



The Shining Light~ July 2023

PASTOR'S COLUMN	2
JULY PRAYER/ WORSHIP SCHEDULE.....	3
MODERATOR'S MESSAGE.....	4-5
JUNE BOARD OF DIRECTORS MINUTES	6-7
TREASURER'S REPORT / SUMMER AGENDA.....	8-9
EVENTS.....	10-18
SEASONS OF OUR LIVES	19
JULY CALENDAR	20



Pastor's Column

Our Minnesota Conference Minister, Rev. Shari Prestemon, called us to do the work of “faithful re-imagination.” As our church is working on this with our Summer Meeting on June 25th, that should give us a new Mission Statement and maybe a new committee to explore a capital fundraising campaign for the upkeep and upgrading of our building. We are in the thick of ‘faithful re-imagination’.

To start this, we have to celebrate (give thanks) to what was done before, what is being done now, but let go of any nostalgia of returning to the past when our pews were full, lots of kids around, and/or what worship used to be. This doesn't mean those things won't be part of our future, just that ministry and what the church is and does is changing because the world and society are changing.

Some things won't change: God's love for us and God's call for us to love each other, do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly. Some things are changing: like worship, how we define members, and what does it mean to be a part of the church. In talking with our clergy cluster this past week, for whatever reasons, those in the Millennial and Generation Z age groups aren't filled by corporate worship. This doesn't mean they are lazy or not interested in having a relationship with God, it means how they connect with community and God are different, and we haven't figured out what that means for the church. We do know that Jesus and Paul didn't sit in the worship places waiting for people to show up, but went to where the people were and built relationships.

Part of our ‘faithful re-imagination’ is retelling the stories of the Bible of creation, sin, and salvation. This story which the evangelicals are sharing is one that been based upon God's honor and power which makes humans less than nothing so God can be bigger when some are saved. We (for the most part) believe in God's love for all, that sin is not the biggest thing about humans, and that we are not destined for Hell (Gehenna) just because we have been born. We maybe even are thinking that God's kindom (kingdom) is present right now, not just for the afterlife if we make it.

As we are heading into the global climate crisis, what does it mean that “The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof.” Our religion and Western Civilization have treated the world and animals as resources rather than beloved creations of God in their own right. How do we faithfully bring ourselves back into relationship? What can we imagine we need in our church, our worship, and our lives to heal our planet? Let us continue the work of theology and ministry and working for justice as the body of Christ, the church, that we may continue to be salt, light, and leaven for the furtherance of God's kindom, here on earth as it is in heaven.

Peace

Pastor Enno

Prayer for the Month of July

God of history and vision, we thank you for our country and for those who worked to create a more perfect union of our nation. As you have worked through history to free all people, help us work in the world today. As you have listened to the cries of those who have cried out for freedom, help us listen today. As you have lifted up the lowly and proclaimed good news to the poor, help us continue to do so today. Be with us in our day to day lives. Help us to be with you in the doing your will on earth as it is in heaven. With Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and God our Creator, we pray and give thanks this day. Amen

Worship for July

Worship is at 10:30AM in person and on Zoom

July 2nd, 5th Sunday after Pentecost, while the Pastor is away, the Board will play. Our Board of Directors is leading the service this Sunday while Pastor Enno is over in Indianapolis as a visitor for General Synod. Tom Yuhasey may have a message for the congregation or keep things short as the Spirit leads him.

July 9th, 6th Sunday after Pentecost, in the second Sunday of the series on Covenant, we will talk about God's covenant with the Earth through the story of Noah. What does the rainbow signify and who is supposed to be reminded when it is seen?

July 16th, 7th Sunday after Pentecost, in this third Sunday of the series on Covenant, we will talk about family, including marriage, of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The stories we will listen to are those of Ruth and Naomi and Jesus and his own family.

July 23rd, 8th Sunday after Pentecost, Pastor Enno will be away in Washington, DC, with members of our church and the Minnesota Conference to advocate for a better world. Karina Roth and her band will be leading our worship with a Blue-Grass worship service. No word yet on who the guest preacher, if any, will be.

July 30th, 9th Sunday after Pentecost, it is a fifth Sunday of the month. Pastor Enno will entertain questions, queries, and disagreements over sermon topics, theology, and who is the church and what are we supposed to be about. The scripture this day comes from the Gospel of Matthew and is the parable of the mustard seed. What small question or discussion this day may grow into good fruit or a spicy conversation?

A Message from the Moderator

By Tom Yuhasey

MODERATOR REPORT JULY 2023 – by tom

(also known as the middle school homework assignment over school break)

Several months ago, Pastor Enno proposed we do a “Time and Talent Breakdown” which entails describing what’s involved in being part of our various groups and committees and to inform people of opportunities to participate therein. Somehow, through no fault of my own, I got involved in this.

Because I know I’m preaching to the choir here, this is difficult for me. So many from the congregation are already involved in multiple committees and groups. But I guess we all understand what is meant in that old adage from Proverbs “many camels are needed to get over the hump.”

