God.

Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you." — Jeremiah 29:12

Hope, Spring Eternal. Our future is in God's hands, and our work continues in faith.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Dr. Terrill N. Murff

Interim Conference Minister
Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

(ICM report on the following pages)

Interim Conference Minister's Report – Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff

Support Staff

Database Migration-Update (clergy, church and donor management):

Sarah Lohrbach worked with **Servis AI (formerly Free Agent)** to build a customized CRM (customer relationship management) system which contains two (2) modules: donor management and database management (people and churches). This system replaces REALM. All church data and people data for 4 out of 5 Associations has been imported into Servis AI. Sarah is doing a data cleanup prior to import to help us start with the best set of data possible and is continuing to update data in Servis AI as well during the cleanup and import process. We will be fully moving from Realm to Servis AI for our Conference database once the final Association people import is complete.

The donor management module enables the Conference to track contributions and generate reports and giving statements. The donor management system is already being used by our Conference Treasurer, Scott Peterson, for 2026 donation tracking.

File Migration

Microsoft SharePoint is the Conference's new cloud-based file server. At the end of 2025, Sarah migrated all files from the on-premises file server into SharePoint and it has been up and running since the beginning of the 2026. It features three (3) hubs for file management: Operations (finance, personnel), Conference (churches, clergy, governance, CoM, etc.), and Archives.

There is still a great deal of data cleanup and file organization that needs to be done, but all Conference files are now in SharePoint and accessible.

New Conference Website

Now that the file migration is complete and the database cleanup/migration is nearing completion, the next major project (which will be the focus for 2027) is the Conference website. Sarah will begin this project by assembling a volunteer team. This team will review other Conference websites to glean ideas for building a robust, user-friendly Conference website.

Part of the process will be getting input from ILUCC clergy and leaders in order to create a site that better meets the needs of our people and churches. Another key component in starting this process is researching web design companies and choosing which company will be the best and most cost-effective company for us to work with in building our new website from the ground up that we will be able to then maintain in house upon completion.

This new website will replace our current Conference website and five (5) Association websites.

JITASA

JITASA is our outsourced bookkeeping and accounting firm which handles bill payments, monthly bookkeeping, accounts payable and accounts receivable. The Treasurer (Scott Peterson), our Conference Bookkeeper (Lauran Smith) and myself

continue to meet weekly with JITASA to reconcile the books, address issues and work to create efficient workflow practices. We continue our work to refine the collaborated financial and administrative practices which we hope will increase our output.

Conference

Fox Valley Re-Covenanting Initiative

There have been two re-covenanting meetings with the pastors of the Fox Valley Association focused on listening, encouraging participation in Conference leadership roles within the new governance structure, and providing pastoral care support where needed.

This approach closely mirrors the re-covenanting model being led by Hank Fairman and Muriel Morely in the Prairie Association. I give thanks to God for the vision, leadership, and collaborative spirit they have brought to this important work, which is strengthening relationships and engagement across the Association.

Re-covenanting efforts will continue throughout 2027 as we seek to deepen connections, strengthen pastoral relationships, and encourage broader participation in the life and leadership of the Conference.

Conference Association Roundtable

I am planning to meet with the Conference Association Chairpersons to create a stronger relational discernment network across the Conference. The purpose of these roundtable conversations is to:

Build Trust and relationship

Provide an early warning system for concerns

Create 2-way conversation

Strengthen polity

Create consistency among the Associations

Improve coordination for ACM's

Create a channel for difficult conversations

Committee on Ministry Chairpersons

1. Annual Information Review (AIR)

I have suggested to the Chairpersons of the Committees on Ministry that the 2027 Annual Information Review (AIR) be administered by the Conference Support Administrative Assistant. I am recommending that the AIR process originate from the Conference office for a few reasons. First, the Conference is working to establish and maintain an accurate and comprehensive database of clergy information, including ministry settings, the status of Boundary Awareness Training (BAT) requirements, church membership, location of ministerial standing, current call position, capturing continuing education and to note changes.

Information gathered through the AIR process is used to update both Conference records and the Ministerial Directory and Authorized Ministers Database (DAD), formerly known as the

Data Hub. Centralizing the AIR process through the Conference Office will help ensure consistency, accuracy, and timely updates to these records, which are essential for supporting authorized ministers and fulfilling Conference and denominational reporting responsibilities.

2. Vetting of Boundary Awareness Training from the Disciples of Christ

I mailed a copy of the Disciples of Christ boundary awareness training curriculum, *Choices for Abundant Living: An Ethics Training Course for Clergy*. I ask that COM's review this curriculum and determine whether it meets the Illinois Conference requirements for Boundary Awareness Training. I would like to use this curriculum during our upcoming Boundary Awareness Training during the Annual Celebration.

In addition, I would like each Association to begin identifying individuals who would be strong candidates to serve as Boundary Awareness facilitators. The authors of *Choices for Abundant Living* have expressed a willingness to partner with the Illinois Conference and have offered to provide facilitator training for individuals we identify. This partnership would enable us to use the curriculum to offer our own Boundary Awareness training events within the Conference.

3. Adoption of the Unified Fitness Review Process (UFRP)

As we continue to strengthen our shared ministry and support authorized ministers throughout the Conference, a common Unified Fitness Review process enables us to respond faithfully, compassionately, and consistently when concerns arise. Adopting the UFRP across the five (5) Associations of the IL Conference also reinforces our commitment to mutual accountability and the well-being of those we are called to serve.

I have asked Bob Tallitcsh to coordinate the five Association COMs to implement a Unified Fitness Review Process (UFRP) for the Illinois Conference. I encouraged Bob to connect with Elizabeth Dilley from MESA (Ministerial Excellence, Support and Authorization) to learn from conferences where a UFRP is already operational and functioning well. Understanding their experiences and best practices will help inform our approach.

A Unified Fitness Review Committee (UFRC) is often created by multiple Associations within a Conference so that fitness reviews are handled timelier, by a trained, experienced, and more impartial group rather than by a single local Committee on Ministry (CoM). Participating Associations agree to accept the committee's findings and recommendations.

Midwest Ministry Development

Ecumenical church related organization that provides professional assessment, counseling, vocational discernment, and leadership – development services for clergy and other church professionals. I am working with them to more effectively and widely utilize their services for our clergy.

Hospice/Threshold Churches

A **hospice/threshold church** is a congregation that recognizes its ministry is nearing completion and intentionally chooses to conclude its life faithfully rather than continue in decline or denial. The term borrows from hospice care — where the focus shifts from curing to comfort, dignity,

and meaningful closure. It’s not about failure, but about finishing well — with grace, gratitude, and purpose.

David Schoen (Church Building Loan & Fund) Minister for Church Legacy and Closure has retired and that leaves a huge void during a time when many of our churches are facing an uncertain and challenging future.

