Truth in Love

Yesterday, a dear friend of mine, a black Baptist pastor in Long Beach, California, posted a video on Facebook to his congregation. When I scrolled past the video without the sound on and saw him take a deep breath, exhale and pause, my heart sank and knew it was something I needed to listen to. His countenance and body language immediately signaled to me that this was not a typical message. I have known this friend for over twenty years, and I have never seen him look so distraught, exhausted, weary, and numb.

When I began to listen, I quickly understood why.

He was addressing his congregation's concerns that he did not speak about the recent deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement. After a long moment of silence, he began in this way, "Many of you expected me (and so did I) to say something today during the Sunday morning service. I had every intention to, but I need to confess and be honest with you. I have been tired. I am just tired. My son has asked me for the last couple of days, 'Dad why are you not up and about? Why are you just laying around?' And I just feel to some degree, so frustrated, so hopeless, not angry. Anger left a long time ago. I am tired, and I wonder when it will end."

I have known this man for over twenty years. He was a seminary classmate of mine and lived in campus housing in the apartment below us. He and my husband became fast friends, playing on the Eden Seminary basketball team. Most nights he was either in our apartment or we were in his.

We helped him with programs at the church he was serving at the time, and he helped me with programs at the church I was serving at the time. He created a song for our youngest daughter, which we still sing to her today. When he fell in love with the woman of his dreams, he asked my husband and I to help him set up the perfect setting to ask her to marry him and told us he would call us as soon as she said yes, so we could all celebrate together.

We talked often, had long and sometimes uncomfortable conversations about race and the different experiences of navigating this world as someone with black skin as opposed to someone with white skin. He introduced us to authors we had never read, and we introduced him to my very Midwest ways of life.

Over the years as I have watched him live out his calling as a parish minister, even though I intellectually knew there were many differences in our experiences, there were also so many assumptions I had about how similar our lives were. We were both pastors balancing the demands of church and home. He had daughters; we had daughters. However, when he had a son, there were things to which I would never relate, especially because I did not have a black son.

He named this reality in such a raw way as he spoke to his congregation. Any black mother or father of black sons knew immediately of that which he spoke. And even though I have heard this from many friends and family members over the years, the other day it hit me differently.

He bravely said, "Racism against black and brown people and the hold of white supremacy in this country is not a black problem; it is a white problem. It is a problem with white America not understanding the impact of racism on black and brown people for generations." My friend was speaking truth in love as he pleaded with his white siblings in the faith to speak up, stand up, and take action.
He was naming an uncomfortable truth. It was an uncomfortable ask. He is right. I join him in naming that uncomfortable truth. I will begin today, and in the days to come, to make my own uncomfortable ask. I ask you who are brave enough, courageous enough, vulnerable enough and compassionate enough to join me in committing ourselves to speaking up, standing up, and taking action to address the systemic racism against our black and brown siblings which exists in our nation, in our communities, in our churches and maybe even in our families and ourselves.

I, too, am tired. I am weary of the heartbreaking injustice I see. Yet, I am not hopeless because I know the power which resides in us when we trust in the Spirit of God to move us towards courageous love and transformation. You give me hope. For I know the spirit which resides in this Conference. It is a spirit of a people who believe all people are God's beloveds created in the image of God. I thank you for the ways you will join me in speaking the truth in love so we may experience justice for all of God's people.

Many blessings, Rev. Shana Johnson, ISC Conference Minister

Retired Pastor
- Rev. Robert Trip, Effingham, IL

People with Life Concerns
- 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.

Inclusivity Statement for DuBois Center and Illinois South Conference of the UCC
Because we affirm the value of all God's people, the Illinois South Conference of the United Church of Christ does not discriminate on the basis of age, race, ability, national origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or gender identity. To the extent possible, we endeavor to accommodate those with a variety of physical, mental, emotional, medical, or dietary needs.
Save the Date - ISC Confirmation Retreat
Dates: Fri-Sat, Sept 25-26 / Fri-Sat Oct 9-10
- Like all ISC events, these will only happen if we think we can offer them safely and meet state guidelines.
- We are going with two events instead of one to more easily allow for COVID safe interactions and stay under the 50-person limit. (We will hopefully be in that phase by then.)
- A team will plan the events together, so the events will be similar.
- Capacity will be 40 youth and the appropriate number of chaperones.

Illinois South Conference COVID-19 Response
UPDATE #12, June 1, 2020

Learning About Racism
Just as our state has opened to a new level of movement, the national crisis over police violence has flashed to center stage across the country. During this pandemic, disparities in the healthcare and economic system have been laid bare, exposing what was weak or already broken. People of color have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and are now forced to grieve the very public deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd at the hands of law enforcement.

Those of us in homogeneous communities may not understand the intensity of lives lived under systemic racism. And, we don't know the anger, frustration and deep sense of injustice that comes with living under severe daily threat. Yet, this moment is calling for us as people of faith to listen more and judge less in order to understand what people are desperately trying to say.