Areas I was assigned to cover were:

- 1. Board of Directors.** Being the Moderator, you would expect me to know a lot about this. The truth is I don’t know as much as I should about boards, and overseeing the works of a religious entity. I have however been around this church long enough to have some idea how vital a church with our beliefs is in these difficult times. To keep us on course we must continue to have a board invested in the idea that this church is meaningful and will continue to grow and be relevant. I hope we continue to uncover volunteers who feel this is a priority in their lives and will lead us forward.
- 2. Finance.** Who better than someone who can’t keep his own checking account in order to outline matters of finance and budgets. Besides, who made this rule being “overdrawn” was a bad thing . . .? However, blessings have been bestowed upon First Congregational UCC in the form of truly capable people who have been handling things for our church. It would be a wonderful opportunity for someone interested in helping with budgeting and management of our resources to learn from the very best.
- 3. Rooted and Rising.** If raised garden beds and rain gardens are your thing, we have opportunities for you. I was told you don’t need a green thumb here just a realization that the planet needs a little help dealing with us humans at the moment. So come to plant and grow and restore one plot at a time.
- 4. Choir.** Finally, something I know about. We have angels in our midst and I’ve seen them singing to us every Sunday. They are always smiling so they must be getting as much enjoyment doing it as we get seeing and hearing them. Join in anytime if you feel you have something to offer. I auditioned for the choir and they said they’d get back to me. That was 14 years ago.
- 5. Bible Study.** I’ve done several of these and they are truly worthwhile. Of course, we didn’t cover the whole book, just the parts that made us feel like there’s not much hope for mankind. Pastor Enno promises that things will pick up soon however.
- 6. Sunday School.** As far as I know Pastor Enno has worked really hard trying to get something going with our youth. This is so important for our future, and for theirs. I guess I would ask Enno where we are at with this. If you could add some insight into this area or have some new avenues to explore to bring more life to the program it would be great. Don’t just suggest pizza parties though, somebody already thought of that.

7. **Before worship.** A great time to reconnect with one another, warmly welcome new folks visiting and look at the signup lists to see where you can contribute. We have a lot of great peace prayer and scripture readers so if you go there, better put your game face on when up front. I think signing up to bring treats for after service coffee time is a great idea. You know, if you have a recipe that looks promising, but you are afraid to try it on your family, bring it to church.
8. **Sound and Video.** We have some seasoned veteran's handling this area but if you want to learn the ropes, I have found they are glad to share their skills. I've done some filling in during someone's absence and I think this is why Pastor Enno is begging ANYONE with interest in Zoom to please contact him.
9. **Repairs and Building Maintenance.** After some discussion with Pastor Enno this category eliminated. It sounds too similar to Building and Grounds. That being said, my recommendation is to always bring a multi-tool to church because you never really know what kind of task will be placed before you when you get here.

THE END



First Congregational United Church of Christ
Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
May 23, 2023 on Zoom

Attending: Tom Yuhasey, Kevin LeVoir, John Bottger, Carol Bennett, Bruce Tyler, Carol Winter, Jenny Delfs, Enno Limvere.

Call to Order 5:04 P.M.

Opening conversations- reading the mission statement, sharing joys and concerns, this month's "question," and reading the communications agreement.

Urgent Business and Housekeeping:

1. May minutes were approved online and will be published in the July Shining Light newsletter.
2. Proposed agenda **approved. Jen/Carol B**
3. Financial report – Kevin LeVoir - report **approved. Tyler/Winter**
 - a. Money in reserve funds
 - b. Bills are covered this month.
 - c. Youth funds to date are \$ 4209.47 toward the DC trip. More funds can be used for programming for the rest of the year.
 - d. Meeting budget for now.
 - e. Pass through funds to donating to Syrian relief, Ukraine, and UCC annual donations.
4. June Shining Light deadline – 23 June. Tom has done this month's Board Message.
5. Next Board of Directors meeting 18 July 2023 5-7 pm.

Old and New Business:

1. Pastor Report reviewed.
 - a. Pastor Enno gave a report on the Conference's Annual Meeting.
 - b. New Office Administer has been hired.
 - c. Review of busy last few months.
 - d. Worship Service on 11 June 2023 at Harbor Park was attended by 104 people.
2. MN UCC Conference attendees were Board member Bruce Tyler, Pastor Enno Limvere, and Nancy Giguere. Budgeted funds for registration can be requested.
3. Mutual Ministry Goal review:
 - a. Mission statement rewrite – A new mission statement is ready for a congregational vote at the 25 June 2023 congregational meeting.
 - b. Community Building -
 - i. Loaves and Hotdish was restarted in April.
 - ii. Solstice Meal at church 21 June 2023 – Bruce is planning. There will be Freewill offering taken for community garden box supplies. The event will be held with the Sing Along.
 - c. Outreach:
 - i. Healing Planet: Pastor Enno is working to have a weekly community gathering beginning on 11 July 2023 at Compass Park (Across from Java Moose) beginning at 12:15 P.M. There will be praise, prayer, and dance to heal our planet and world. The local ministers and Zahir Orest have been contacted to help in the leadership of the event.
 - ii. Continue announcements Sundays featuring different nonprofits and charities.
 - iii. The Explorer's Club is back for the summer.
 - iv. A WOW Potluck Dinner is being planned for 2 July 2023 at 6:00 P.M. Jeff is planning the event and inviting foreign workers. The Food Committee is helping out.

