

SECTION G

HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

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Heartland Conference United Church of Christ
Rev. David Long-Higgins, Transitional Conference Minister

March 8, 2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

In some ways I hope for this report to take more the form of a letter from my heart to yours as you gather in celebration of shared ministries. I offer this along three themes: A Heart of Gratitude, A Heart of Healing, and a Heart of Hope.

A Heart of Gratitude

I want you to know that I am holding you in my prayers with thanksgiving. Whether your setting is pastoral or lay ministry, in the local congregation or as a chaplain or specialized minister, I have seen the perpetual pivot of love which COVID 19 has required in all that you do to live out the Gospel. Thank-you for your ministry and your support of the ministry which goes beyond your local settings into the Northwest Association, the Heartland Conference and literally around the globe. Additionally, I want to thank your Association Executive Team for their commitment to the shared work I will describe below and to Rev. Dan Busch for his partnership and commitment in so many ways and settings. All of this has been a great gift.

A Heart of Healing

While COVID 19 fostered many challenges in the past year, it also created some openings made possible by the necessity of meeting via zoom. The Association Executive Teams and the Conference Executive team together with the Leadership Roundtable (the Association Ministers and myself), were able to meet quite frequently (in some cases weekly) to both build relationships and also tend wounds and misunderstandings that long have kept us from being our best selves together. A special team called the One Heart Working Group consisting of representatives from the Executive Teams and the members of the Leadership Roundtable were tasked with even deeper work in these areas and also with the work of exploring how we live into the 2018 Vision Proposal. This included fashioning a renewed statement of the why, calling, and covenant for the Conference. I know you will be considering this at the spring meeting.

A Heart of Hope

This work described above has resulted in a discovery that we are strongest when the wisdom from across our shared life gets connected for ministry collaboration and mutual encouragement, based on attentive listening to the various settings of ministry which make up our life. What has been discovered is that our structure is best described by the relationships we build by intentionally gathering for mutual discernment, encouragement and engagement. This means the Executive Teams will continue to meet quarterly for the purpose of being hearts that hear the hunger of every setting. The Conference Board of Directors will be transformed by a process where members of the Association Executive teams will also serve on the Conference board (a practice already engaged in NWOA). The Leadership Roundtable meets twice monthly for mutual encouragement, sharing of ministry ideas and planning shared engagements. Significantly, the Leadership Roundtable also helps to oversee the various networks which are already providing energy in our life together. These include networks addressing Faith Formation, Anti-Racism, Communications, Generosity, Disaster Response, and our Westphalian (German Church) Partnership. Others that are currently forming or have been inquired about include: Accessibility/inclusion, LGBTQ, Global Mission, Opioid Addiction, Worship and Technology, Creation Care, Chaplaincy, and Spiritual Directors. There is much energy, and you are invited to connect wherever your heart leads you. Just contact the Heartland Conference office at becca@heartlanducc.org. Additionally, there has been financial savings as the office has gone permanently virtual and our accounting is now offered as a gift to us by United Church Homes! Many thanks all around! All of this and so much more, gives me hope and I hope it gives you hope, as well. I am so thankful to share this journey with you! Blessings and Godspeed to you all!



Outdoor Ministries Update 2020-2021

Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ

This past year continued to bring change for Templed Hills Camp and Conference Center and Outdoor Ministries in the Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ.

Due to COVID-19 after Mid-March 2020, no traditional events have happened **at Templed Hill Camp and Conference Center**. Most rental income was lost for over a year. We did have individuals and families come out in the summer for day only or individual self-contained retreats and campouts. We also had one church hold an event at camp in October instead of their annual campout. They came out for the day and did all their activities outside, masked and physically distanced. They hiked, had a photo scavenger hunt, did a service project for camp, and also held a campfire. The first rentals for 2021 are scheduled for May. Many Winter and Spring church group retreats have begun reserving for Fall 2021 and Winter and Spring 2022.

Summer Camp 2020 was like nothing we've done before. Due to Covid-19 we determined that we were not able to run resident camp at Templed Hills. However, we wanted to somehow meet the needs of our campers. Because of the dedication and talents of our amazing camp volunteers, we successfully implemented Camp 2.0. Camp took place in 3 methods including "camp-in-a-box", one way camp content videos on our camp activity [webpage](#) (click to view), and two way zoom sessions where campers and staff could interact in traditional activities. Although it wasn't the same and everyone missed being at Templed Hills, campers did connect with Christ and each other, and grow in their faith. This program was provided to 274 campers free of charge and was supported as a mission project of the Heartland Conference. Thank you so much to everyone who donated to support this project. We raised over \$18,000 covering all our direct expenses and some of the indirect expenses.

As of December 30, 2020, Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ, severed our relationship with United Camp, Conferences, and Retreats (UCCR) for management of Templed Hills Camp and Conference Center. Policies and procedures are being review, revised, and implemented. Guest reservations systems are in place and will open to new guests in April. Check the conference website, www.heartlanducc.org for information.

Summer Camp 2021 is on! Registration is now open! Virtual and Opportunities at Templed Hills are available. Join us for some of your favorites: Choir Camp, Sports Camp, Music, Mime, Arts, Dance and Drama (MMADD) Camp, Faith Adventures Camp, Grands and Family Camp, and Hanging with the Spirit (Adult Women's event) Camp. Also join us for DIY Days in May or bring your family out for self-contained camping in Parker Ridge in May or August to the first week in October. Click [here](#) to register and for more information.

Thank you for your support in 2020. Please prayerfully consider a gift in 2021 by clicking [here](#).