I am looking for programs and initiatives to resource and provide Pastoral nurture to the many of our congregations who find themselves in this challenging paradigm.

Church Property

God Can Ministries

The congregation disbanded during COVID. The mortgage holder is Church Building Loan & Fund who threatened foreclosure. God Can Ministries has sold the property to another church and will plan to close prior to year-end.

The Conference office was approached by Century 21 Lincolnwood seeking a congregation who is looking to sell its property. They have a congregation who is looking for a free-standing church building (not a campus nor a school) circa 6,000-12,000 sq ft., with the sanctuary and restrooms on the ground floor, seating around 250 – 300 people with on site parking.

Weekly Meetings

MLT (Ministry Leadership Team)- ACM's

Conference Leadership (President and Vice President)

CMA Community of Practice

JITASA (IL Conf Treasurer, IL Conf Bookkeeper)

Monthly Meetings

Board of Directors

Finance Board

FVA/CMA Association Council

CMA Clusters 1, 3, 5, and 6

Human Resource Board

CMA Community of Practice – Clergy & MID

Quarterly Meetings

Council of Conference Ministers w/ Karen Georgia Thompson

Community on Ministry Chairpersons

Bi Monthly Meetings (every two months)

Advocate Hospital Board of Directors

Advocate Southland Governing Councils

Advocate Quality Management Oversight

Community work with Covenanted Partners

Midwest Ministry Development Board Meeting

Civility Press Conference @ Chicago Urban League

Advocate Hospital – Philanthropy to Support Southside Transformation Initiative

Community Renewal BOD – Facilitate / Chair meeting

Ecumenism Chicago Metro Unity Prayer

Rainbow PUSH Conference

Samuel DeWitt Proctor Conference

Live Free

Illinois Conference Nominating Committee Report

October 19, 2026

The Illinois Conference Nominating Committee has met several times over the past year to engage in conversation and strategy to seek candidates for open positions on our Conference Board of Directors (BoD), Conference Standing Committees, and Conference Program Teams. With the adoption of the new governance structure at the 2025 Annual Celebration, we were charged with filling open positions throughout the year that we then took to the Board of Directors for their official approval when we were able to secure candidates for those positions.

It has been somewhat of a difficult task to begin the work of the Conference Program teams outlined in the new Conference structure. With the leadership of the Team Chairs, known as the Ministry Council, the Nominating Committee has revisited the commitment of those who had agreed to previously serve and to also engage new members for that work. We believe that we are now at a stage where the work of those teams will begin with purpose.

We present our ballot for the 2026 Annual Celebration with several open positions that we continue to seek to fill prior to our meeting. For any open positions at the 2026 Annual Celebration, we will invite nominations from the floor to help us provide as strong a structure and as wide a participation from across the Conference.

I thank the members of the Nominating Committee who have worked diligently with me to provide the ballot that you will find in our Annual Celebration packets.

Respectfully,
Rev. Tom Norwalk, Chair

CMA Representatives: Rev. Gloria Cox & Rev. Michelle Day
EA Representatives: Rev. Terri Smith & Rev. Tom Norwalk
FV Representative: Rev. Catherine Erwin
PA Representative: Rev. Hank Fairman
WA Representatives: Rev. Jon Prain & Rev. Jan Johnson

SLATE OF ILLINOIS CONFERENCE POSITIONS
TO BE ELECTED AT THE 2026 ANNUAL CELEBRATION

All positions are to be nominated by the Conference Nominating Committee, with input and suggestions from the designated Associations if a position is to be representing an Association--and elected at the Conference Annual Celebration

BOARD OF DIRECTORS (All terms are for TWO Years)

The Board of Directors shall administer the affairs of the Conference between business meetings of the Conference and have such powers and duties as are usual and customary to a Board of Directors under the laws of the State of Illinois, unless restricted or prohibited by these Bylaws

President:	Emily Mitchell	(Term Expires 2028) (new term)
Vice-President	Pastor Alex Garncarz	(Term Expires 2028) (new term)
Secretary:	Sarah Alexander	(Term Expires 2027)
Treasurer:	Scott Peterson	(Term Expires 2027)

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

Kim Shelton	(Term Expires 2027)
Debbie Kent	(Term Expires 2027)
Wilbert Watkins	(Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)
Sue Harvey	(Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Doug Zimmerman	(Term Expires 2027)
Mary Gilman	(Term Expires 2028) (new)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Open	(Term Expires 2027)
Open	(Term Expires 2028)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION

Lisa Gorchels (DeKalb)	(Term Expires 2027)
Lisa Schubert (Freeport)	(Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION

Mary Newcomb	(Term Expires 2027)
Rev. Tim White	(Term Expires 2028) (new term)

ALSO ON THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

- CHAIRPERSON OF THE CONFERENCE FINANCE COMMITTEE:
(Elected for a term of one year by the members of the Finance Committee)
- CHAIRPERSON OF THE CONFERENCE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE
(Elected for a term of one year by the members of the Human Resources Committee)
- CHAIRPERSON OF THE CONFERENCE NOMINATING COMMITTEE
(Elected for a term of one year by the members of the Nominating Committee)

STANDING COMMITTEES

CONFERENCE FINANCE COMMITTEE

The Conference Finance Committee promotes and preserves the financial integrity of the Conference, overseeing committees and teams that manage and promote financial development and stewardship of the Conference's fiscal and real properties

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

Rae McCray	(Term Expires 2027)
Harlette Smith	(Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION

Bev Obert	(Term Expires 2027) (new term)
Open	(Term Expires 2028)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Frank Zavaski	(Term Expires 2027)
Open	(Term Expires 2028)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION

Rev. Dave Bateman	(Term Expires 2027)
Open	(Term Expires 2028)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION

Ken Harding	(Term Expires 2027)
Ken Webster	(Term Expires 2028) **(Chair)** (continues for new term)

CONFERENCE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

The Conference Human Resources Team promotes fair and just labor practices for all persons employed by the Conference and oversees such committees and teams that assist in this administration. They shall recommend employment policies, job descriptions, evaluation guidelines, and salary structure

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Dr. Regena Caldwell	(Term Expires 2027) **(Chair)**
K. C. Mosley	(Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Eric Quinney-Burnard	(Term Expires 2027)
Shawn Hillman	(Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION
Open (Term Expires 2027)
Gail Paul (Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION
Rev. Muriel Morley Jahn (Term Expires 2027)
Dina Lauman (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION
Rev. Santina Poor (Term Expires 2027)
Rev. Jon Prain (Term Expires 2028) (new term)

CONFERENCE NOMINATING COMMITTEE

The Conference Nominating Committee gathers the members of the Conference to be considered for election by the Conference at its annual meeting, except for those whose nominations are provided by the Associations