4. Daycare in South Rm - no new news.
5. New office manager hired: Neil Pederson.
6. The Board gave grateful thanks to the delegates attending the Conference's Annual Meeting. Both Nancy Gigure and Bruce Tyler gave brief reports.
7. Nominating Committee– Moderator Tom and Carol B. The Committee has found two individuals to run for the at-large open seats, Steve Aldrich and Francie Beaster. Carol B and John Bottger are going off Board in June. Tom Y and Carol Winter are running for re-election.
8. The Board expressed their thanks for the hard work of the members of the Board not running for reelection, John Bottger and Carol Bennett.
9. Agenda for the June Congregational meeting was reviewed – elections, mission statement vote, presentation by Buildings and Grounds, Time and Talent survey, and a Treasurer's report.
10. The Memorial Committee has contacted the families of those memorialized to discuss what projects they would like to see accomplished.
11. Pastor Enno reported on several recent events that may impact safety and security at the church. The Sheriff is providing more presence in the neighborhood. There was a discussion on the possible need for security cameras and "How to Respond to Disruptions" training. The Building and Grounds Committee will look into the Cost and appropriateness of Security cameras.

Committee updates:

1. Pastoral Relations meeting regularly with Pastor Enno
2. Finance committee - weekly updates to the congregation
3. Stewardship committee – describing volunteer roles for booklet, time, and talent survey.
4. Children and Youth life /faith formation – Sunday School is off for summer, Youth gatherings continue, and the Youth DC trip is coming in July 2023.
5. Memorial Committee -need to determine the designated use of memorial funds.
6. Building and Grounds – successful Spring clean-up Saturday, garage roof replaced @ parsonage. A Presentation is in the planning stage. Hiring an Architect is on hold for now.
7. Outreach – WOW in full swing, Collaborations with the Food shelf, climate groups, Pride
8. Rooted and Rising – taking on rain gardens and church garden boxes.
9. Worship committee meeting monthly.
10. Grievance committee has not been needed to date.
11. Food Team – Ask congregation for volunteers for after service treats, socializing.

The end of the agenda was reached, and the meeting was Adjourned at 7:00 P.M.



Treasurer's Report

The May 2023 (latest fully available information) Financial Report shows a total income of \$14,957.28 and expenses of \$18,632.22 (See Detail Below). This means the Church's expenses were more than Income by \$3,674.94.

Income for May 2023	
Pledged Donations	\$ 6,654.32
Non-Pledged Donations	\$ 360.00
Loose Plate Offering	\$ 66.00
Building Use	\$ 332.00
Youth Fund	\$ 3,323.62
WOW	\$ 600.00
Syrian Relief	\$ 60.00
Income from Outside sources	\$ 3,556.47
Interest Income	\$ 4.87
	\$14,957.28
Expenses for May 2023	
Pastor	\$ 6,823.03
Staff	\$ 208.30
Business	\$ 1,852.43
Worship	\$ 600.00
Education	\$ 244.50
Building and Grounds	\$ 2,216.40
Parsonage	\$ 6,483.33
	\$ -
Loan Principle	\$ 204.23
	\$18,632.22
Difference	\$ (3,674.94)

The full report is available in the Church office.

PROPOSED CONSTITUTION CHANGE

The Board of Directors proposes a Constitutional change to be voted on by the Congregation at the Summer Meeting on 25 June 2023. The Change will replace item III of the constitution.

Item III now reads:

III.

Purpose and Mission First Congregational United Church of Christ is an open, inclusive church that exists to worship God and practice the gospel of Jesus Christ. We welcome all people of goodwill who seek to share the love of God and honor the diversity of creation in the spirit of tolerance and flexibility. As a Just Peace Church, we invite all who seek the reign of God to join us in reaching out in healing ministry, working for justice, witnessing for peace and striving to overcome all forms of oppression. We recognize two sacraments: Baptism and Communion.

The proposed change to the Constitution will replace III with the following:

Item III will read:

III.

The mission of the First Congregational United Church of Christ, Grand Marais, is to
Welcome all.
Explore the mysteries of faith.
Celebrate and honor Creation.
Work for justice and peace.
Create community.

Kevin R LeVoir for the Board of Directors

Summer Meeting is this Sunday June 25! Following the Worship Service

First Congregational United Church of Christ – Grand Marais, MN

Summer Congregational Meeting Following the Worship Service

In Person and on Zoom

Agenda

1. Welcome and review of procedures for the meeting
2. Call to order – Moderator
3. Opening Prayer – Pastor Limvere
4. Mission Statement and Open and Affirming Statement

First congregational United Church of Christ is an open, inclusive church that

exists to worship God and practice the gospel of Jesus Christ. We welcome all people of goodwill who seek to share the love of God and honor the diversity of creation in a spirit of tolerance and flexibility. As a Just Peace Church, we invite all who seek the reign of God to join us in reaching out in healing ministry, working for justice, witnessing for peace and striving to overcome all forms of oppression. We recognize two sacraments: Baptism and Communion.

