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