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION
Rev. Michelle Day (Term Expires 2027)
Rev. Gloria Cox (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION
Rev. Tom Norwalk (Term Expires 2027) **(Chair)**
Rev. Terri Smith (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION
Open_____ (Term Expires 2027)
Open (Term Expires 2028)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION
Open (Term Expires 2027)
Open (Term Expires 2028)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION
Rev. Jan Johnson (Term Expires 2027)
Open (Term Expires 2028)

MINISTRY TEAMS

Each Ministry Team is composed of at least five (5) members and a maximum of ten members elected from at least three (3) Associations by the Conference at the Annual Celebration. Each Ministry Team shall elect from its members a Chair and Vice Chair for a two-year term

COMMUNITY AND VITALITY TEAM

(AKA "Program Innovation Events)

The Community and Vitality Team discerns and drives the ministry that creates leadership development, Pastoral Excellence, and deep relationships in and among the local churches and Associations

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Ashley Dowden (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Joycelin Fowler (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION

Patricia McCure (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Pastor Dennis Hughes (Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Rev. Selena Blackwell (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Open (Term Expires 2028)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION

Open (Term Expires 2027)
Open (Term Expires 2028)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Mary Alice Kirk Sutter (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Rev. Martin Nussbaum (Term Expires 2028) **(Chair)** (continues for new term)

JUSTICE AND WITNESS TEAM

The Justice and Witness Team discerns and drives the ministry of advocacy and action to bring the world into a more just, equitable, and inclusive image of God's realm

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Titus Bryant (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Rev. Ketric Emory (Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION

Amanda Herman (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Rev. Mark Jacobs (Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Amy Allen	(Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Rev. Patricia Lindquist	(Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION

Rev. Eric Ogi	(Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Ali Groen	(Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION

Ursala Webster	(Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Rev. Duane Lahti	(Term Expires 2028) **(Chair)** (continues for new term)

CHURCH CONNECTIONS TEAM

(AKA "Local Church Team")

The Church Connections Team discerns and drives the ministry that supports the care and connections between the local churches, the pastoral leaders, and the structures that support the interconnected ministries of the Conference

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

Doug Roberts	(Term Expires 2027) **(Chair)** (continues)
Rev. Benna Bell	(Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION

Maurine Sterrett	(Term Expires 2027) (new term)
Pastor Jay Hurd	(Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Open	(Term Expires 2027)
Catherine Erwin	(Term Expires 2028) (new term)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION

Rev. Tyler Spellious	(Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Open	(Term Expires 2028)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Lauren Padgett	(Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Open	(Term Expires 2028)

WIDER ENGAGEMENT TEAM

The Wider Engagement Team discerns and drives the ministry of connections within the United Church of Christ and across our ecumenical partners

FROM CHICAGO METROPOLITAN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Michael Jones (Term Expires 2027) **(Chair)** (continues)
Jeni Fabian (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM EASTERN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Carol Currier-Frighetto (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Lilana Terlep (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM FOX VALLEY ASSOCIATION

Open (Term Expires 2027)
Open (Term Expires 2028)

FROM PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION

Rev. Karen Zellers (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Min. John Omerod (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

FROM WESTERN ASSOCIATION

Rev. Carol Hoke (Term Expires 2027) (continues)
Rev. Tyler Yost (Term Expires 2028) (continues for new term)

"The Thriving in Ministry grant was created to support pastors, so they can become better leaders in their congregations. If pastors are better leaders, this will equip their congregations to spread the gospel."

-Chris Cobles, Vice President for Religion

Lilly Endowment

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Thriving Pastors in Revitalizing Congregations (TPIRC)

Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

Pillars of TPIRC

Leadership – Collegiality – Spirituality – Congeniality

Team

Melody L. Seaton, Project Director

Lindsey Svetlick, Project Coordinator

Stephanie Moore, Generosity Officer

Kathy Brown, Administrative Assistant

Membership Report:

- 14 churches involved in TPIRC

Team Meetings:

1/7, 2/4, 4/1, 5/6, 6/3, 8/5

Team Meetings with Annual Planning Committee:

1/6, 1/8, 2/5, 3/5, 4/23, 6/4, 8/6, 9/3, 10/22

Responsibilities:

A. Secured 7 of the presenters.
    1. Grant Writing
    2. Taste & See (sample CCP)
    3. Leading Well: An Inside -Out Approach to Self-Care
    4. Faithful Stewardship in an age of AI
    5. Honest & Honorable Conversations
    6. The Male Spiritual Journey
    7. Faith in Place (Environmental Justice)
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B. Worked with Rev. Sarah Lohrbach to create the registration portal.
C. Handled the logistics for the meeting.
D. Arranged for Lunch both days.
E. Secured the Banquet location.
F. Secured the Hotel.

Thriving in Ministry Lily Endowment Gathering:

March 2026-Attendees: Stephanie Moore (Generosity Officer) & Kathy Brown (Administrative Assistant)

Activities

Cohort Meetings:

1st Quarter Meetings: 4/25

Presenter: Rev. Jonathan Brooks
Formerly of Canaan Baptist Church
Topic: Cultivating Networks of Impact

2nd Quarter Meetings: 7/18

Presenter: Minister Zakiya Moton
Uplevel Management
Approaching a Biblical & Theological Framework for approaching AI with wisdom

Generosity Officer:

To assist in the raising of the matching funds for the sustainability grant, we contracted J & P Consulting. They have an established footprint in the community locally and at large. It was our hope that by working closely with our new generosity officer, the tools needed to secure various types of funding would occur. We contracted Dr. Jordan, principal consultant for a 12-month period and she worked extensively writing grant and introducing Ms. Moore to fundraising protocols. To culminate this year, Dr. Jordan will be one (1) of the presenters for the Annual Meeting/TPIRC Education Summit. She has created a grant-writing booklet useful for religious organizations.

Clergy Communities of Practice:

We continued with two (2) CCOP groups headed by Rev. Dr. Kent Poindexter and Rev. Hank Fairman. They meet monthly with specific topics to govern the gathering time. Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff will be resuming CCOP he led to be in line with one of the expectations of the sustainability grant.