5. Approval of Agenda – VOTE
6. Approval of 2023 Winter Congregational Meeting Minutes – VOTE
7. Moderator Report – Tom Yuhasey
8. Pastor Report – Pastor Limvere
9. Any other Committee Reports or News
10. Introduction of Prospective Board of Director Candidates
11. Election of two new board members - VOTE
12. Proposal to replace Constitutional (Sec III) Purpose and Mission Statement with a new more current and concise mission statement - VOTE
13. Any Other Business?
14. Closing Prayer/ Adjournment

July Events

Healing the Planet—Tuesdays at lunch

To get through this global climate crisis we will need more than just actions, we also need a new vision of our relationship with the planet. To help us create and strengthen a restorative and healing relationship, all are invited to participate in prayers, songs, poems, silence, and even dancing each week on Tuesdays over the lunch hour. We will be gathering at Compass Park (across the street from Java Moose) at 12:15 PM each week. We hope that we will also have a rotation of leaders: religious, lay people, and those who want to reconnect and fill the space with love. Each gathering should last about 20 minutes with time left for fellowship and the breaking of bread (or whatever people bring to eat).

Summer Potluck to Meet International Workers—July 2nd

Recently, Jeff Kern brought an opportunity to Pastor Enno's attention, and Enno passed it along to the Food Committee. Through the WOW program, Jeff has met 30 visitors from around the world who are here to work in our community for the summer. There are people from Jamaica, Poland, Dominican Republic, Peru, Chile, Russia, Columbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mongolia and Turkey. They are mostly college students, working hard at various jobs here in the community. Jeff thought it would be a good idea for our church to host a supper for these workers to welcome them and get to know them better. He suggested we do this sooner than later and said Sunday evening was the best time for most workers since they don't have lots of spare time.

The Food Committee (Foodies) thought this was a great idea, so faster than a speeding bullet, we chose Sunday, July 2nd at 5:30 p.m. for the church to host a "summer foods" potluck supper. We won't ask the student workers to bring anything but are asking we good church people to bring a "summer dish" to share, e.g. salad, fruit, vegie tray, sandwich fixings or dessert.

We know it's right around the corner, but hope you can join us to welcome and get to know these workers from around the world, who are living and working hard in our community.

Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting Reports

Highlights

By Bruce Tyler

College of St. Benedict, St. Joseph, MN; June 9-10, 2023

Attendees: Rev. Enno Limvere, Bruce Tyler, Nancy Giguere

54 churches represented and at least 128 voting delegates in attendance

Mission statement of the Conference: God calls the Minnesota Conference UCC to equip a courageous church alive with Christ's transforming love.

Meeting Theme: Protecting God's Gift of Creation

Fact: 71% of Minnesota congregations have 50 or fewer weekly worshippers.

Our conference is one of the 5 most generous in the nation.

54 congregations are Five for Five: Our Church's Wider Mission, One Great Hour of Sharing, Strengthen the Church, Neighbors in Need, Christmas Fund-Veterans of the Cross

Resolutions passed (unanimously!)

Budget of \$1.68 million

Budgets are Mission Spending Plans: strategic plans include deepening commitments to these initiatives: anti-racism; outdoor ministry and Creation Justice; faith formation for children, youth and adults; Re-imagination programming.

Expenses are slightly lower due to increased use of virtual meeting formats and decreased travel

expense, sharing formation leadership with the Wisconsin Conference (Damascus Project), outsourcing some financial functions, new communications systems, and a smaller office space.

OCWM offerings of \$620,000 received in last fiscal year; 34.75% (\$215,500) sent on to National setting UCC. The balance is a significant part of the conference operating budget. Other sources: endowment income, congregations per capita, grants, and bequests.

Compensation Guidelines: 4.5% increase in pay for conference staff; congregations encouraged to also do so, as their resources permit.

Education Resolution: That state and federal mandates for English Language Learning (ELL) and Special Education be fully funded by the respective legislatures. They currently are not, forcing school districts to cut back on other important educational programs to cover the costs.

The sponsoring congregation is looking for 5 more congregations to co-sponsor this resolution for the next General Synod in 2025. Details forthcoming.

New congregations granted full standing in conference:

United Faith Community, Buffalo, and People's Congregational, Bayport

Conference Minister's State of the Conference Address:

Rev. Sheri Prestemon stated that the conference and its staff is doing an excellent job of supporting the congregations in their ministries.

She challenged us to notice and seize the new thing that God is longing to do in this Age of the Spirit. What does it look like to "be church" for the sake of the Gospel and as a witness to communities sorely in need? Re-imagination and deep discernment is a core strategy for the future. To that end the Conference is developing a Reimagination support curriculum for use in congregations.

Bible Study: Psalm 24: 1-4. Led by Rev. Brooks Berndt, Minister for Environmental Justice, UCC national setting.

"The earth is the Lord's and all it holds, the world and those who live there....Who may go up to the mountain of the Lord?... the clean of hand and pure of heart..."

If God is the owner of all the earth, what does that mean to us?

How can we do whatever we wish with it? What is our responsibility? It is time to change how we view the planet and its resources. It is "not ours to wreck."

