AN ALTAR IN YOUR HOME

For several weeks, my colleagues Rev. David Long Higgins, Conference Minister of the Heartland Conference (formerly Ohio Conference), Rev. Chad Abbott, Conference Minister of the Indiana Kentucky Conference and I have been hosting live conversations on Facebook on what it means to be the Church in the midst of a pandemic. Last Friday, a pastor, the Rev. Christel Emma Anna Weber, who is currently serving one of the largest churches in Westphalia, Germany, joined us. Our conversation with Christel revealed the ways we, as the Church of Jesus Christ, are experiencing the grace and beauty of the Spirit as we adapt to the reality of not meeting in person for worship in the ways we have become accustomed.

What I found particularly interesting in our conversation was to hear Christel speak about her church and how many of the churches in Germany have enabled church members to transform their thinking about sacred space. She explained that even though she serves in an urban setting, her members and community do not have readily available access to the Internet or technology. Although she (with the help of a younger pastoral colleague in the city) has been able to produce a few videos for her congregation, primarily she and other pastors in her community have created worship materials for people to worship at home. Each week, pastors make a liturgy and written sermon or devotion available for her church members. Church members are invited to worship at their kitchen table at 10 am on Sunday mornings (the time they worshipped in their sanctuaries for years). On Sunday mornings, church members place their bible, their hymnal, the worship materials, and a lit candle on their kitchen table as they begin to join their hearts, minds, and spirits with other members around the city in worship. They have named the practice simply “kitchen table worship.” For so many, their kitchen tables have become their altars for worship.

What I find most compelling about this simple practice is it takes us back to the heart of worship. Too often, we have regulated our worship to specific spaces, limiting our times of prayer and devotion to a place outside of our homes, in a designated space within a church building. Yet, creating an altar in our homes not only takes us back to our historical roots of house churches, but also can serve to simply remind us of the presence of the Divine, which is with us at all times and in all places.

Throughout history, creating an altar is a way by which people of faith have set their intention to focus on the presence of God in their midst. It is a visible reminder of the One who is the Creator and Author of our lives and who is worthy of our devotion, time, and praise. In scriptures, we read of the people of God building altars on mountaintops, in the wilderness, or by streams of water to mark the places that they encountered the power and presence of God. Often their altars consisted of merely a collection of stones which represented that particular place. As time went on, altars became more elaborate and ornate. Yet, the concept was the same.

As many of us will continue to remain in our homes, not able or not comfortable gathering in the sanctuaries for worship, I believe the idea of creating altars in our homes would be a powerful reminder we can experience and worship the presence of God wherever we are. I encourage you to consider creating an altar in your home. Simply choose a designated space in your home. The foundation of the altar can be a plate, tray, scarf, a piece of wood, a table, shelf, or even the floor. Upon the table,
place items which will serve as visual reminders of your faith. This could be a candle, cross, a bible, pictures, rocks, flowers, or other inspirations, which are particularly meaningful for you. Then use your altar as your designated space to be in prayer, devotion, and praise. Create rituals such as lighting a candle or playing specific music when you are in the space, which will call your mind, body, and spirit to a time of worship.

The Spirit of God continues to connect us in the times we are not in the presence of one another. The Spirit of God is with us not only in the sanctuaries of our churches, but in the sanctuaries of our homes as well. May you discover the beauty and the blessings of the sacred wherever you may be as you continue to worship the Lord in these days.

Blessings, Rev. Shana Johnson, Conference Minister

**Illinois South Conference COVID-19 Response**

**UPDATE #10, May 18, 2020**

**What Will You Do After Shelter-in-Place Ends?**

After the end of shelter-in-place expires and we move to the next phase of reopening Illinois, you will have a lot of decisions to make. When will you choose to return to in-person worship? Or will you stay suspended for the foreseeable future? There are many factors to consider, from public health to the specific practicalities and needs of your congregation. You can download a copy of Faithfully Phasing Forward on the ISC website. This document poses questions to consider, relates to the Restore Illinois plan, and includes some best practice guidelines for worship and church-sponsored activities.