There are no easy fixes to the very complicated structures of complicit and implicit systemic racism. Our Conference will begin to engage discussions about racism throughout the summer, with a hope of better hearing life stories different than our own. We are all human. We all are God's beloveds created in the image of our God.

If you choose to attend a protest or vigil during this time of pandemic, please follow these guidelines:
 * First, listen to the leadership of the event you are attending
 * Second, wear a face mask, because they are effective in slowing virus transmission
 * Third, try to socially distance from others if possible

Please remember, the public perception about COVID-19 has changed, but the realities of the virus have not.

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.

Kindercottage Gets a Hand from Friedens UCC
Hecker Friedens UCC members Dianne Mertz and Vivian Horn recently made 180 book bags to prepare for Kindercottage to reopen. Vivian Horn also made an additional 30 face masks for their staff and volunteers, both with Velcro and with ties. These supplies will help Uni-Pres Kindercottage get back to serving children. Pictured L to R: Vivian Horn, Brenda Crisp, and Kindercottage teacher displaying the bags and masks. Submitted by Rev. Ivan Horn

Thank you to these churches for their OCWM donations received last week. These donations continue to support all the work of the Conference.
- Carlinville - St. Paul UCC
- Grantfork- Grantfork UCC
- Lenzburg- St. Peter's UCC
- Nashville- St. Paul UCC
- Summerfield - St. John UCC
- And anonymous gifts from individuals

Helpful Information
The State of Illinois has released comprehensive guidelines for places of worship while we are in Phase 3 of the Restore Illinois plan. You can go here to get a copy.
The Conference Local Church Ministries Team is producing a worship service that will be shared before Sunday, June 28. Pastors in the Conference can plan now to use this video and can take a Sunday off from preparing worship.

The COVID-19 Update will move to bi-weekly with this edition. Next edition will be June 15.

**Worship Resources**
We have worship resources 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

Ms. Virginia Ilch
Rev. R.J. Morgan
Rev. Mike Southcombe
Ms. Barbara VanAusdall

**As Congregations Consider Re-Opening Their Buildings for Worship**
*An evolving resource from the national setting for congregations of the United Church of Christ*

Isaiah 43:5 *Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from west.*

Dear Church,

We will hold the hope of gathering again, one with another. In these days, it may be helpful to re-frame our understanding of Extravagant Welcome to be Extravagant Care and Protection. We value life and are our neighbors' keepers. In that, the Church commits itself to taking actions to protect and preserve health. As much as folk long to come together for a postponed “Easter,” the next several months will entail a gradual ability to gather with significant changes to "how we've always done it." It is important to remember that there are no absolute safe ways to gather in mixed groups, only safer ways. Plans must take seriously the continuum of risk involved. Life with Covid-19 is challenging society in many unanticipated ways, and the Church is not exempt from that. And yet, the Church continues, adapts, re-imagines, and engages in faithful ministry even in this time. While our buildings may be closed, the Church is wide open!

One place to begin is by acknowledging that these days are full of grief. For losses of life and livelihoods, for losses of touch and connection, for cancelled plans and for a future that will be changed beyond what we can imagine, there is grief. Our sacred traditions of communion, baptism, funerals, and weddings are being re-imagined for times of sheltering in place, and that change is hard. Worship, with choral and congregational singing, hugs, fellowship, and so much else shared in close proximity has been transformed to screen, telephone, and text. These have been a good and necessary changes. Churches are learning now that many worship practices are among the riskiest, the most likely to spread the virus, and even with the use of masks and attention to physical distancing, congregations cannot yet safely resume these activities. How shall we gather again in the face of so much grief and loss and change?

Read the entire [letter](#).

**The Insurance Board has released its most recent Loss Control Resources containing the COVID-19 Liability FAQs, and the COVID-19 Resource Guide.** Another inquiry revolves around guidelines for reopening worship services. The Insurance Board's Loss Control department is currently working on guidelines for in-person worship services which will be shared with you in the next week. Shortly thereafter they will provide information relating to youth and camps. Additionally, stay-tuned for more webcasts and some exciting news offering even more guidance on reopening church offices, worship services, and even training for staff and volunteers.

In light of the recent events of civil unrest, the Insurance Board's Loss Control Team is providing a [resource](#) for churches to use as guide for protecting their ministries.

**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](mailto: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](mailto:dkesner@iscucc.org).

For communicating within the Conference, the Conference website, Facebook page or Weekly Connection, contact Lynnette Schuepbach at [lschuepbach@iscucc.org](mailto: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.
For DuBois Center, contact Shirley Asmussen at 618-787-2202 or dcinfo@duboiscenter.org.
To speak with the Conference Minister, contact Rev. Shana Johnson at sjohnson@iscucc.org or 618-882-8247.

Pandemic grants for churches added to UCC National Setting COVID-19 relief response
The United Church of Christ National Setting is offering financial assistance to local churches whose ministries have been challenged by the novel coronavirus pandemic. As one, the national officers have collectively identified $2.6 million in COVID-19 relief, $1.5 million in loans that will be administered through the Cornerstone Fund and another $1.1 million in micro grants. The grant application process opens June 1. To find out more details, click here.