Are we worthy to enter the house of the Lord? Can we pray to God without examining our consciences with regard to our misuse of the earth and how it affects all the natural world?

Keynote Address: Rev. Michael Malcom, Environmental Justice Minister, S.E. Conference in Atlanta, and founder of the Alabama People's Justice Council.

"It is evil to determine a person's health and well-being by color or wealth."

There is no environmentalism without environmental justice. Too often, industry is permitted to pollute the air, water, or soil next door to communities of color and poverty. Indeed those areas are often the only ones where the poor and the black/brown can afford to live.

Sooner or later, pollution is a shared burden—it will affect us all. (Witness the smoke from fires up north.)

He challenged those of us who have the privilege of "whiteness" and resources to "Use your voices!" to force those who would block change to pay attention and to compel change on the issues we care about.

Remember to celebrate any advocacy victory, however small. Sometimes that is simply getting up in the morning and continuing the fight.

Closing Worship Message, by Rev. Nikki Frontz:

Consider the Zulu word "Ubuntu," meaning community, respect, strength, and togetherness.

Often translated: "I am because we are," the word points to the fact of the interdependence of all people and includes the whole natural world.

Workshop: “A Playbook for Political Action in the Progressive Church” Rev. Sarah Campbell, Mayflower UCC, Minneapolis. Attended by Bruce Tyler

The church—locally, conference, and national-- needs to be more nimble to make an issue actionable. Move from civic stance and individual education to collective action. Often too hung up on process, the perfect enemy of the good—if you can agree 85 % with a partner, good. Have a clear mission statement. Partner with faith-based organizations (ISAIAH, JRLC, MNIPL.) Governance has to serve the mission. Be strategic. Encourage members to be prophetic, not the minister alone.

Focus groups bubble up and subside. Let them drive the action: letter writing, postcards, phone calls to legislators, alerts for public demonstration. Make it easy for everyone to take action. Make it a priority to be active in some way.

Workshop: “Is your congregation at risk?” Rev. Cindy Mueller, Conference Minister for Transitions. Attended by Nancy Giguere.

Risk factors and what to do about them. Multiple options, not just ending ministry.

Resources and strategies: re-visioning process, available help for long-term planning; what every congregation should know and do whether at risk or not. See Nancy’s more detailed report.

[So You Think You Think Your Church is at Risk](#)

By Nancy Giguere

Workshop presented by Rev. Cindy Mueller, Minister for Church in Transition, MN Conference UCC

COVID has exacerbated and accelerated the difficulties that congregations faced before the pandemic. Total religious participation in US has declined significantly. Many congregations have difficulty addressing the changes in culture, communities, and the church. 107 UCC congregations closed from 2020 through 2022. Among all denominations and traditions, 9 churches close each day in the US.

The purpose of the workshop was to help pastors and church leaders assess their congregation’s situation and future options.

What I learned – our congregation shows some signs of being at risk. For example:

- Little or no new leadership, and current leadership is tired
- Same folks stay in position for years, or simply switch hats
- Majority of congregation is over 60, and has been members for many years
- Worship participants fill less than 40% of the sanctuary space
- History of conflict – BUT appears to be resolved

On the plus side:

- We do have a focus on the community and wider service
- Online tech: perhaps not the best, but we are learning
- We are NOT using up our endowment

What to do?

Early conversation during time of transition is critically important.

- Review by-laws/constitution – do they reflect how the congregation functions TODAY? Update if necessary (check out number of committees – more than 3 to 5 probably unnecessary)
- Keep membership rolls updated annually
- Include broad segments of congregation, friends & community — try not to limit to leadership
- Perhaps invite someone from outside the congregation to leader or listen to conversation; could be another pastor or Conference staff
- Remember the loudest voices are often not speaking for everyone

- Through conversations, discover core group of folks who are willing to address and assess future options for church to present to congregation

Number of possible future pathways: probably most relevant for us:

- Create strategy for re-visioning and re-missioning congregation

Other possibilities include:

- Sell building & relocate to rent space or start in a new location in a right size facility
- Consolidating, merging, or yoking with another congregation— these are three separate paths
- Recreating as a house church
- Sharing a building with another congregation
- Deciding to end the congregation’s ministry, define its legacy, and close the church

Many aspects of the discernment process which I won’t going into here, BUT one very important one is to **clarify leadership roles:**

- Congregational leaders are responsible for the process and decisions
- Pastor’s role is to encourage conversation and process

One very important resource: Church building and loan fund

- Resources for future options: program consists of 10 modules for churches in transition. Church can choose those most relevant.
- Partners in Vision Program which offers planning and technical assistance on major projects involving church property. Create a plan that is resourceful, sustainable, creative and mission focused, assisting with project management, pre-development, repurposing church owned property that is used or underused, planning complex projects, and charting a course for real estate in transition.

According to Cindy: Don’t jump the gun. Consult with CBLF BEFORE talking to architect



Rev. Michael Malcom, Keynote Speaker at Minnesota Conference Annual Meeting

[General Synod](#)

Ahead of General Synod, GMP nominee Thompson shares ‘vision of hope’ for UCC

by [Maic D'Agostino](#) | published on Jun 16, 2023

At the [34th General Synod](#) of the United Church of Christ, June 30-July 4 in Indianapolis, the denomination's national body will elect a new General Minister and President.

