



Reflections from Our Conference Minister



calendar.

Last year, my parents gave my dogs an Advent calendar. Every day I opened a perforated flap and pulled out that day's treat. It was delightful for them, but not exactly spiritual. And that's the problem: when we treat Advent as a simple countdown to Christmas, we miss its real purpose.

The word Advent comes from the Latin *ad venion*--"until the coming." Advent is an opportunity for us, as Christians, to reflect on our outer witness and proclamation of Christ in the world. It is a time set aside to consider how the presence of Emmanuel (God with us) can transform how we relate to one another, love one another, and further the reign of Christ in the world.

Advent invites us to consider: What difference does Christ's coming make? What difference can it make--still--in our world, in our families, in our own hearts?

Advent is a season of holy imagination.

Not imagining what *is*, but what could *be* through the power and presence of Christ.

This holy imaging is not only about what Jesus brought into the world, but what we--made in God's image--are called to bring now.

So, in this season of waiting, may your spirit be quiet enough to listen.

May your heart soften enough to hope.

May your mind lift high enough to see Christ's vision for humanity--visions of peace, reconciliation, compassion, and radiant love.

And as we wait "until the coming," may Christ reveal how *you* can carry Christ's light:

How might you bring **hope** to someone who feels forgotten?

How might you bring **peace** to a tense situation or troubled heart?

How might you bring **joy** where heaviness lingers?

How might you bring **love** in ways that reflect the very heart of God?

This---dear friends---is the invitation of Advent:

Not a countdown, but a calling.

Not a race to Christmas, but a readiness for Christ.

May you enter this holy season aware, expectant, and willing to shine the light of Christ even in the darkest corners of the world.

-Rev. Shana Johnson
Conference Minister

Please Remember in Your Prayers this Week...



Friedens UCC, Hecker



Evangelical UCC, Highland-
Rev. Bill (Sally) Kapp

Retired Pastor-
Rev. Dr. Don (Nancy) Wagner

It is with profound sadness that we share the passing of Rev. Gus Kuether on Monday, November 17. Rev. Gus was not only a pastor and leader in our Conference for many years, but also active in the wider Church of the UCC. Gus and his wife, Suzanne, served for many years as commissioned missionaries in Honduras. He then served on the United Church Board for World Ministries in St. Louis. He was also an interim Associate Conference Minister in the Illinois Conference before coming to the Illinois South Conference, both interim and settled positions; his last settled ministry was at St. Paul UCC in Belleville. Please keep the family of Rev. Gus Kuether in your prayers.

The funeral service of Rev. Gus Kuether will be held on Sunday, December 14, at 3 pm in the sanctuary of St. Paul UCC, Belleville. There will be no visitation. However, there will be light refreshments after the worship service to give people a time to connect with the family, offer their sympathies, and share stories. <https://rennerfh.secure.tributecenteronline.com/obituaries/Rev-Gustav-Kuether?obId=46472055>

John Mier, spouse of retired ISC Minister Joan Mier, had his 2nd knee replacement surgery. Requesting healing prayers for a speedy recovery.

[Submit prayer requests here](#)

UCC Global, National, + Regional News



"When they saw the star, they were filled with joy." —Matthew 2:10

The Christmas Fund has been caring for active and retired clergy and lay employees of the United Church of Christ for over 100 years, providing emergency grants, supplementation of small annuities and health premiums, and Christmas "Thank You" gift checks each December to our lower-income retirees. United Church of Christ congregations and members have blessed the Christmas Fund with their generosity for many years. This year, your care and compassion will be especially appreciated by those servants of the church who are facing a time of need. Thank you!