Microgrants:

This year we awarded four (4) microgrants in the amount of $1,000 each to the following churches:

1. Hope UCC, Moline
2. First Congregational UCC, Springfield
3. Church of the Good Shepherd, Chicago
4. Federated Church of Sycamore, Sycamore

Illinois Conference United Church of Christ
Summary of United Church Funds Investments

Account	Investment	12/31/25 Balance	9/30/26 Balance	YTD % Change	2027 5% Draw Amount
FUNDS TO SUPPORT CONFERENCE OPERATIONS					
IC UCC Trust Fund	Balanced	$ 522,465	$ 556,336	6.5%	$ 23,586.75
These funds are used at the direction of the Conference Board of Directors					
IL UCC General Operating Endowment	Balanced	$ 310,559	$ 330,692	6.5%	$ 13,526.97
Used for sustaining and expanding current & future programs of Mission & Ministry. Dist by Conf Board					
Sold Properties Fund	Balanced	$ 214,137	$ 29,369	-86.3%	$ 19,269.68
Proceeds from the sale of churches received by the Conference. Distributed by the Conf Board					
Total		**$ 1,047,161**	**$ 916,397**		
ASSOCIATION FUNDS					
Fox Valley Association	Balanced	$ 37,676	$ 40,119	6.5%	N/A
Managed by the Fox Valley Association					
Prairie Association	Balanced	$ 60,555	$ 66,893	10.5%	N/A
Managed by the Prairie Association					
Total		**$ 98,231**	**$ 107,012**		
FUNDS TO SUPPORT SPECIFIC MISSIONS					
Leonhart Fund	Balanced	$ 361,508	$ 343,296	-5.0%	$ 16,251.42
Used to support mission causes and special projects. Dist by Western Assoc					
FVA Bayler Fund	Balanced	$ 142,205	$ 151,424	6.5%	$ 6,293.85
Provides grants to help retire Seminary debt of ministers. Dist by Fox Valley Assoc					
Lilly Grant -- TPIRC	Cash & Equity	$ 773,507	$ 643,202	-16.8%	N/A
Helps pastors build relationships with mentors to guide them through leadership challenge in ministry. Dist by Board / TPIRC Leadership					
Tuthill Trust	Balanced	$ 686,710	$ 731,228	6.5%	$ 32,209.03
Devoted to foreign Missionary activities. Dist by Tuthill Commission					
Leopard Trust	Balanced	$ 34,147	$ 36,361	6.5%	$ 1,511.33
Used to support those in need. Dist by CMA.					
Schmidt Trust	Balanced	$ 17,074	$ 18,181	6.5%	$ 755.67
Used to support peace and justice issues. Dist by Justice & Witness Ministry					
Slater Fund	Balanced	$ 8,537	$ 9,090	6.5%	$ 377.83
Assist worthy young men and women in obtaining and education. Dist by Eastern Assn					
Heinberger Fund	Balanced	$ 2,561	$ 2,727	6.5%	$ 113.35
Encourages and financially assists UCC seminary students. Dist by Eastern Assn					
Harding Fund	Balanced	$ 2,741	$ 2,918	6.5%	$ 121.30
Used to aid students-in-care in WA and/or the Iowa Conference. Dist by Western Assn					

Illinois Conference United Church of Christ

Summary of United Church Funds Investments

Rice Fund	Balanced	$ 5,122	$ 5,454	6.5%	$ 226.70
Used to aid students-in-care. Dist by Western Assn					
ODM Scholarship Fund	Balanced	$ 15,363	$ 16,359	6.5%	$ 681.78
Used to provide scholarships to Tower Hill and Pilgrim Park Camps					
Brown Endowment for Praycations	Balanced	$ 114	$ 122	7.0%	N/A
Payment / Reimbursents of Clergy Praycations. Dist by Finance Committee / Staff					
Hope Scholarship Fund	Balanced	$ 43,080	$ 45,873	6.5%	$ 1,906.68
Annual $1,500 scholarship for needy student who is an Illinois Conference UCC member attending college, seminary, or other advance education, w/ special consideration for any student in Vermillion. Dist by Eastern Assn					
Eunice M. Green Fund	Balanced	$ 6,152	$ 4,356	-29.2%	N/A
Scholarships for lay students who wish to attend The School of Ministry (now DOC). Dist by ACM for PIE					
Pastoral Transitions - Lilly Grant	Balanced	$ 1,378,538	$ 1,222,745	-11.3%	N/A
Dist by Board / Pastoral Transitions Leadership					
LEEAP Fund	Balanced	$ 79,001	$ 54,951	-30.4%	N/A
Local Evangelism, Envisioning and Planning (LEEAP)'s purpose is to strengthen local churches. LEEAP oversees the start of new churches and partners with existing churches to revitalize them.					
Total		**$ 3,556,360**	**$ 3,288,287**		
GRAND TOTAL		**$ 4,701,752**	**$ 4,204,684**		

Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

Statement of Financial Position

As of Aug 31, 2026

	Total
Assets	
Current Assets	
Bank Accounts	
1000 Cash	
1010 Byline Bank Accounts	
1011 Byline Gen Op Checking x0162	$ 84,362.58
1012 Byline Gen Op Savings x5457	$ 585.65
1013 Byline TPIRC Checking x2794	$ 51,954.53
1014 Byline Pastoral Trans Checking x9980	$ 43,681.90
Total 1010 Byline Bank Accounts	**$ 180,584.66**
1090 Petty Cash	
1091 Petty Cash-Tower Hill	$ 1,500.00
1092 Petty Cash-Pilgrim Park	$ 1,500.00
Total 1090 Petty Cash	**$ 3,000.00**
Total 1000 Cash	**$ 183,584.66**
1500 Investments	$ (5,235.37)
1501 Bayler Fund x0002	$ 154,740.21
1502 Conference Council Directed Fund x0000	$ 568,518.20
1503 E Green Scholarship Fund x0022	$ 4,451.24
1504 General Operating Fund x0011	$ 337,932.81
1505 Harding Fund x0014	$ 2,982.06
1506 Heinburger Fund x0013	$ 2,786.79
1507 Leonhart Fund x0001	$ 350,813.63
1508 Leopard Fund x0009	$ 37,157.44
1509 ODM Scholarship Fund x0016	$ 16,717.31
1510 Frantzen Continuity Fund Fund x0019	$ 248,425.54
1511 Rice Fund x0015	$ 5,573.64
1512 Pilgrim Park Fund x0006	$ 19,303.64
1513 PP Renew Energy Fac Fund x0018	$ 18,398.47
1514 Prairie Association Fund x1490	$ 65,893.38
1515 Schmidt Fund x0010	$ 18,578.75
1516 Slater Fund x0012	$ 9,289.37
1518 Hope Scholarship Fund x0021	$ 46,877.85
1519 Tuthill Fund x0008	$ 747,240.02
1520 ILUCC Sold Properties Fund x0017	$ 30,012.39
1521 TPIRC Lilly Grant Fund x0007	$ 786,628.66
1522 Brown Endowment Award Fund x0020	$ 124.24
1523 Pastoral Transitions Lilly Gr Fund x0023	$ 1,500,049.51

Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

Statement of Financial Position

As of Aug 31, 2026

	Total
1524 LEEAP Fund x0024	$ 56,154.15
1525 Fox Valley Association Fund x0006	$ 40,997.32
Total 1500 Investments	**$ 5,064,411.25**
Total Bank Accounts	**$ 5,247,995.91**
Accounts Receivable	
1100 Accounts Receivable	$ 285.00
Total Accounts Receivable	**$ 285.00**
1800 Other Assets	
1810 Mortgage Receivables	
1811 Mort Rec - Malta, Maranatha EPC	$ 12,328.80
1812 Mort Rec - Iglesia Fuente	$ 53,882.54
Total 1810 Mortgage Receivables	**$ 66,211.34**
1820 Mort Rec - Bad Debt Reserve	$ (2,324.22)
Total 1800 Other Assets	**$ 63,887.12**
Total Other Current Assets	**$ 63,887.12**
Total Current Assets	**$ 5,312,168.03**
Fixed Assets	
1600 Fixed Operating Assets	
1699 Land	$ 245,823.86
Total 1600 Fixed Operating Assets	**$ 245,823.86**
Total Fixed Assets	**$ 245,823.86**
Total Assets	**$ 5,557,991.89**
Liabilities and Net Assets	
Liabilities	
Current Liabilities	
Accounts Payable	
2000 Accounts Payable	$ 19,977.53
Total Accounts Payable	**$ 19,977.53**
Credit Cards	
2100 Credit Cards	
2110 Expensify	$ 1,428.41
Total 2100 Credit Cards	**$ 1,428.41**
Total Credit Cards	**$ 1,428.41**
Other Current Liabilities	
2200 Accrued Liabilities	
2240 Camp Deposits	
2242 Pilgrim Park Camp Deposits	$ 5,562.00

Illinois Conference of the United Church of Christ

Statement of Financial Position

As of Aug 31, 2026

	Total
2243 ODM Camp Deposits	$ 30,185.00
Total 2240 Camp Deposits	**$ 35,747.00**
Total 2200 Accrued Liabilities	**$ 35,747.00**
2300 Accrued Payroll	
2340 Accrued Payroll - 401k/403b	$ 133.86
Total 2300 Accrued Payroll	**$ 133.86**
Total Other Current Liabilities	**$ 35,880.86**
Total Current Liabilities	**$ 57,286.80**
Total Liabilities	**$ 57,286.80**
Net Assets	
3100 Net Assets with Donor Restrictions	$ 500,000.00
3000 Net Assets without Donor Restrictions	$ 5,527,091.52
Net Income	$ (526,386.43)
Total for Net Assets	**$ 5,500,705.09**
Total for Liabilities and Net Assets	**$ 5,557,991.89**

OCWM Wellness Analysis

Giving Through September 2026

	2024	2025	2026	
Month	Actual	Actual	Actual	Budget
January	$ 87,584	$ 39,351	$ 42,746	$ 41,250
February	$ 50,425	$ 42,426	$ 70,635	$ 41,250
March	$ 49,440	$ 31,643	$ 39,979	$ 33,000
April	$ 62,994	$ 86,146	$ 79,137	$ 90,750
May	$ 75,752	$ 42,568	$ 28,154	$ 49,500
June	$ 60,972	$ 60,235	$ 29,997	$ 66,000
July	$ 82,820	$ 65,358	$ 62,421	$ 74,250
August	$ 47,356	$ 35,219	$ 23,603	$ 41,250
September	$ 50,612	$ 95,297	$ 28,428	$ 99,000
October	$ 55,296	$ 78,015		$ 82,500
November	$ 39,814	$ 52,915		$ 57,750
December	$ 174,879	$ 141,801		$ 148,500
Annual Budget	$ 1,000,000	$ 900,000		$ 825,000
Annual Actual	$ 837,944	$ 767,224		
Actual Through September 30	$ 567,955	$ 498,243	$ 405,100	$ 437,250

Illinois Conference United Church of Christ
Preliminary Results Actual Versus Budget
January - August 2026

		Actual		Budget	% Var
Income					
	Our Church's Wider Mission (Total)	$ 377,925		$ 437,250	-13.6%
	Less Allocation to National	$ (75,985)		$ (87,450)	-13.1%
	Net OCWM	$ 301,940		$ 349,800	-13.7%
	Friends of the Conf	$ 2,574		$ 10,200	-74.8%
	Other	$ 813			
Total Income		$ 305,327		$ 360,000	-15.2%
Expenses					
	Salary and Related Expenses	$ (508,159)		$ (496,804)	2.3%
	Accounting & Legal	$ (28,312)		$ (35,000)	-19.1%
	Office				
	Telephone and Internet	$ (5,872)			
	Equipment	$ (2,294)			
	Digital Tools	$ (8,854)		$ (16,450)	76.5%
	Subscriptions	$ (7,167)			
	Supplies	$ (4,855)			
	Rent & Utilities	$ (11,671)		$ (13,067)	-10.7%
	Travel	$ (8,985)		$ (16,000)	-43.8%
	Insurance	$ (34,735)		$ (2,000)	1636.8%
	Ministry Support	$ (9,188)			
	Payments to Covenanted Partners			$ (8,108)	13.3%
	Council of Conference Ministers	$ (1,400)			
	Other	$ (4,539)		$ -	
Total Expenses		$ (636,031)		$ (587,429)	8.3%
Operating Deficit		$ (330,704)		$ (227,429)	45.4%
	Camp Forward Payments	$ (20,000)		$ (60,000)	
Overall Deficit		$ (350,704)		$ (287,429)	22.0%

		TOTAL ANNUAL 2027 BUDGET	PROJECTED 2026 ACTUAL
INCOME			
DONATED REVENUE			
Direct Contributions			
	Individual Contributions		
	Our Church's Wider Mission	$ 825,000	$ 783,495
	Friends of the Conference	$ 10,000	$ 5,000
TOTAL FOR DONATED REVENUE		**$ 835,000**	**$ 788,495**
EARNED REVENUE			
Program Sales & Fees			
	Sponsorships / Grants	$ 15,000	$ -
Total for Program Revenue		**$ 15,000**	$ -
TOTAL EARNED REVENUE		**$ 15,000**	$ -
TOTAL INCOME		**$ 850,000**	$ 788,495
EXPENSES			
EXPENSES - GRANTS, SALARIES & CONTRACTORS			
Gifts & Direct Assistance			
	National Allocation	$ 165,000	$ 156,699
	Gifts to Other Organizations	$ 60,000	$ 80,000
Total for Grants & Direct Expenses		**$ 225,000**	**$ 236,699**
Salaries & Related Expenses			
	Salaries and Wages; Housing	$ 588,818	$ 580,907
	401k/403b Contributions	$ 57,250	$ 59,748
	Employee Benefits	$ 100,431	$ 97,035
	Payroll Taxes	$ 21,735	$ 25,519
	Payroll Service Fees	$ 9,500	$ 9,261
	Workers Comp	$ 18,000	$ 17,283
	Conference Minister Search	$ 10,000	$ -
Total for Salaries & Related Expenses		**$ 805,734**	**$ 789,753**