**ISC Spirit**

If you know of stories that show people being the church, please send it to ISCspirit@iscucc.org. Share the stories that are warming your heart. #ISCspirit.

Thank you to the Hunger/Food Action Committee, who recently awarded grants of varying amounts to 23 different churches/organizations in our region.

- Bethel UCC (Twigs Summer Lunch Program)
- Cahokia Community Basket
- CCBA Food Pantry
- Community Interfaith Food Pantry
- Dupo Community Backpack Angels Summer Lunch Program
- Highland Area Christian Service Ministerial Alliance (Food Pantry)
- House of Neighborly Service
- Marion Ministerial Alliance Food Pantry
- Mascoutah Food Pantry
- Mascoutah Summer Lunch Program
- Murphysboro Food Pantry
- Trenton Council of Churches Food Pantry

**Funds for the Three Great Loves Vegetable Seeds Program:**

- Belleville - St. Paul UCC  Marion - Zion UCC
- Brighton - St. John’s UCC  Moro - St. John’s UCC of Midway
- Marissa- Friedens UCC  New Hanover- Zoar UCC
- Mascoutah- St. John UCC  Trenton - St. John UCC
- Maeystown - St. John UCC  Waterloo- St. John UCC
  Waterloo- Zion UCC

Thank You to the Steve and Emily Walton Family Foundation. They sent a $5000 grant to DuBois Center, which will help the loss of summer camp income.

St. Paul Lebanon sent email cards to all the mothers in their congregation for Mother’s Day to let them know they were remembered and appreciated even in a time of social distancing.

Submitted by Rev. Don Wagner

**Prayer list for May 24 - May 30, 2020**

**Churches & Pastors**

- Alhambra Salem UCC, Rev. Jeremy Wood, Sr. Pastor
- Alhambra Salem UCC, Pastor John (Marilee) Mindrup, Associate Pastor

**People with Life Concerns**

- Please pray for the family of Virginia Terrill as they mourn her death. Virginia is the mother of Rev. Elizabeth Terrill, the Interim Pastor at St. John UCC in Valmeyer. A private service was held on Tuesday, May 12. Memorial donations may be made to Chesterton Art Center at 115 S 4th Street, Chesterton, IN 46304. Please designate in memory of Virginia Terrill. Cards may be sent to Rev. Terrill, St. John UCC, PO Box 251, Valmeyer, IL 62295.

- Hold the family of Lou Garcia, 96, in prayer as they mourn his death. Lou was active in Illinois South Conference until 2010 as part of the Committee on Ministry and a member of Christ UCC in Belleville. Click here for a full obituary. Visitations with social distancing will be Thurs, May 21 at Quernheim Funeral Home. (10 people in funeral home at a time.) A private service will follow.

- Pray for the healthcare workers and first responders who have put their lives on the line to protect us.

- Special prayers for the families who are dealing with loved ones who have been diagnosed with COVID-19 and are not able to visit them in person for support. Give strength to the sick and to those who are struggling with separation.

- Pray for Rev. Bob Coffey as he deals with some health issues. Rev. Coffey is serving as Pastor for St. Peter’s UCC in Lenzburg. Cards may be sent to 6213 Jo Ann Dr, Belleville, IL 62223.
Thank you to these churches for their OCWM donations received last week. These donations continue to support all the work of the Conference.

Brighton - St. John's UCC
Centralia - St. Peter UCC
Collinsville - St. John UCC
Columbia - St. Paul UCC
Moro - St. John's UCC of Midway
New Baden - Zion UCC
Troy - Friedens UCC
And anonymous gifts from individuals

Helpful Information
- The United Church of Christ has just started the Pandemic Relief Loan Program. This fund makes loans of $5000 to $20000 to churches. Go here for details.
- Especially for Pastors: a self-care workshop titled Pastoring in a Time of Pandemic, presented by the Solihten Institute and Care and Counseling: May 21, 2020, 1-2:30pm CT. The discussion will be on the intersection of faith and mental health. See the flyer with the call-in details on the ISC website.