[Christmas Fund Resources](#)



'A Time of Expectation and Anticipation': UCC GMP shares Advent greetings by [Charles Jefferson, Jr.](#) | published on Dec 2, 2025

As we enter the 2025 Advent season, United Church of Christ General Minister and President/CEO the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson shares a message centering on the peace of God and being surrounded by the love of community in her annual Advent video. [Read article](#)

If inclement weather causes us to postpone this event, it will be held on February 14th-15th

Frostbite Fun Youth Event

January 17 - 18th, 2026

All youth in grades 6-12 are invited to attend this ISC youth event at our camp, DuBois Center.

Weather permitting, horseback riding is available for \$25/person.

2 Ways to Participate
 Single Day (\$50): Saturday 10 am to 7 pm
 Overnight (\$100): Saturday 10 am to Sunday 11 am

Registration open NOW on Campwise.
 Registration closes on **January 4th!**

Each church is responsible for providing the necessary chaperones for the event.

Questions? Contact Jillian Mayer
 (jill@stpaulonline.org or 618-939-7123)

DuBois Center is located at 2651 Quarry Rd, DuBois, IL

Frostbite Fun Youth Event registration is open!

Don't get bitten by a missed registration deadline!

Register TODAY

Click [Here](#)

NURTURE THE SOUL

FINDING Joy IN ADVENT

Thursdays @ 3:30 Eastern
LIVE on Facebook & YouTube

- DECEMBER 4TH: JOY AS RESISTANCE
- DECEMBER 11TH: JOY THROUGH HOPE
- DECEMBER 18TH: JOY THROUGH LAMENT

Join us!
 (no registration necessary)

Nurture the Soul

***Beginning THIS Thursday**

The season of Advent invites us to embody joy. Yet, the times in which we live may challenge joyful experiences, practices, and encounters.

Worship helps bridge recognition of the current reality with hope for the future...making space for JOY. NO registration necessary, this program will run LIVE on our Facebook and YouTube channels (a recording will be available after the event date.)

YouTube channel: <https://ow.ly/39jA50Xxw6t> (direct link coming soon)

Longest Night Service

Sunday, December 21, 2025

4:00-5:00 p.m.

St. John United Church of Christ
307 West Clay Street
Collinsville, IL 62234
www.stjohnucc-collinsville.org

This quiet, contemplative time of reflection and perspective offers a safe haven, a holy space for those who participate to find support, care, and compassion in the embrace of Christ.

*Leading this service are Rev. Dr. Don Wagner,
Rev. Jennifer Sowell, Carolyn Catalano,
and musicians Christine Brewer (soprano) and Jennifer King (piano/organ).*

Please plan on joining us in this Longest Night Service.
You are welcome here.



The Christmas Fund reflects on hope, peace, joy and love: Congregations 'give their hearts' to help others

by [Donna Jackson](#) | published on Dec 2, 2025

In the poem [“A Christmas Carol,”](#) written by Christina Rossetti in 1872 — which then evolved into the carol “In a Bleak Midwinter” — the author posed the question: “What can I give him, as poor as I am?” A shepherd could give the Christ child a lamb and a wiseman “could do his part,” Rossetti mused. And we? We could give our hearts, she penned.

For more than a hundred years, United Church of Christ ministers and laity have been giving their hearts by making generous donations to [The Christmas Fund](#).

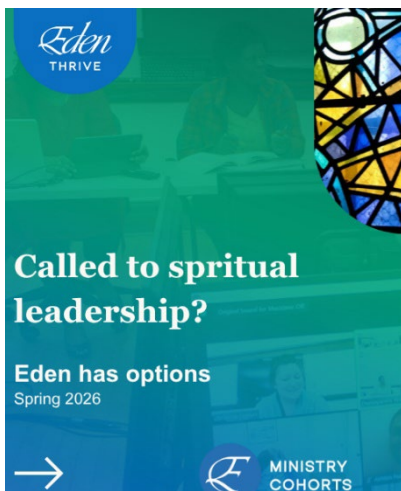
The Rev. Paul Ramsey, director of Church Relations and Philanthropy for [The Pension Boards](#) (PBUCC), reported that the 2024 Christmas Fund was the largest offering collected to date, reaching \$1.8 million. [Read article](#)

Spring 2026 Ministry Cohorts Are Open!