In February, the UCC Board's search committee [recommended the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson](#), current Associate General Minister for [Wider Church Ministries](#), as candidate for the UCC's highest office. A few weeks later, the full Board [affirmed this recommendation](#), voting to make Thompson the official GMP nominee.

Now, General Synod must decide if Thompson is to become the first woman — and the first woman of African descent — to lead the denomination.

During Synod, delegates will hear Thompson give a nomination speech at the June 30 plenary, have an opportunity to ask her questions during a “Meet the Candidate” session July 1 at 4:15 p.m. and ultimately will cast their votes, likely the morning of July 3.

To help delegates learn more about the candidate, search committee chair the Rev. Noah Brewer-Wallin [recorded an interview with Thompson ahead of Synod](#), whose theme this year is “Making All Things New.”

A ‘vision of hope’

That theme, Thompson explained, was chosen with the accompanying text of [Isaiah 43:18-19](#), but is actually a direct quote from [Revelation 21:5](#).

“In the Revelation text ... John is reflecting on the Isle of Patmos about, really, the oppression of the Roman Empire,” Thompson reflected in the interview. “And in this particular part of the chapter, it talks about a new heaven and a new earth and making all things new. And I don't think it's so much about throwing out the baby with the bathwater as much as it is imagining that there could be a different world possible, in the face of everything that people are experiencing.”

A [recording of the full interview](#) is available on the UCC's YouTube channel.

She called this verse of Revelation a “vision of hope,” in contrast to how the biblical book is sometimes perceived as disturbing and apocalyptic. This kind of hope in the present could be particularly important for envisioning the future and possibility of the Church.

“I wonder, 25 years from now, what would people say about us in this moment?” Thompson asked. “We look back and we say, ‘We're a church of firsts.’ And I wonder, what are the firsts that are yet to come for us?”

Why the UCC?

Thompson has served the UCC National Setting in three different roles for more than a decade. Before that, she pastored a UCC church in Florida, later working in disaster response for the [Conference](#).

But she wasn't initially part of the denomination. In the video interview, Brewer-Wallin asked Thompson what brought her to where she is now, a leader within the UCC.

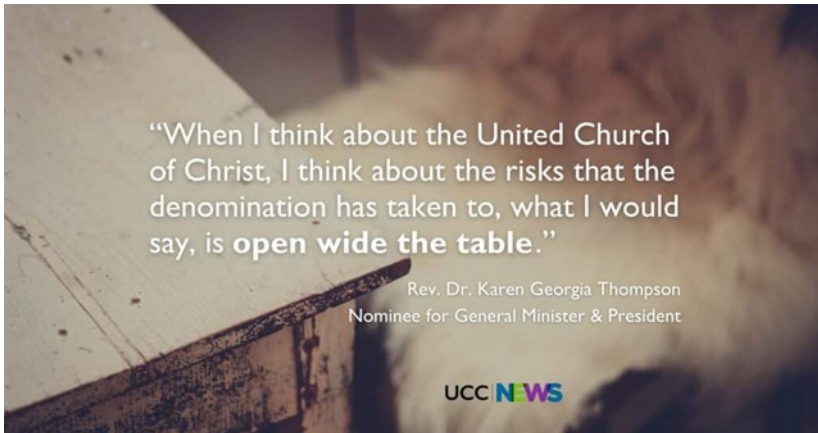
Thompson responded that, first and foremost, she came to the UCC for a very personal reason: because she wanted a safe place for her children. Part of that, she explained, meant a safe environment for her children to show up to church as themselves — as young people uncovering their burgeoning identities.

“I wanted them to have a safe space to explore who they found themselves to be in any of those given moments,” Thompson said. “I think, for me also, it was about finding space where I could be who I was called to be as a woman in ministry. So, it was balancing those out, vocationally and as a mother.”

She particularly recalled a watershed moment when one of her children came out to her. As

Thompson tells it, they hesitated because they thought she would condemn them, since she was a Christian pastor.

“I think if anything has shaped my ministry, it was those 30 seconds of my life,” Thompson said. “And I don’t ever want to do ministry in a place or be a part of a space where my child or anybody else thinks that what I represent damns who they understand themselves to be as made in the image of God.”



Showing up for the marginalized

In the interview, Thompson spoke to another significant aspect of the UCC, at all levels: its commitment to extravagant welcome as an act of justice.

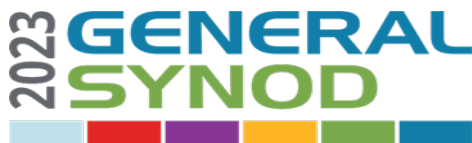
“When I think about the United Church of Christ, I think about the risks that the denomination has taken to, what I would say is, open wide the table,” she said.

Throughout the years, that has meant the denomination aligning with and accompanying different groups of people that have been marginalized and oppressed by society at large.