		TOTAL ANNUAL 2027 BUDGET	PROJECTED 2026 ACTUAL
Contract Service Expenses			
	Contractors - General	$ -	
	Accounting	$ 44,400	$ 43,968
	Attorney & Legal	$ 12,000	$ (1,000)
	IT Consultant	$ 15,000	
	Mentors and Coaches		
	Contracted Maintenance	$ -	
Total for Contract Service Expenses		**$ 71,400**	**$ 42,968**
TOTAL FOR GRANTS, SALARIES, & CON		**$ 1,102,134**	**$ 1,069,420**
NON PERSONNEL EXPENSES			
Nonpersonnel Expenses			
	Supplies	$ 2,000	$ 2,014
	Food & Refreshments	$ 2,500	$ 2,542
	Telephone & Internet	$ 9,000	$ 8,835
	Postage & Shipping	$ 1,400	$ 1,371
	Equipment Rental	$ 3,500	$ 3,463
	Software & Hardware	$ 17,500	$ 12,818
	Printing & Copying	$ 400	$ 358
	Subscriptions	$ 10,000	$ 10,809
Total for Nonpersonnel Expenses		**$ 46,300**	**$ 42,211**
Facility Expenses			
	Office & Storage Rent	$ 18,000	$ 18,000
	Utilities	$ 2,000	$ 1,661
	Repairs & Maintenance	$ -	
	Depreciation & Amortization	$ -	
Total for Facility Expenses		**$ 20,000**	**$ 19,661**
Travel & Conference Expenses			
Total for Travel & Conference Expense		**$ 13,000**	$ 12,782
Other Program Specific Expenses			
	TBD	$ -	

		TOTAL ANNUAL 2027 BUDGET	PROJECTED 2026 ACTUAL
	TBD	$ -	
	TBD	$ -	
Total for Other Program Specific Expen		$ -	$ -
Other Expenses			
	Interest Expense	$ -	
	Insurance - Non-employee Rel	$ 7,700	$ 6,670
	Membership Dues - Organizati	$ 10,000	$ 9,523
	Staff & Volunteer Training	$ 3,000	$ 2,930
	Bank Fees	$ 1,800	$ 1,836
Total for Other Expenses		$ 22,500	$ 20,959
TOTAL NONPERSONNEL EXPENSES		$ 101,800	$ 95,612
TOTAL EXPENSES		$ 1,203,934	$ 1,165,032
TOTAL NET OPERATING INCOME		$ (353,934)	$ (376,537)

MEETING OPERATING DEFICIT		
5% Draw From Investments	$ 56,653	$ 46,435
Additional Draw from Reserve	$ 297,281	$ 330,102
Total Draw From Reserves	$ 353,934	$ 376,537

2026 ILLINOIS CONFERENCE

FINANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

From Governance Renewal to Financial Stewardship
The Finance Committee emerged within the Illinois Conference's renewed governance model, developed through a multi-year process of listening, discernment, constitutional and bylaw revision, and implementation. Under the new structure, Finance is one of three (3) Standing Committees, working with the Board of Directors (BoD) and ministry teams to steward Conference resources in support of mission. The 2025 comparison chart also placed Stewardship within a broader Community & Vitality team, making collaboration across the new governance model essential.

The Conference's call to promote congregational health and vitality and pursue God's peace and justice provides the theological context for this work. Our committee therefore approaches budgeting, financial integrity, generosity, property, investments, and longer-range planning not as ends in themselves, but as practical means of sustaining covenantal relationships and shared ministry.

2026 Committee Organization and Action Plans
Revision eight of the 2026–2027 Finance Committee Action Plans (see attachment) established ongoing communications, priority governance and stewardship work, and visionary planning. Four (4) subcommittee/taskforce teams were identified:

- Accounting + Narrative Budgeting
- Property
- Investment
- Possible Conference merger(s)

Several taskforce team appointments and committee positions are still unfilled in the membership lists, so formation should not be confused with completion of every assignment.

Evidence of Progress and Work Underway
Financial oversight and budget development
The Finance Committee meetings reviewed the preliminary 2027 budget, 2026 variance information, revenue visibility, and the potential draw on reserves. Members raised questions about OCWM trends, forecasting precision, staffing costs, and appropriate reserve sources. The UCF accounts to cover the projected shortfall are as follows:

- IC UCC trust funds
- IL UCC General operating fund
- Sold Properties Fund

Property stewardship
The Property Subcommittee, chaired by Bill McCarthy in the task-force roster, reported work on a donated residential lot, member recruitment, and plans to publicize its expertise so churches could request assistance with real-property matters.

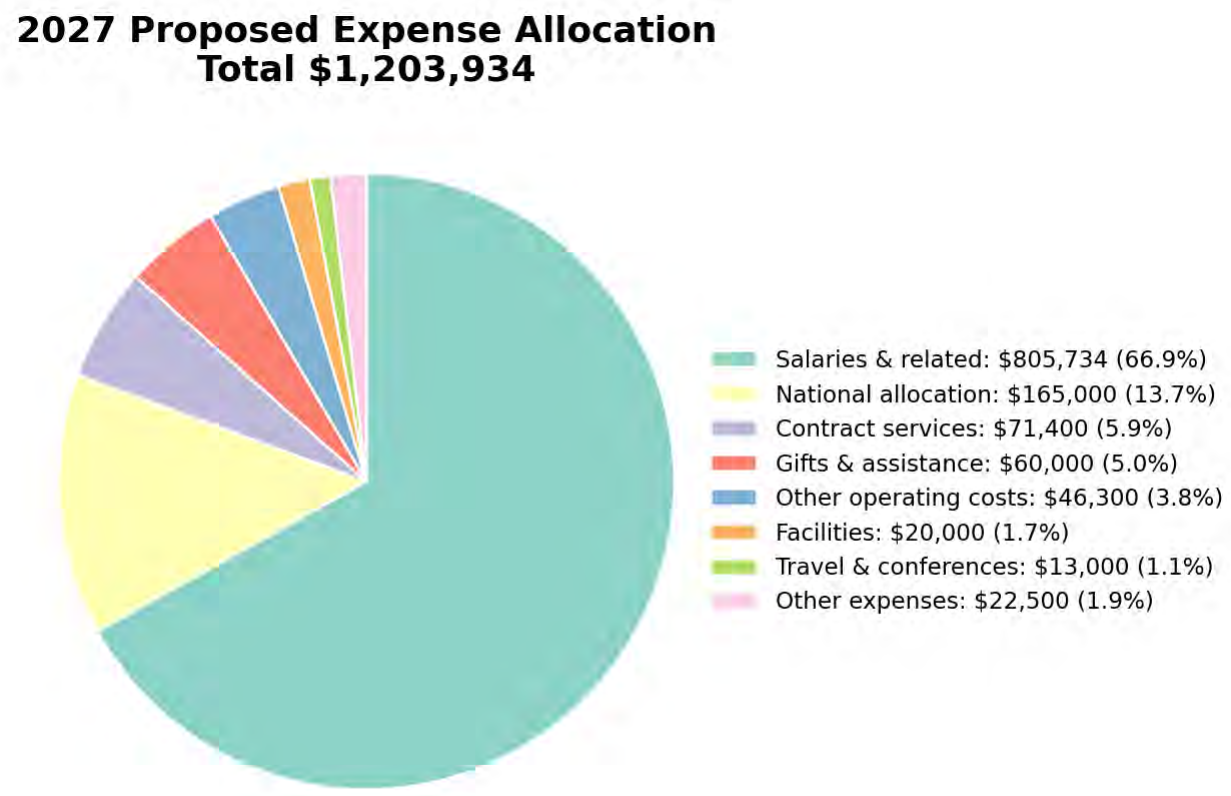
Generosity and covenantal relationships
The Finance Committee identified generosity and relationship programs that will be jointly developed with the Community & Vitality Ministry Team. Discussions