We're excited to announce the Spring 2026 Ministry Cohort Themes:

- [How's My Preaching? Check-In and Level Up](#)
- [Intergenerational Faith Formation](#)
- [Creative Conflict Resolution](#)
- [The Body of Christ and the Body Snatchers](#)
- [Making Strangers Neighbors](#)

[>>Learn more and sign up for the Cohort that intrigues you most!](#)





Start Your Degree in January 2026

Have you been considering a [Master's program](#), [Doctor of Ministry](#), or a [graduate certificate](#)? You can start your program in January 2026! Learn more and talk to an admissions officer about your options today! [Learn More](#)



Global Ministries

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ

Job Opening: Global Engagement and Logistics Manager Global Ministries is seeking a dynamic and detail-oriented Global Engagement and Logistics Manager to oversee the administration of the People-to-People Pilgrimage program, coordinate interpretation for staff, mission co-workers, and international partners throughout the life of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ and provide logistical support for organizational events. [Download job description](#)



This Month at the United Nations

Description

Join us to learn more about what the UCC does at the United Nations!

Hear updates from the UCC Main Representative to the UN, Donna Bollinger, on program updates, our interfaith and ecumenical partners, and upcoming events.

There will be time set aside during the meeting so that we can hear from YOU on these topics and how we can help to amplify the work our local congregations and partners are doing in the community. [Register](#)

Date & Time (Central)

- Jan 6, 2026 01:00 PM
- Feb 3, 2026 01:00 PM
- Mar 3, 2026 01:00 PM
- Apr 7, 2026 01:00 PM



Sabell Wave of Prayer

by [Middle East and Europe](#) | published on Dec 1, 2025

On the second week of Advent on 7th December, many churches around the world will light the second candle, "The Bethlehem Candle," which represents peace. Many communities are participating in FOSNA's "Preach Palestine" Advent campaign to preach justice and peace during Advent and to organize their communities towards liberation. Sign up for the resources [here](#)

Prince of Peace, as we journey through Advent, help us remember that you came to this earth to proclaim peace and righteousness. Teach us how to heed your call to be peacemakers and to resist the temptations of evil. We pray that all violence, wars and genocides may cease and a just peace will prevail.

Lord in your mercy...hear our prayer

Read the Global Ministries news piece [HERE](#)



ISC Hunger Action Team - Facing Hunger in Your Community



The Hunger Action Team would like to recognize **CHRIST UCC CHURCH, DUPO** for the continued support of their neighbors in need.

Christ UCC members are invited to donate non perishable food and hygiene items to fill the "Micro Pantry" at the Dupo Public Library. Homeless individuals have been spending time at the library. This mission project will provide single serve food and hygiene items. With cold weather coming, other suggested items: cotton socks, hats, gloves, and small blankets. Heartfelt thanks to Christ UCC, serving others as stewards of God's Grace. Under the leadership of pastor and teacher, Rev. Todd Muschaney. Such a blessing!

By sharing your stories of being in service to others, you shine God's Light to all of us in the ISC and beyond! Click below...

...to share stories of fighting hunger in YOUR community.

News from DuBois Center



This Giving Tuesday, we're celebrating 60 years of camp at DuBois Center.

That's 60 years of adventures, from horseback riding to boating and from swimming to exploring God's creation.

When you support DuBois Center, you make it possible for us to offer new adventures to campers and guests.

Will you make a gift today at [DuBoisCenter.org/Donate](https://duboiscenter.org/Donate) so that we can continue adventuring for the next 60 years (and beyond)?

We've already gotten our first 78 registrations for Summer Camp 2026!

We're **aiming** to have MORE next summer - more friendships, more experiences, more faith formation, and way more fun.

If you're not already registered, head on over to <https://duboiscenter.org/summer-camps/> to find the right session for you.