“That’s what justice looks like,” Thompson said. “It’s not just saying, ‘Oh, there’s injustice over there.’ It’s about being in solidarity, but also finding a way to alleviate suffering or injustice, however that looks.”

The UCC especially has become recognizable for its Open and Affirming covenant, supporting and advocating for the LGBTQ+ community. In that tradition, Thompson said that the Church can do more to support trans and nonbinary siblings, for example, [who are “being targeted” in this moment in history](#).

“I think the United Church of Christ has done incredibly well around LGB,” she said. But, “there’s T, there’s Q, and I think we’re still negotiating what it means to show up in spaces, what it means to provide meaningful resources and programming, how to be stronger advocates.”



The United Church of Christ’s 34th [General Synod](#) will be held June 30-July 4 in Indianapolis. For Programming, information and more, visit generalsynod.org.

Thus, to “show up” for marginalized communities can mean confronting injustice through Christian ministry.

“I think race continues to be a very divisive issue, to the point of death for people,” Thompson said. “And in the midst of that, we’re talking about the militarization of our cities and what reparations is going to look like. Those are places where the church needs to be present.”

National yet pastoral ministry

To aid local congregations in such ministry — and many other kinds — Thompson sees opportunities in what the UCC’s National Setting has to offer.

The National Setting provides numerous resources for churches “for today and for tomorrow,”

she explained, from a wide variety of justice initiatives, interfaith relations and a host of other resources to help congregations connect to their communities and pursue their mission and vision.

Having previously served as the UCC's racial justice minister and ecumenical officer prior to her election to AGM, Thompson said that pastoral ministry "still remains at the heart of how I understand my ministry, even in the National Setting."

She recalled how, when she worked in disaster response for the Florida Conference, she often encountered such pastoral moments.

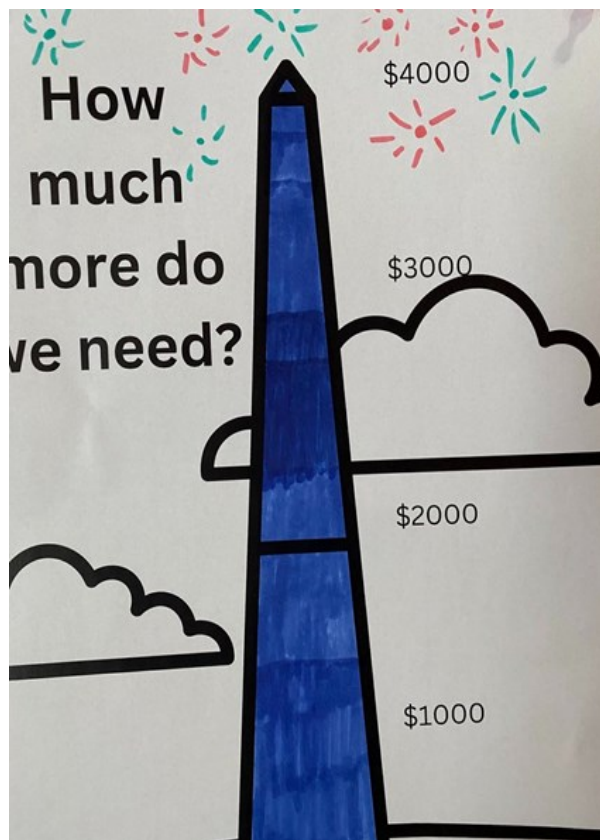
"There was something in being able to show up for people in a time of crisis and to provide practical and spiritual care," Thompson said. "And so, being a pastor has never really left who I am. And I think that there are people in the National Setting who are ordained who would probably say the same as well, that there are many places in which we function in specialized ministries — in chaplaincies, in Conferences, in national ministry.

"But at the heart of that, I believe, is being able to provide care and hope and to bring God's love to people who are experiencing challenges around a multiplicity of issues."

To learn more, visit the GMP nominee update page on the Synod website [here](#).

Content on ucc.org is copyrighted by the National Setting of the United Church of Christ and may be only shared according to the guidelines outlined [here](#).

Washington DC Trip



We are getting closer and closer each day for our trip to Washington, DC with our youth, adults, and 70 other people from around Minnesota and even a few from North Dakota. We will have 50 youth total going, and our national UCC staff in the Washington, DC office openly admits they have never had a group of youth this large that has come through their office. We will be staying in hostels (2 because of such a large group), making most of our own meals to keep the costs down, touring many of the institutions, museums, and must-see places. The goal is to get our youth to meet with the Representatives and Senators (at least their staff) to share their concerns, their hopes, and what action they want our government to take to make this a better world. Kyla Knapper gave a great interview of this trip on WTIP, you can listen and check it out [HERE](#). Thanks to the generosity of our church, community, family and friends, the group reached its goal to raise \$4,000 for the trip.

2023 OUTDOOR MINISTRY EVENTS



Register for these amazing events before it's too late! All registrations are open. Scholarships are available upon request. The links will take you directly to the Outdoor Ministry page with more information and registration links.

