

SECTION G

HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

**REV. DAVID LONG-HIGGINS
CONFERENCE MINISTER**

**JILL FREY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
OUTDOOR MINISTRIES**

**KEVIN GEHRES
DISASTER COORDINATOR
DISASTER MINISTRIES**

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

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Dear Friends in Christ,

I write to you with profound appreciation for your faithfulness in ministry and mission in this long season of COVID requiring perpetual pivots of love. Your theme, "Peace in Exile" arising out of the passage from Jeremiah, reminds us that in every season God is imagining something larger than can often be seen in the present moment. This is true in every setting of the church. Here are just a few ways this truth is expressing itself in the Conference setting we share.

Clarification of Conference Priorities for Ministry

Growing out of the long and intentional work of the executive teams of the associations and the conference over the past several years, this past year has involved listening sessions resulting in clarified priorities that will guide our life over the next several years. Recognizing that life can shift unexpectedly and quickly, these priorities provide focus and assume a necessary flexibility for the unforeseen. The priorities are as follows:

- **Anti-Racism** – Empowering every setting of ministry to respond to the call of Jesus Christ to build an anti-racist world.
- **Reimagining Church Vitality** – Empowering vocational clarity and engagement through context-specific training and cross-conference networks of connection.
- **Organizational Clarity and Focus** – Alignment of current practices with necessary constitutional revisions and board development. This work is significantly aided by the work of the Leadership Roundtable (the Association Ministers and me) who meet twice monthly.
- **Pastoral Preparation and Support** – Addressing the realities of more part-time pastoral settings and the reality of pastoral fatigue due to COVID.
- **Faith Formation and Outdoor Ministry** – A robust faith formation at every age and stage of life feeding church vitality and vocational clarity arising out of theological and spiritual depth and maturity. Increased use of Temples Hills by all settings of church.
- **Financial Sustainability** – A focus on developing sustainability both for the local setting and the wider settings of the church. A special focus on generosity development.

Vocational Clarity and Engagement

Conference-wide networks continue to develop around a host of ministry foci. They include: Anti-racism, Generosity and Stewardship, Faith Formation, Creation Care, Veteran Ministry, Inclusion (Mental Health and Disability Ministry), Westphalian Partnership ,(German Church), Disaster Response, Sharing America's Resources Abroad (SARA), Interim Ministry, Lantern Fellowship (Women's Retreat), Harm Reduction/Drug Overdose Prevention and more on the horizon. You can find out more about these by going to the Heartland Conference Website at www.heartlanducc.org.

There is always more to share and know that I am glad to do so. I am especially glad to share this good news through preaching and welcome invitations to come and preach. **Finally, thanks so much for your commitment to this work we share! Your gifts to Our Church's Wider Mission make this possible. Thank-you! Thank-you! Thank-you!** Finally, a special thanks to Dan, Joan, and Deb for their partnership! Blessings all around!



Outdoor Ministries Update 2021-2022

Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ

Templed Hills welcomed the return of many old friends as well as new ones as we sponsored and hosted events at camp once again. Congregations came for family retreats, men's retreats, women's retreats, confirmands retreats, youth retreats, and more! We also saw the return of two of our long-time partner camps the Ohio Foreign Language Association Camp (OFLA) and the Northeast Ohio Cross Country Running Camp by Gopher Running. We also were excited to host Camp Erin, Ohio for the first time. Camp Erin is the largest national grief program for youth. **We were also blessed with many volunteers who helped re-open camp in the spring.**

Summer Camp 2021 was a success! We served 192 campers and 100% of campers reported having fun! One camper stated, "It was different this year because of COVID, and all the protocols made me feel safe". We followed all of the CDC guidelines for Covid-19 and were able to hold camp without any cases of Covid spread at camp. At **CAMP** we also focused on and grew in **Community, Acceptance, Mindfulness, and Prayer**. 98% of campers helped their group do something. 94% of campers made new friends or connected with old friends. "I was accepted and acknowledged, and I felt more at home than I have felt in a long, long time" 2021 Camper. Campers also **learned** more Biblical stories, **lived it** by modeling their behaviors after the positive examples in the Bible, and **shared it** by sharing what they learned with another camper or staff. 95% of campers experienced the energy of being close to God and understand that they are loved unconditionally by God. "Camp helps me find my place in God's work and what I can do to spread his love even when camp is over, and I go home." 2021 camper.

Templed Hills Camp continues to see physical improvements. We finished installation of a new electronic exhaust hood over the cooking equipment in the institutional kitchen. We remodeled the basement of Skipper with larger rooms perfect for youth groups and added air conditioning. **2022 is bringing a new chlorine system to the pool** along with many other improvements to ensure that we have a beautiful and efficient pool to swim in this summer.

Summer Camp 2022 registration is now open! Join us for some of your favorites: Choir Camp, Sports Camp, Music, Mime, Arts, Dance and Drama (MMADD) Camp, and Grands and Family Camp. Or our new session "Just Camp" or "Mini Just Camp" for those who want to try it all for a half a week. Check out the conference website to register and for more information.

Bring your congregation or community group to camp for a peaceful retreat or a day of service.

Thank you for your support in 2021.

Please prayerfully consider a gift of time, talents, and/or finances in 2022.

Check the conference website, www.heartlanducc.org for information.

Disaster Ministries Update

Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ

Greetings from your Heartland Conference Disaster Ministries Team! I want to share that our Team has been working diligently to refocus, redefine, and reshape what Disaster Ministries should look like in 2022 and beyond, here in the Heartland Conference. The NWOA has exceptional representation on our Conference Team, with Jim Huckemeyer, Arnold & Katherine Helleman, Lynn & Mary Anne Ewing, Andy Lacefield, Ed Karges and myself represented. We continued to respond to the call to be “servants in the service of others” through the recent donation and delivery of one of our trailers to Back Bay Mission, Biloxi, MS. Another trailer has found a temporary home at Shiloh UCC, Dayton, and has been outfitted with tools for the mission work with the May 2019 tornado recovery efforts. We continue to monitor this effort in Dayton, and have supported the renewal effort with workgroups. In March, we kicked off a Conference wide campaign to create 2022 CWS Buckets & Hygiene Kits here in 2022. As you prayerfully consider this, please remember there is a \$250 grant that can be applied for through the National UCC office to help defray costs of these...as well as the NWOA Bucket for Bucket offer! WHAT A DEAL!!! We also have been working with Church World Service, having now established Templed Hills Camp as a year-round Buckets & Kits Depot storage facility! Now, regardless of when you choose to respond with Buckets and Kits, they can be stored in the basement of Heritage Hall at Templed Hills.

Finally, we are looking forward to the churches here in the NWOA and Heartland Conference, to prayerfully discuss the opportunity to become a **“Willing To Respond”** congregation. Please check this out on the Heartland Conference website, or contact me for more information. I’d like to conclude by asking that you hold our Heartland Conference Disaster Ministries Team in your prayers, as we continue the work of guiding our churches to be the “servants in the service of others”!

Thank you for your dedication, service, and support. Blessings.

Kevin Gehres

Heartland Conference Disaster Coordinator

disaster.ministries@heartlanducc.org

gehreskb@gmail.com

(419)203-2776