emphasized church visits, better communications, OCWM reporting visibility, and narrative communication of ministry value. Scott Peterson, Ken Webster, and Rev. Martin Nussbaum are working on this initiative.

Accounting, narrative budgeting, and investment
The Accounting + Narrative Budgeting team was charged with assessing in-house versus external accounting and developing a narrative budgeting process compatible with the existing accounting system. Members discussed learning from the Wisconsin Conference and preparing for 2027. Investment discussions included relationships with Cornerstone Funds and United Church Funds. The task forces' evaluations were still in development.

Longer-term Conference sustainability
A visionary task force was proposed to study the financial and operational feasibility of closer Conference relationships or merger. The Interim Conference Minister's and the Finance Committee Chair preliminary conversations with other regional Conferences are discussed in every monthly meeting. This is a study objective, not a decision to merge.

2027 Narrative Budget: Resources and Mission
The preliminary October 5, 2026, budget anticipates $850,000 in income, including $825,000 from Our Church's Wider Mission, $10,000 from Friends of the Conference, and $15,000 from sponsorships and grants. Expenses total $1,203,934, yielding a projected operating deficit of $353,934. This plan relies heavily on covenantal giving, while demonstrating a pressing need to broaden sustainable revenue and responsibly evaluate reserve use.



Narrative interpretation: Approximately two-thirds of proposed spending ($805,734, 66.9%) supports salaries and related expenses—the people who provide Conference leadership, care, and organizational capacity. The $165,000 National allocation (13.7%) supports broader UCC covenantal commitments. Gifts and direct assistance ($60,000, 5.0%) represent tangible support to other organizations. Contract services ($71,400, 5.9%) support professional capacity; the remaining operating, facility, travel, and other costs sustain the day-to-day infrastructure of shared ministry.

This chart shows how funds are budgeted by accounting classification, not a definitive measurement of ministry outcomes. In the next narrative-budget iteration, staff and ministry teams should attach concrete examples, activity measures, and congregational stories to each major category.

Financial Policies and Procedures Handbook Version 3.0
The existing Financial Policies & Procedures Handbook dated 21 May 2024 *v2.0* is being updated. This 47-page Finance Policies and Procedures Manual will summarize: governance controls, duties, approval authority, accounting, and reporting requirements used by the new Illinois governance organization and the local churches of the Illinois Conference. Educational classes will begin in 2027.

Priorities for 2027
The Committee's forward agenda calls for completion of the financial policy review; fuller subcommittee staffing and work plans; stronger OCWM and church-relationship reporting; an integrated narrative-budget method; the first-quarter accounting feasibility review; evaluation of investment and alternative funding options; property assistance upon invitation; and an initial merger-feasibility study report targeted for the third quarter.

Each outcome should have an accountable lead, dated milestone, and progress report to the Board.

Closing Reflection
Financial stewardship is a ministry of trust. As we continue to discern how the Illinois Conference can be stronger together, our work must combine disciplined financial practice with generosity, transparency, collaborative relationships, and faithful support for congregations and ministries across the Conference.

Peace,
Ken Webster
Finance Chair

Action Plans for Finance Committee Meetings/Preparations/proposals
2026/2027
Revision #8 (for October meeting)

Introduction

The purpose of this action plan is to outline the key preparatory tasks for the upcoming Finance Committee meetings. This financial committee's action plans are designed to ensure thorough preparation, effective collaboration, and alignment with the broader objectives of the Finance Committee. The outlined tasks focus on agenda development, subcommittee formation, financial discussions, budget planning, generosity initiatives, and meeting scheduling coordination.

Task 1 (Ongoing): Develop Meeting Agenda in Consultation with Key Stakeholders

Collaborate with Scott Peterson, Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, and Juanita Bradley to draft a comprehensive agenda for the Finance Committee meeting. Schedule a preliminary discussion to gather input from all parties, ensuring that the agenda addresses current priorities, ongoing projects, and areas requiring committee action.

Milestone: Circulate the draft agenda for feedback and finalize it at least one (1) week before the meeting. I will improve on current lead-times.

Task 2 (Priority): Review and Revise Financial Policies & Procedures Handbook dated 21 May 2024, *v2.0* in Consultation with Key Stakeholders

Collaborate with Scott Peterson, Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff, and Juanita Bradley and all standing committees to draft their respective revisions of financial policies & procedures handbook that will conform to the new governance structure. Schedule a preliminary discussion to gather input from all parties, ensuring that the revised policy & procedures addresses current priorities, ongoing projects, and areas requiring finance committee action.

Milestone: Circulate the draft document for feedback and finalize it for annual celebration. Additional revisions required.

Task 3 (Priority): Establish a Property Taskforce/Subcommittee (pages 14 &30-of the FPP handbook)

Initiate the formation of a property Taskforce/subcommittee to address property-related issues and opportunities. Identify potential subcommittee members based on expertise and availability. Define the scope, objectives, and initial tasks for the subcommittee, and set a timeline for their first meeting and subsequent reporting to the Finance Committee.

Milestone: Complete process in place by 2026 Annual Celebration (completed). Updates on Lake Villa property.

Task 4 (Ongoing): Review Finance Committee Meeting Schedule with Juanita

Work with Juanita Bradley to review and optimize the scheduling of Finance Committee meetings in relation to Board meetings. Assess current meeting dates for potential conflicts or inefficiencies. Propose adjustments to ensure timely communication and decision-making between the Finance Committee and Board. Confirm and communicate the updated schedule to all relevant parties.