2026 SUMMER CAMP

SCHEDULE

Registration Opens November 24th
Early Bird Registration ends February 14th

	MAIN CAMP	RUSTIC
June 14-19	*Discovery (1 st - 3 rd) Settler (3 rd - 5 th) **Quest (1 st - 3 rd) Leadership in Training (11 th - 12 th)	Horse Play (5 th - 7 th) Outback (7 th - 9 th)
June 21-26	Settler (3 rd - 5 th) Art Explosion (5 th - 8 th) Base Camp (6 th - 8 th)	**Rustic Sampler (4 th - 6 th) Splash (5 th - 7 th) Saddle Em Up (7 th - 9 th)
June 28-30	Just You & Me (Ages 5-8 & adult) Main Camp Cabins & Hickory Lodge	
July 5-10	High School Week Drenched (9 th - 12 th) - Wrangler (9 th - 12 th) - X-Plore (9 th - 12 th) All camps are on Rustic	
July 12-17	*Discovery (1 st - 3 rd) Settler (3 rd - 5 th) **Quest (1 st - 3 rd)	Trekkin It (5 th - 7 th) Giddy Up (6 th - 8 th) Dunk'd (7 th - 9 th)
July 20-22	Just You & Me (Ages 5-8 & Adult) Main Camp Cabins & Hickory Lodge	
August 7-8	Rainbow Camp ALL Ages Welcome! Main Camp Cabins & Hickory Lodge	

The grade listed next to each camp is the grade campers have completed.
* Partial-week camp: Sunday-Tuesday / ** Partial-week camp: Wednesday-Friday

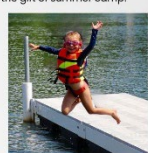
FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT DUBOISCENTER.ORG

Do you know which week works best for your schedule? Do you know what session your camper wants to do? Are you READY?!

<https://duboiscenter.org/summer-camps/>



Gifting experiences over material things makes a longer lasting impact! Give a camper the gift of summer camp!



SUMMER CAMP EXPERIENCE

DBC MERCH



You can't go wrong with gifting DBC merch to someone who LOVES DuBois Center! Check out our online merchandise!

DuBois Center

GIFT GUIDE

In case you needed a few ideas.. DuBois Center put together a gift guide for you!

Summer experiences only require a \$50 non-refundable deposit down to secure your camper's spot and these impactful adventures can be found here: <https://duboiscenter.org/summer-camps/>

DuBois Center Merch benefits our Ministry and items can be found here: <https://www.bonfire.com/store/dubois-center-merch/>



Spring Events

Join us at one of our spring events or retreats!
Registration opens January 1st, 2026

MARCH 7 Service Saturday
Everyone is invited to lend a helping hand as we prepare our facilities for the spring season. We'll provide lunch!
RSVP at duboiscenter.org/support-dubois/work-days/

MARCH 13-15 Women's Retreat
Get the girls together or come on your own and make new friends! This retreat is all about relaxation and self-reflection! Choose a short getaway (Fri-Sat) or a longer stay (Fri-Sun).

APRIL 11 Father-Daughter Day
Dads and Daughters - spend the day at DuBois Center! Enjoy camp fun - one on one, brunch, horses, crafts, canoeing and worship!

APRIL 24-26 Father-Son Retreat
Join us for our annual Father-Son Retreat. Boating, horses, archery, fishing, games and plenty of guy time! Fathers, sons, grandfathers, uncles, nephews are welcome!

MAY 9 Ride Day
Sign up for a ride time that fits your schedule best!
10:30 am: Arena Ride for ages 3-7 with parent walking alongside \$18 per child.
1:00, 2:30, 4:00: Trail Ride for ages 8+ \$30 per rider.

MAY 9 Service Saturday
Everyone is invited to lend a helping hand as we prepare our facilities for the summer season. We'll provide lunch, please RSVP at duboiscenter.org/support-dubois/work-days/

For information or to register, visit duboiscenter.org/retreats/dbc-retreats.

