

SECTION G

HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

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Heartland Conference, United Church of Christ
Rev. Dr. David Long-Higgins, Conference Minister
2023 NWOA Report

Dear Friends in Christ,

I write to you with profound appreciation for your faithfulness in ministry and mission in this season of ever-unfolding opportunities and challenges. Your theme, “Making All Things New” arising out of the passage from Isaiah, reminds us that there is a power at work in life larger than we can see much of the time. However, there are glimpses of this work of God in our midst. Here are just a few ways this truth is expressing itself in the Heartland Conference setting we share.

Last year I shared the conference priorities that grew out of the intentional work of the executive teams of the associations and the conference over the past several years. Those included the following: The work of anti-racism; reimagining church vitality; gaining organization clarity and focus, tending pastoral preparation and support; faith formation and outdoor ministry; and financial Sustainability. There is much to share regarding our engagement with these priorities. A brief summary will have to suffice in this space, but you can **find out more** by going to our website at www.heartlanducc.org. I also encourage you to sign up for the Fast Five our weekly email by going to the bottom of our homepage and clicking on “email sign-up”.

Anti-Racism – In the past year we have been engaging quarterly zoom gatherings at which different speakers have presented ways that can deepen our awareness of the roots of racism and the necessary work personally and systemically to build a world resembling more and more the beloved community. This past February we hosted the Sacred Ally Quilt Ministry of the New Hampshire Conference. The SAQM consists of 11 quilts produced by nine congregations capturing the last words of George Floyd’s life. These quilts formed a sacred space in each setting they were shared for vital conversation about the way in which we move forward as a human family to dismantle racism and fashion a world where all God’s children can flourish.

Reimagining Church Vitality – To date we now have eight ministry networks encompassing faith formation, anti-racism, harm reduction and overdose prevention, creation care, veterans’ ministry, mental health and accessibility, generosity and stewardship, our partnership with the Westphalian Church in Germany and Sharing America’s Resources Abroad (SARA). Several other networks are on the horizon. These networks are intended to inspire, connect, equip and support individuals and congregations for their vocational discernment, clarity and engagement. I encourage you to check our website at www.heartlanducc.org to find out more.

Organizational Clarity and Focus – A significant revision of the Heartland Conference Constitution is underway and will be sent out to the conference for consideration in advance of our Conference Annual Gathering on September.

Pastoral Preparation and Support – A series of retreats for pastors has already begun. The next one will be held at Templated Hills on April 17-April 19th.

Faith Formation and Outdoor Ministry – A strategy to clarify how the gift of Templated Hills can not only survive but thrive is currently being engaged. Jill Frey will share about this in her report.

Financial Sustainability – A focus on developing sustainability both for the local setting and the wider settings of the church continues with a special focus on generosity development.

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 your invitations to come and preach. **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 2022-2023

Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ
Thank you for your support in 2022!!

Summer Camp 2022 was a success! We served 301 campers register about a 57% increase from 2021. We also had 76 new campers register. At **CAMP** we also focused on and grew in **Community, Acceptance, Mindfulness, and Prayer**. One camper stated, **“I’ve been going through a really hard time and being at camp really helped me remember my faith”**. 95% of campers helped their group do something or helped a fellow camper or counselor. 95% of campers made new friends or connected with old friends. One camper said, **“I’ve gotten to know a lot of new kinds of people and get different perspectives”**. 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. 93% of campers experienced the energy of being close to God and understand that they are loved unconditionally by God. One camper said, **“I learned that I was loved and appreciated by God no matter what or who I am”**.

Summer Camp 2023 registration is now open! Join us for some of your favorites: **Sports Camp, Music, Mindfulness, Arts, Dance and Drama (MMADD) Camp, and Grands and Family Camp**. Our general camp session this year is **Pathfinders** (full week) or Jr. pathfinders (half week). **Confirmation camp** is new this year and will cover “most of confirmation”. Ideal for congregations that have a couple of kids and not enough to do a full confirmation program on your own. We are excited about our other new session **Camp “out”**, specifically designed for our Queer and Allied campers. **Check out the conference website to register and for more information.**

Templed Hills Camp continues to see physical improvements. The most exciting improvements this year were at the **pool**, which was fully functioning all summer. We installed a **new sign** at the front entrance and a couple of volunteers updated the welcome sign to match. Many volunteer projects that included new coats of paint, new electrical and lighting, and more!

We need you!

- Although we have seen growth in the last year, we are not where we need to be for attendance, usage, facilities upkeep, or fund raising. Right now we are forming **action committees** to develop and implement plans to increase and diversify **Participation**, and **Fund Development**, as well as address **deferred maintenance** and consider **alternative delivery methods**. If you would like to serve or know someone else who might serve, **contact Jill Frey**, Executive Director of Outdoor Ministry. **And.....**
- **Bring your congregation** or community group **to camp** for a peaceful retreat or a day of service.
- Please prayerfully consider a gift of time, talents, and/or finances in 2023.

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

Disaster Ministry Team

Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ

Our Disaster Ministry Team was very busy in 2022, as we dedicated the year to Renewal. We met 5 times, establishing goals for both the present...and for the future. We also worked to continue the partnership with the Disciples of Christ in the tornado recovery work in Dayton. Additionally, through a generous donation from Southwestern Ohio Association, we purchased tools and created a tool trailer to support tornado recovery efforts...both in Dayton and in Princeton, Ky.

Through a grant from the national UCC, we were able to purchase a used pickup to pull the trailer to the different locations. Finally, we established a CWS Depot at Templed Hills, and not only set our Challenge Goal of 2022 buckets and hygiene kits, but surpassed it by over 100 units...in no small part through the generosity and faithfulness of the churches in the Northwest Ohio Association...and the Association office offering the 1-1 grant opportunity for buckets and kits!!!

This year, our theme is one of Partnership. We have set our new CWS Bucket and Kits Challenge Goal at 2023 units. As of this writing, we have over 500 units already in the Depot, and with the support of churches like yours, are looking to smash this Challenge Goal again this year! We are partnering with a faith based group in East Palestine, working to assist residents there...in addition to walking alongside them in response and recovery. Anyone wishing to assist in this area, can find a link on the Heartland Conference website. Another area of partnership, is that of a "house build" that we are sponsoring on Aug. 25 & 26 at Templed Hills. We are partnering with Crossroads Missions, and Habitat for Humanity, as we construct the walls of a house to be transported to a yet to be determined location for finishing. Stay tuned for more information and registration, to be a part of the *Help Build Hope* opportunity! Finally, we would like to partner with all the churches in both the NWOA, and the Heartland Conference, through our *Church Readiness Challenge*. This information is being sent out in through the Heartland Conference social media sites, as well as can be obtained by contacting me at disaster.ministries@heartlanducc.org.

On behalf of the Heartland Conference Disaster Ministries Team, I would like to thank the congregations of the Northwest Ohio Association for their continued support, passion, and partnership. Blessings to each of you.

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