Milestone: On-going

Task 5: (Priority) Create a Generosity and Relationship Program

Design a program in conjunction with Community & Vitality Ministry aimed at fostering generosity and strengthening stewardship relationships within our Conference. Define program goals, target churches, and engagement strategies. Collaborate with Community and Vitality ministry team to identify resources and potential activities, such as donor appreciation events, educational workshops, or communication campaigns. Establish metrics for evaluating program success.

Milestone: Have Chair of Church and Vitality Ministry team attend/ report updates concerning relationship questions with OCWM reporting. Conference education is goal for 2027.

Task 6 (Visionary): Discuss Financial Development (Investment subcommittee)

Arrange meetings with Cornerstone funds and United Church Fund (UCF) to discuss the strategic use and management of finances. Prepare a list of topics and questions relevant to financial stewardship, investment/grant opportunities, and partnership potential.

Milestone: Document the outcomes of discussions and share insights with the finance committee for further evaluation.

Task 7 (Priority): Initiate the Narrative Budget Process

Begin the narrative budget process by gathering financial data, program outcomes, and impact stories from relevant staff and stakeholders. Develop a timeline for budget drafting, review, and presentation. Assign responsibilities for compiling information and ensure the narrative budget reflects both quantitative and qualitative aspects of financial planning.

Milestone: subcommittee to develop interface with existing accounting system for 2027 budget proposal.

Task 8 (Visionary): Develop alternative Revenue stream fundings that are available for churches from other 501(c)(3) organizations for calendar years 2026/27

Grants from private foundations, public charities for specific community-focused projects or general operations, and potentially through donor-advised funds (DAFs) or corporate giving programs. Funding from Corporate Philanthropy and Sponsorships, Partnerships, Fee-based Services and Rental Income.

Milestone: task is visionary and its concepts and process with its preliminary results should be presented by years end.

Task 9 (Priority): Develop Sub-committee/Task Force team that will evaluate the feasibility of bringing accounting functions back in-house

Form a task force to assess requirements and evaluate the possibility of moving financial accounting from JITASA to an in-house accountant or hiring another vendor. The task force team will be balanced to ensure both technical accuracy and alignment with the church's mission. It will have five (5) members. The chairperson will ideally be a voting board member and will serve as the liaison to the church board. Members will include at least one (1) person with financial expertise (e.g., a CPA or experienced bookkeeper) who understands religious-based non-profit-specific issues like cash/fund accounting and 501(c)(3) compliance. The team will include a staff member and ministry leader to ensure the solution supports day-to-day ministry goals. To ensure diversity of views, recruit a volunteer from each Association who works in a different industry to provide a "fresh eyes" perspective on efficiency and cost.

Milestone: The scope of this task and its preliminary results will be a finance committee agenda line item for all meetings. First review presentation will be in the first quarter of 2027.

Task 10 (Visionary): Develop Sub-committee/Task Force team that will evaluate the feasibility of merging Illinois Conference with another Conference(s)

Form a task force Committee to study the financial and operational feasibility of merging the Illinois Conference with another Conference(s) (i.e., Wisconsin, Illinois South, etc.), including gathering best practices from other recent Conference mergers (i.e., Keystone Conference). Rev. Dr. Terrill Murff will attend a National setting of Conference Ministers to start the initial conversations. Preliminary task force actions will commence immediately.

Milestone: The task force team will prepare an initial interim report, and it should be targeted for 3rd Quarter 2027.

Task 11 (Visionary): Develop local Church contacts (Custodians) of restricted funds/grants documentation

Use appendix C (Illinois Conference FPP Handbook) as guideline plus smart goals to develop: administration (umbrella or stand-alone 501(c)(3) church), distribution rules, legality. Task coordinators could start with Generosity officer of TPIRC and former Conference treasurers.

Milestones: Identification list would be first milestone: Annual Celebration. This task will be combined with tasks 6 & #8.

Conclusion

The outlined finance committee tasks are designed to foster collaboration, enhance the Finance Committee effectiveness, and support strategic fiscal management. The assigned specific responsibilities for each task will establish interim deadlines to monitor progress.

Milestones: The Finance Committee will review task(s) milestones and completion(s) and finalize preparations ahead of each meeting.

Dear Rev. Elizabeth Hartung, Rev. Melody Seaton, and Members of the Annual Celebration Planning Committee and TPIRC Team:

As we reflect on the success of our Annual Celebration, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Rev. Elizabeth Hartung and Rev. Melody Seaton for your leadership as Co-Chairs of this year's collaborative Annual Celebration and TPIRC Educational Summit. By bringing these two (2) important gatherings together, you demonstrated a spirit of collaboration, shared purpose, and commitment to the mission of the Illinois Conference.

That same spirit was evident in the dedicated work of your team: Rev. Dr. Kim Grice, MID Lindsey Svetlick, Generosity Officer Stephanie Moore, Administrative Support Kathy Brown, Support Staff Lauran Smith, Tech Mark Binder Jr., and ACM Kathy Lawes. I offer each of you my sincere appreciation for your tireless work, faithful service, creativity, and commitment to making this collaborative effort a success.

In addition, special appreciation goes to Support Staff Naomi Else for invaluable logistical and administrative support and to Rev. Sarah Lohrbach for outstanding assistance with communications and registration. Your contributions helped ensure that the many details of this gathering were handled thoughtfully and effectively, allowing the event to unfold with care and purpose.

Behind that successful experience were countless hours of preparation, coordination, flexibility, and problem-solving, much of it taking place behind the scenes. I recognize the scope of this undertaking, and I want you to know that your work has not gone unnoticed. Through your efforts, you helped create an experience that brought our Conference community together for learning, fellowship, and shared ministry.

More than that, your collaborative spirit offered a meaningful example during this season of transition. It reminded us of what we can accomplish when we unite our gifts, talents, and resources around a common vision. In doing so, you helped us move beyond simply hosting an event to nurturing relationships, strengthening connections, and cultivating hope for the future of our Conference.

For all these reasons, thank you for giving so generously of yourselves and for helping us live into our theme, "*Hope, Spring Eternal*."

May the God of hope renew your strength, refresh your spirits, and fill your hearts with the joy of knowing that your labor has made a difference. May God bless the hands that planned, the minds that organized, the hearts that served, and the gifts each of you shared so generously. May the seeds of faith, collaboration, and hope planted throughout this year's Annual Celebration and TPIRC Educational Summit continue to bear fruit in the life of our Conference and the congregations we serve.

As you move forward from this season of service, may you find rest for your weariness, encouragement for your journey, and renewed assurance that your work in the Lord is never in vain. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit abide with you all. Amen.

With deep appreciation, gratitude, and blessings, Terrill

Thank You for Joining Us!

We look forward to our continued ministry together in the coming year!

Illinois Conference
United Church of Christ
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