NOTE: RETREATS MAY BE CANCELLED IF FEWER THAN 15 PEOPLE REGISTER.

2026 DuBois Center
Spring Event offerings announced so you
can start your planning!!

[More Info Here](#)



Hoyleton's Hope for the Holidays

Interested in giving a child in need a brighter holiday season?
You can drop off gifts at any of our donation bin locations!

Find the one closest to you

here: <https://hoyleton.org/events/2025-hope-for-the-holidays/>

Shop the [Hope for the Holidays Wishlist](#)



Dear Friends of Uni Pres Kindercottage,

Thank you to everyone who has reached out to give to our children this holiday season. Your kindness is already making a heartfelt difference. For those who still wish to give, there is *still time*! We have several children on our list who have not yet been chosen, and your generosity could bring joy and warmth to their holidays.

If you are able to support a child this season, please contact Ms. Aimee at aimee@unipreskindercottage.org for details.

Let's continue to light up our children's faces with joy as they celebrate this season of hope, love, and wonder.

With gratitude,

Aimee Hart, Executive Director

618-874-6505(work)

618-799-1417 (cell)



Emmaus Homes on News 4

Take a moment to [watch Stacy Spradling and Lisa Key](#) talk about Emmaus Homes on News 4 Great Day and the importance of [GivingTuesday](#). We hope you will take a moment to watch and consider donating.



Hitz Home-Engraved Bricks and Tiles to Create Beautiful Permanent Stone Garden

Hitz Memorial Home is a faith-based non-profit 59-bed skilled nursing facility located in Alhambra, IL. The Board of Directors and its marketing committee is excited to offer you an opportunity to purchase personalized engraved bricks or tiles for a forthcoming stone garden. Individual, families, groups, organizations, and businesses are invited to take part in this project. Bricks and tiles can be purchased in honor or memory of loved ones, in recognition of special events, or to publicize an organization or business. Donations

given through December 31, 2025 will be matched up to a total of \$50,000 thanks to a generous donor. Learn more and find the order form [HERE](#).

HITZ HOME AUXILIARY PRESENTS
Christmas Tasting Bee
 Friday, December 5, 2025 at 1:00 p.m.

Join Us!
 For an afternoon
 of fellowship and
 entertainment.

Where?
 Hitz Home
 Activity & Dining
 Room
 Donation:
 \$8.00

Hitz Home Christmas Tasting Bee Friday, December 5th at 1:00pm Bring your favorite Christmas appetizer, dish, or dessert (a variety of meats will be provided). Silent auction, entertainment, and Christmas raffle to include a quilt and gift certificates! Full flyer <https://www.hitzhome.com/>



The 2026 Mission Trip Calendar is officially open!

Wondering which dates are open?

[Click to view calendar](#)

Look for "Schedule your mission trip today!"

To reserve a date, please contact our volunteer coordinator using the button below!

Reserve Your Trip

Here!>>volunteercoordinator@thebackbaymission.org



MARCH 24-26, 2026
INDIANAPOLIS

Excitement for The Gathering: Many Gifts, One Spirit is building as a plethora of workshops are formulated for attendees. Thirty-five workshops will take place across the three days, including eight presenters CHHSM participants will find familiar. In addition, some of the 35 workshops will be led by staff from all five health and human service organizations. [ABOUT THE GATHERING](#)



CAREGIVER RESOURCES

Join others caring for loved ones with dementia or other disabilities to receive support and encouragement. All support groups are free of charge thanks to funding from AgeSmart Community Resources.

COFFEE TALK

Make new friends while learning about resources and strategies to support your caregiving.

Mondays, 9-10:30 a.m.
 Verona Coffee Company,
 101 E. Main, Collinsville

Fridays, 10-11:30 a.m.
 Jan's Naturals,
 2929 N. Center, Maryville

MEMORY CAFE

A relaxed gathering for caregivers and their loved one with dementia focused on cognitive stimulation through reminiscing.