MEANDERING with MARTY
One of the joys of Phase 3, is being able to expand our circle just a bit. On Saturday, Marty Kemper made the trek to DuBois Center to check out a number of areas around camp. If you have never met Marty, you are missing out. He is a biologist who recently retired from the Dept of Natural Resources. An avid birder, he is a founding member of the Green DuBois team and a long-time DuBois Center earth care volunteer. The new grass and the accompanying weeds on the back side of the dam are growing. Now that a section of the trees and brush have been removed for the new spillway, we are developing a plan to keep the new growth under control. Some of this growth is very good, but some of it is definitely not. Pictured here is the stump of an Ash tree with new shoots. It needs to be cut back and the stump treated. Also pictured is a close-up of Spreading Dogbane, also found on the dam. It’s a keeper! This beautiful native plant is not especially common on our property, or anywhere in Illinois for that matter. In fact, this was the first time Marty had seen this specific variety. Its close cousin, Hemp Dogbane, also known as Indian Hemp, is prolific at DuBois Center. The name of Indian Hemp comes from the fibrous strength of the stem. It was harvested by native peoples and used as twine or woven into rope and other items. One reason this is such a “good” plant, is its value as a rich source of nourishment for pollinators. Monarch butterflies love it! As southern Illinois begins to slowly re-open, we hope to encourage small groups of volunteers to take on projects, such as the dam. Watch for details.

SIXTY SECONDS of SOLITUDE
During these challenging times, many have found themselves even busier than usual and definitely more stressed. It's hard to remember to take time to breathe deeply, relax ones' shoulders and back, and remember that God is always with us. Beginning this week, DuBois Center will be sharing 60 Seconds of Solitude - short videos of sacred scenes at DuBois Center. These will be posted on our website and Facebook pages. We hope you enjoy this video and future mini relaxation reminders.

VIRTUAL CAMPFIRES
Miss the crackle of the campfire? Singing silly songs with your counselors? Making s'mores with friends? Listening to inspiring words from chaplains? Praying together under the stars? SO DO WE!! It won't be the same, but staff and volunteers are working on creative ways to share some of these favorites with campers and their families via virtual campfires. The first release is scheduled for 7 pm on Thursday, June 11. That would have been the first closing campfire of Summer 2020. We hope you'll join us. Watch for details.
SUMMER CAMP 2020 - Fallow Ground Update
As you are likely aware, our traditional summer camp line-up has been postponed until 2021. This summer has been declared a season of fallow ground. Many families have already responded regarding their summer camp fees. Requests for full donations, full refunds and every combination in between have been received by our Registrar. We will begin processing these requests this week and hope to wrap up the process before the end of June. To read the full announcement, click here. Options related to camper fees already paid can be found here. We have been humbled by the many touching and inspiring emails and notes of support as well as the generous donations. It is exciting to see the number of families that have decided to rollover their fees to 2021 - committed to returning next summer. You give us hope! Camp is green; the plants, hay and grass are growing; birds and critters are everywhere. God's incredible handiwork is everywhere! But the rich and colorful threads our campers, staff and volunteers bring with them to this sacred place are missing. The incomplete tapestry of peace and caring that is DuBois Center awaits your safe return.

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.

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.

Online Alzheimer’s Support Group - Tuesday, June 9 from 1:30 pm - 3 pm
If you would like to join the Zoom Group meeting online, please email Gail at gshaw@stjohnscc.org. She will send you the instructions and invitation to join the meeting. Join others dealing with dementia and memory loss on the second Tuesday of each month. Chartered in 1991, this group is intended for family caregivers with loved ones suffering from Alzheimer's. This group is facilitated by experienced leaders specially trained in issues of dementia and aging.

Online Family Caregiver Support Group Wednesday, June 10 at 6 pm
If you would like to join the Zoom group meeting online, please email srhodes@stjohnscc.org. She will send you instructions and invitation to join the meeting. Intended for family caregivers caring for loved ones with any type of disability held the second Wednesday of every month. Join other caregivers for fellowship and support at this meeting. This group is hosted by the Director of the Adult Day Program.

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 NO registration fee. 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.
**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 revdjatkins@gmail.com or 618-635-2386.

**Children's Ministry Curriculum**

*Bloom! Children's Ministry Curriculum* will be $50 for all congregations this fall due to the financial impacts of COVID-19 on so many of us. To support you more in the event of sheltering-in-place again, we'll also include a Story Intro video that you can send to families to use at home. It can stand alone or you can use it as an introduction to other Bloom! activities that you can put together for families to use as well. There will also be children's sermon videos that you can either edit into a worship video, or that you can use to get ideas from. Bloom! follows the Narrative Lectionary for our Bible story sequence, though it is great for all congregations. We offer ideas for PreK-6th grade (in sections of PreK, K&1, 2&3, 4-6) as well as for large group and a Christmas program. Check out more about it at [www.bloominfait.com](http://www.bloominfait.com).