Worship Resources
- We now have a worship resources section on the Conference website, with a link on the home page.

Together in Christ's ministry with you,
Dr. Jill Baker, Conference Moderator
Rev. Christy Eckert, Conference Vice-Moderator
Mr. Dwight Asselmeier, Conference Treasurer
Rev. Ivan Horn, Conference Secretary
Rev. Shana Johnson, IL South Conference Minister
Rev. Rosemary Captain
Ms. Virginia Ilch
Rev. R.J. Morgan
Rev. Mike Southcombe
Ms. Barbara VanAusdall

Memorial Day - Honoring Sacrifice and Loss
According to www.history.com, Memorial Day was started to bury and honor the 600,000 to 800,000 Union and Confederate soldiers while the survivors were emotionally battered after the worst military conflict in the United States. The first national commemoration of Memorial Day was held in Arlington National Cemetery on May 30, 1868, but several towns and cities claim to have observed their own earlier versions of Memorial Day or "Decoration Day" as early as 1866. But in the late 1990s, historians learned that a group of freed black slaves first honored the fallen soldiers less than a month after the Confederacy surrendered in 1865. The Washington Race Course and Country Club in Charleston, SC, had been used as a make-shift prison for Union soldiers. Disease and exposure had caused many to die and were hastily buried in a mass grave behind the club house. This group of freed slaves honored them by moving them from the mass grave to individual graves in a new cemetery honored as "Martyrs of the Race Course." According to two newspaper reports, a crowd of 10,000 people, mostly freed slaves and white missionaries, staged a parade around the race course in their honor. For more on this historical discovery, click here.

The Power of Waiting
I was recently reminded about the power of waiting. And in that instance, I returned to a time that I had traveled to Phoenix, Arizona. While there, I took a little time to visit the Lost Dutchman State Park near Superstition Mountains to walk a trail in the Sonoran Desert. I only had a few hours, but, with camera in tow, I was determined to experience the trail.

A storm was brewing. I could see the clouds rolling in, but in my mind, nothing was going to stop me. Surely, the weather would hold off. As I passed people returning from the trail, I was warned, “Don't go out there. A storm is coming, and you don't want to be caught in the desert during a storm.” That didn't stop me. I paused to take a photo of a hawk flying above me when large raindrops sprinkled my lens. The clouds became more ominous and flashes of lightning brought me to my senses.

Disappointed, I ran to shelter beneath the tin roof of a pavilion at the beginning of the trail. Seated on the picnic table, I watched a blurred wall of rain as it approached. I could smell the rain before it arrived. Then, one drop - two drops - many
drops beating on the tin roof. The sound was magical. Hail joined the rain, which turned up the volume of the magic and created a blanket of white as it fell on the ground. I closed my eyes to soak in the sound.

When they opened, I saw a brilliant rainbow in front of the horizon, which turned into a double rainbow within a few minutes. As the storm passed, the bleached-out glistening edge of dark clouds moved away from a colorful setting sun. The lighter air after the storm encouraged me to breathe deeper and relax my shoulders.

I could hear God say, "Lynnette, I told you. If you just slow down and wait, I will give you such a show. It will be worth the wait."

As I reflect now, perhaps God is saying, "World! If you just slow down and wait...."

Blessing, Lynnette Schuepbach, ISC Communications Coordinator

THIS IS YOUR OCWM MONIES AT WORK
During the shelter in place order, all Conference staff will be working remotely, but they are available to help you. Keep these contacts handy.

For the work of Conference teams and committees or search and call inquiries, contact Christy Pursell at cpursell@iscucc.org.

For financial matters (in terms of your church's giving to the Conference or OCWM), contact Debbie Kesner at dkesner@iscucc.org.

For communicating within the Conference, the Conference website, Facebook page or Weekly Connection, contact Lynnette Schuepbach at lschuepbach@iscucc.org.