Tuesdays, 1:15-2:15 p.m.
 Main Street Community Center,
 1003 N. Main, Edwardsville

Wednesdays, 1:30-2:30 p.m.
 St. John's Community Care,
 Collinsville and on Zoom.

ALZHEIMER'S SUPPORT GROUP

First and third **Tuesday**,
 1:30-3:00 p.m.
 St. John's Community Care,
 Collinsville and on Zoom

First and third **Monday**
 1:00-2:30 p.m. (Starts Oct. 1)
 Glen Carbon Senior Center,
 157 N. Main, Glen Carbon

Second **Thursday** of every month
 10:30-11:00 a.m. (Starts Sep. 11)
 Edwardsville YMCA,
 1200 Esic Drive, Edwardsville

Affiliated with the Alzheimer's Association

EVENING ZOOM GROUP

Second and fourth **Wednesday**
 on Zoom, 6-7:30 p.m.

Follow us to find out about special events: [Facebook.com/stjohnscc](https://www.facebook.com/stjohnscc)

STJOHNSCC.ORG | INFO@STJOHNSCC.ORG | 618-344-5008



RAISE SOME DOUGH

Help support us!

30% of sales will benefit
Trinity United Church of Christ

December 4, 2025
4:00 pm to 8:00 pm
3120 Green Mount Crossing Drive
Shiloh, IL

In Cafe Drive-Thru
Pick-Up Delivery

Enter promo code **FUND4U** at online checkout.



Faith Hall at St. John UCC | 307 W Clay St | Collinsville, IL

Winter Wonderland Christmas Bazaar

Saturday, December 6th
10:00 am - 4:00 pm
Sunday, December 7th
10:30 am - 2:30 pm

Christmas Decorations & Vendor Fair, Crafts, Handmade Gifts &
Everything you need for Christmas!

Christkindlmarkt

Sunday, December 7, 2025
11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
St. John UCC, Maestown

Get in the Christmas spirit and join us for our annual Christkindlmarkt this Sunday, December 7th at 11:00am - 4:00pm.

St. John UCC, 1301 Franklin St, Maestown, IL

[Click to submit your EVENTS + NEWS to the Weekly Connection](#)

[Part-time Music Leader - St. Paul UCC Pinckneyville](#)

[Part-time Bookkeeper - St. John UCC Fairview Heights](#)

[Part-time Facilities Manager - St. Paul UCC Belleville](#)

Contact Us - Your OCWM Monies at Work

Please call (618) 654-2125 before coming to the Conference Office or make an appointment with a staff member using the emails below.

For the work of Conference teams and committees or 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 **Missy Loyet** at mloyet@iscucc.org.

For DuBois Center Co-Interim Executive Directors, contact **Jason Petry** or **Leah Petry** at director@DuBoisCenter.org or (618) 787-2202 ext. 2 for Jason or ext. 3 for Leah.

For DuBois Center registration for upcoming events and camp sessions or ISC program registrations, contact **Julie Riechmann** at

jriechmann@iscucc.org or (618) 357-1809.

For **Rev. Shana Johnson**, ISC Conference Minister, contact her at sjohnson@iscucc.org or (618) 882-8247.

***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.

[Illinois South Conference](#) [Back Bay Mission](#) [CHSM](#)

[Deaconess Foundation](#) [Deaconess Nurse Ministry](#) [DuBois Center](#)

[Eden Theological Seminary](#) [Emmaus Homes](#) [Hitz Memorial Home](#)

[Hoyleton Youth & Family](#) [Unleashing Potential](#)

[Pension Board-UCC](#) [St. John's Community Care](#) [UCC Insurance Board](#)

[Uplands Village](#) [UCC Campus Ministry](#) [Uni-Pres Kindercottage](#)
[UCC Newsletter](#)