YOUTH AND INTERGENERATIONAL SUMMER CAMP

- July 5-7 | Summer Camp (going into 6th grade-graduating seniors) at Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning Center, Sandstone
- August 5 | 1-Day Intergenerational Family Camp at Peoples Church, Bayport
- August 6 | 1-Day Intergenerational Family Camp at First Congregational UCC, Mankato

ADULT SUMMER CAMP

- September 8-10 | Women's Retreat (adults 19+) at Camp Onomia, Onamia
- September 22-24 | Women's Wilderness Retreat (adults 19+) with Walking Spaces, Houston
- September 29-October 1 | Queer Walk Retreat (adults 19+) with Walking Spaces, Houston

Scan QR Code to sign-up!



Rooted and Rising Climate Action News



Thanks to those you Attended the Summer Solstice Fest!

Thanks to all who attended the Solstice Fest on Wednesday evening, June 21, and especially to those who brought a wonderful array of fruit desserts. Your donations of \$200 covered the costs of setting up the raised planters. Many thanks.

We continue to care for the rain gardens in front of the Library on Monday evenings at 5 pm. Please consider bringing pails or jugs of water. The faucet at the library is broken and it is getting drier each day without rain. And invite your friends to join us.

We have received a request from the City Parks department to respond to a questionnaire about future improvements to the Rec Park and Campgrounds. The Climate Action group is collecting our own requests for environmental stewardship and will present them at the meetings.



We urge you to look for the questionnaire and fill it in at: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/GMRA2023>

There Will also be public in-person comment sessions next week on Tuesday, 6/27, from 4-7 pm and Wednesday 6/28 from 1-4 pm. I assume these will be at the city offices.

For more information contact Bruce Tyler.

SEASONS OF OUR LIVES

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven.

(Ecclesiastes 3)

Time to Celebrate....

July Birthdays

7/7 Sandy Stover
7/7 Art Kidd
7/10 Leah Leonard
7/14 Laura Quaife Turnquist
7/15 Peter Igoe
7/16 Nancy Leonard
7/18 Paule Wannebo
7/18 Ryan Thompson
7/21 Emily Cihlar
7/22 Jenny Delfs
7/22 John Bottger
7/27 Ryan Bockovich
7/27 Helen Carter
7/28 Joyce Riggle



Please help keep us up to date by letting us know if you'd like to be added (or removed) from our Birthday and Anniversary newsletter announcements.

July 2023

First Congregational United Church of Christ

Grand Marais, MN

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1 Pastor Enno at General Synod
2 9:30am Choir Prac- tice 10:30am Worship 6:00pm Potluck for Wow Pastor Enno at General Synod	3 3:00pm-5:00pm Food Shelf Open to the Public (LL) 5:00pm Rooted and Rising Rain Garden 7:00pm ALANON Pastor Enno's day off	4 Independence Day	5 8:00am-5:00 pm Explorers Club 3:00pm-5:00pm Food Shelf Open to the Public (LL) 6:00pm Sing-a-Long	6 10:00am Tai Chi 11:00 am Building & Grounds Com- mittee 12:00pm Wom- en's AA (FS)	7 7:00am AA (FS) 8:00am Harbor Watch	8
9 9:30am Choir Prac- tice 10:30am Worship	10 3:00pm-5:00pm Food Shelf Open to the Public (LL) 5:00pm Rooted and Rising Rain Garden 7:00pm ALANON Pastor Enno's day off	11 8:00am-5:00 pm Explorers Club 12:15pm Heal our Planet	12 8:00am-5:00 pm Explorers Club 6:00pm Sing-a-Long	13 10:00am Tai Chi 12:00pm Wom- en's AA (FS)	14 7:00am AA (FS) 8:00am Harbor Watch	15
16 9:30am Choir Prac- tice 10:30am Worship	17 3:00pm-5:00pm Food Shelf Open to the Public (LL) 5:00pm Rooted and Rising Rain Garden 7:00pm ALANON Pastor Enno's day off	18 8:00am-5:00 pm Explorers Club 12:00pm Clergy Cluster 12:15pm Heal our Planet 5:00pm BOD mtg.	19 8:00am-5:00 pm Explorers Club 6:00pm Sing-a-Long	20 10:00am Tai Chi 12:00pm Wom- en's AA (FS) 12:00pm Eco Preacher	21 7:00am AA (FS) 8:00am Harbor Watch Washington DC Trip Begins	22
23 9:30am Choir Prac- tice 10:30am Bluegrass Worship	24 3:00pm-5:00pm Food Shelf Open to the Public (LL) 5:00pm Rooted and Rising Rain Garden 7:00pm ALANON Pastor Enno's day off	25 8:00am-5:00 pm Explorers Club 12:15pm Heal our Planet	26 8:00am-5:00 pm Explorers Club 6:00pm Sing-a-Long	27 10:00am Tai Chi 12:00pm Wom- en's AA (FS) 5:00pm Library Board	28 7:00am AA (FS) 8:00am Harbor Watch Washtington DC Trip Ends	29
30 9:30am Choir Prac- tice 10:30am Worship	31 3:00pm-5:00pm Food Shelf Open to the Public (LL) 5:00pm Rooted and Rising Rain Garden 7:00pm ALANON Pastor Enno's day off					