For registration for upcoming events or for information about cancelled camp sessions, contact Julie Riechmann at 618-357-1809 or jriechmann@iscucc.org.

To speak with the Conference Minister, contact Rev. Shana Johnson at sjohnson@iscucc.org or 618-882-8247.

Zoom Upgrade to Zoom 5.0
On April 27, Zoom released Zoom 5.0. On May 30, everyone will need to upgrade in order to use Zoom. That means the host of the session as well as everyone who wishes to join the meeting and conversation must upgrade. Usually, an automatic reminder will come up as you try to use Zoom. Click to allow the upgrade to happen so that you will be able to enjoy the session together.

This past Sunday, there was maintenance being done on Zoom so many of the churches were not able to continue with that venue. After you upgrade to Zoom 5.0, that should not be an issue for future sessions.

GRADUATION EDITION - Part 2
Last week we celebrated two of our 2020 graduates – Kristian Avise-Rouse and Laura Renken. This week we celebrate two more. All four were part of our 2019 Summer Program Staff and are graduating this spring.

Bailey Reichert AKA Minno will be graduating from Illinois Wesleyan University with a Bachelors of Science in Biology and a minor in Psychology. Illinois Wesleyan has postponed graduation until August, so she is hoping to actually walk with her class - live and in person. Bailey is moving to Carbondale and plans to finish some prerequisite courses before applying to an accelerated nursing program. After a year in that program, she will have a second Bachelors - this one in Nursing. Bailey attended summer camp at DuBois Center in 2016 and then spent most of the summer of 2017 volunteering as a counselor. She joined our summer staff team in 2018 and returned in 2019 as our Waterfront Coordinator. When asked about a favorite memory from last summer, she couldn't pick just one. She especially enjoyed returning to the rustic cabins for a week of counseling during High School Week and the evening of wacky relays at the waterfront. Bailey loves to sing, dance and act! Spending time with the horses and at the waterfront are two of her favorites activities, but she's also a fan of candle times, crafts, creek walks, water games and almost anything DuBois! One of the many gifts Bailey
brought to our staff was her organizational skills. In addition to a heavy course load and work schedule, Bailey served on
the Executive Council of her sorority - Kappa Delta - for three years and as the president for 2019. These experiences
only served to strengthen her administrative and leadership skills. Bailey’s attention to detail, creative program planning,
and the care she extended to campers and staff were an asset to our team. CONGRATS, Minnow!

Mtipe Koggani AKA Amani graduated from Eden Theological Seminary on Friday night, May 15. It
was a virtual ceremony - which was different - but it did allow friends and family from around the world
to join him! Hailing from Tanzania, Mtipe graduated with a Masters of Theological Studies. Due to the current health
crisis, his plans are still in the works. He was accepted at Princeton University Graduate School, but is also exploring the
possibility of a one-year commitment to Deaconess Anne House in St. Louis, which is part of the Episcopal Service
Corps. Mtipe is a gifted musician who sings, plays the piano and now the ukulele. He brought his years of successful
experience working with children, youth and young adults in ministry settings to DuBois Center. Mtipe's goal for his time
at camp was to immerse himself in another culture and work with young people from backgrounds very different than his
own. Though nervous at first, especially about the horses and the lake - he embraced the experience. He even learned
to ride and swim at DuBois Center and now enjoys both immensely! In fact, one of his favorite memories from last summer
was a dock to dock swim - which he completed. He also loved playing on the water mat with campers and staff! Mtipe
worked with every age group at DuBois Center from the youngest campers and their adults in Just You & Me Camp to
high schoolers in X-Plore and related well to all of them. Mtipe is one of the most positive, gentle and kind people I have
ever met; many, many others echoed this sentiment as well. His camp name is Amani, which in Swahili means peace.
This is especially fitting for two reasons - PeaceWorks was our theme last summer and Mtipe embodies the word.
CONGRATS Mtipe!

**SUMMER CAMP 2020 - Fallow Ground**

Here in the Midwest, fallow ground is a familiar concept. It refers to land that has been plowed but not
seeded for one or more growing seasons. It is a ritual that helps restore the land's fertility. The Illinois
South Conference Council met on May 4, and after prayerful and tearful consideration, it was decided
that this summer will be a season of fallow ground for DuBois Center. The vote was unanimous, though
made with heavy hearts. Currently scheduled programs for June - August 9, 2020 are being postponed
until summer 2021. The ground was plowed and harrowed as brochures were sent to eager families,
potential staff were interviewed, and plans were set in place. But the seeds, our blessed campers and leaders, will not
be sown at DuBois Center this summer. This decision was announced last week. To read the full announcement, click
[here](#).

Options related to camper fees already paid can be found [here](#).

DuBois Center is your OCWM (Our Church's Wider Mission) monies at work. When you or your congregation gives
to OCWM, you are directly supporting the work of DuBois, a Camp and Retreat Center of the Illinois South Conference
of the United Church of Christ. Thank you for your ongoing support of OCWM!
The Insurance Board Addresses Concerns When Reopening Offices

In response to your inquiries concerning steps needed to re-open church offices and ministries once permitted to do so by State and Local authorities, The Insurance Board Loss Control team has created a resource to provide tips and information on how to re-open church offices and to prepare your building before returning.

May is Mental Health Awareness Month. The Insurance Board's next upcoming webcast will be on May 27, 2020 at 1 pm CDT entitled "Light in Dark Places: Mental Health and Church Ministry." It will feature Kevin Brown, Marriage & Family Therapist, who will address mental health concerns during COVID-19 and beyond. Click here for a flyer on the upcoming webcast. Click here for previously recorded webcasts.

The Walker Leadership Institute announces the addition of the "Insights for Leadership in Challenging Times" series. Insights is a series of conversations on topics related to missional leadership. Recorded videos include an inspirational message from visiting professor at Bentley University in Boston, Michelle Barton. Other Insights feature Founding Director of Glean Network, Rabbi Elan Babchuck; Executive Director of Integrated Marketing & Branding, Virgil Tipton; and Director of Youth Ministry for the Episcopal Church of St. Michael and St. George, Kyle Tallman. Click here to register.

Eden Seminary's Theological E-Forum. Register here for session 10, Thursday, May 21, at 7 pm. This week's theme: "Isolation and Spiritual Growth: A Journey to the Desert" presented by Dr. Adam Ployd, Assistant Professor of Church History and Historical Theology at Eden Theological Seminary. All previous E-Forum sessions are recorded and available online.

What's Happening at Illinois South Conference...

ZOOM VBS
The director of Christian Ed at St. Paul UCC, in Belleville, Craig Bielke, is putting together a Vacation Bible School program using the materials "Wilderness Escape Program". The sessions will be held on June 29, June 30, and July 1. The program will be presented using Zoom. It is for children Pre-K through the 6th grade. There will be a registration fee which includes the materials for the crafts. The craft package will be available for pickup at St. Paul UCC in Belleville on dates to be determined. If you have children who would like to participate, please contact Craig Bielke 210-383-0385 or email cbielke@stpaulucc.org.

Strengthen the Church Offering - May 31, 2020
Materials for the offering have been mailed to churches. If you have not received your supply or need additional materials, click here. Recognizing that many churches are not meeting in person, we are providing a number of digital resources online.

Thank you for your continued support of your local Conference, the National Setting, and our work together to build the Body of Christ. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Jacqueline Owen, Development Strategist, at owenj@ucc.org or 216-736-2169.

Job Opportunity: Staunton St. Paul UCC is searching for a new director for Exhale, their youth ministry for grades 6-12. Approximately 15-20 hours weekly. Must be familiar with the UCC and theologically progressive. Responsibilities include weekly Exhale meetings, planning and implementing annual mission trip and fundraisers; devotions; service projects; assist with Vacation Bible School and attend worship at least twice monthly. Send resume or contact Pastor Debbie at revdjkamins@gmail.com or 618-635-2386.