

SECTION G

HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

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

Dear Friends in Christ,

Though my being on sabbatical will mean that I cannot be with you in person, please know that I hold you in my heart as you gather for the Northwest Ohio Association Meeting. What a joy it is to be joined by Christ for a shared work of ministry that includes and extends beyond our various local settings. I count it a privilege to work alongside you in this way and thank God for your persistence in bearing the love of God made known in Christ into the world.

There is much that has been evolving in our life together formed by the “power of love” that I would like to point you toward so that you may know of resources for inspiration, connection, equipping and support of your ministries in their many and varied expressions. **I hope that many of you are aware of the ministry networks we have been developing together in our shared life over the past couple of years.**



If you are not aware of these, I encourage you to **click on this QR code and click on the networks button.** There you will find a listing of the networks that are in various stages of formation. These “rooms of love” offer a range of encouragement. Some of them are for ongoing engagement around particular settings of ministry, others focus on programmatic opportunities, and yet others focus on prophetic engagement related to the Gospel of Christ and its intersection with the needs of the world.

I especially want to draw your attention to STAR Network. This stands for small town and rural church network. As many of you know, there are nuances to these settings of ministry that call forth attention to particular needs. Pastor Amy Kinney and Pastor Jay Scott have been partnering with me as we envision together how a STAR network can be a help to you who serve in these settings.

There are two other upcoming events that I want you to be aware of. **A Regional Youth Event is being planned for this summer** at Augustana College from **July 17-20.** It will draw youth from the Great Lakes and West Central Regions of the United Church of Christ. With the help of special grants, the cost of this event has been kept very low for an event of this kind. **Registration information about the RYE can be found scanning the QR code above.**

Second, **please put the Conference Annual Gathering on your calendar.** It will be **September 27-28 at First Community Church in Columbus** and will be a **joint gathering with the Disciples Regional Assembly.** This is the first time we have done this, and it arises because of the strong encouragement received for this idea at last year’s Annual Gathering. The theme is **Being the Community of Christ – Together.** The focus will be not only on the many ways we are engaging life together ever more creatively but also on **how congregations can engage the “purple” realities that inhabit congregational life** in ever more health and creative ways.

Finally, thanks so very much for your gifts to Our Church’s Wider Mission which makes these ministries possible, changing lives in so many important ways for the better. Thanks also to Dan, Joan, and Deb, for their remarkable gifts of ministry that help to tend this covenant we so cherish. Blessings on you all!

Pastor Dave



Outdoor Ministries Update 2023-2024

Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ

Thank you for your support in 2023!!

Summer Camp 2023 was a success! We served 337 campers, about a 14% increase from 2022. At **CAMP** we also focused on and grew in **Community, Acceptance, Mindfulness, and Prayer**. One camper stated, **“My Faith was a bit broken, but I feel like it was fixed here”**. 96% of campers helped their group do something or helped a fellow camper or counselor. 98% of campers made new friends or connected with old friends. One camper said, **“I learned strategies to calm myself when in a stressful situation.”** 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. 88% of campers experienced the energy of being close to God and understand that they are loved unconditionally by God. One camper said, **“The Fruit of the Spirit helped me find Peace”**.

Summer Camp 2024 registration is now open! Join us for some of your favorites: **Sports Camp, Music, Mindfulness, Arts, Dance and Drama (MMADD) Camp, Camp “out” (LGBTQIA+) and Grands and Family Camp**. Join us for **Pathfinders** half week session to try it all. We are excited about our two new sessions **All Ages Family Camp** and **Seek and Sip (Adult only camp for 21+)**. **Check out the conference website to register and for more information.**

The most exciting **improvement at Templed Hills** this year was the **completion of two gender neutral accessible restrooms on the upper level of Skipper.**

In November of 2023, Heartland Board of Directors shared with **heavy hearts that they decided to sell our beloved Templed Hills Camp and Retreat Center**, due to financial challenges. If you have not read their full message, please find it on our conference website. **At the same time, they pledged to invest in Outdoor Ministries. This means our summer camps and other program opportunities will continue and grow in 2025 and beyond.** Part of that growth means opportunities in many locations across the Conference, including perhaps some in Northwest Ohio. **Summer Camp 2025 will be announced and open for registration by June 2024.**

We need you! Please prayerfully consider a gift of your time, talents, or financial resources.

- **Bring your congregation** or community group **to camp** for a peaceful retreat or a day of service. **Celebrate the last year at Templed Hills!**
- **Volunteer!** We are looking for summer camp volunteers of all types, Nurses, Cooks, Kitchen Helpers, Counselors, and more. We are looking for additional **Grands and Family directors to help facilitate these sessions across the conference in 2025 and beyond.**
- **Please prayerfully consider a financial gift in 2024.** Outdoor Ministries still greatly needs your support as we support Templed Hills this year and its transition to new sites next year.

Check the conference website, www.heartlanducc.org for information. Contact Jill Frey to volunteer or for more information at jill@heartlanducc.org or 1-800-282-0740 ext. 2.

Disaster Ministry Team

Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ

As we take a look into the 2023 rear-view mirror, your Heartland Conference Disaster Response Team was again very busy. Besides meeting quarterly to address the needs and concerns of the Heartland Conference, we had the following initiatives throughout the year:

- Responded to the East Palestine, Ohio train derailment with 119 cases of water and onsite visits.
- Continued to support the Long Term Recovery from the December 2021 tornado's in Western Kentucky, through loaning the Indiana-Kentucky Conference our DM pickup and tool trailer for six months.
- Supported the tornado relief in Point Place, in conjunction with Rev. Jon Komperda and Point Place UCC, through Recovery Grants from our national UCC Global Hope (\$20,000), Heartland Conference (\$5,000), and the NWOA (\$1,250).
- Supported the Zoar bus accident with a Heartland Conference Long Term Recovery counseling grant (\$1,800).
- Participated in both the Ohio Volunteer Organizations Aiding Disasters (OVOAD), and the West Virginia Volunteer Organizations Aiding Disasters (WVVOAD). We are full, participating members of both organizations.
- Presence/display/presentation at both the NWOA & Heartland Conference annual meetings. Additionally, our DM Buckets & Kits trailer was requested at 4 different churches in 2023, including both St. Paul's UCC, Wapakoneta, and Trinity UCC, Tiffin, for Buckets & Kits collection.
- Sponsored a "Help Build Hope" House Build at Temples Hills in August, where 70 folks from across the conference, including partners from the Ohio Assembly, Disciples of Christ, gathered on a Friday evening and Saturday to cut and assemble 60+ walls for a future house to be built through the Wayne County Habitat for Humanity. What an awesome & rewarding experience!
- Set our Church World Service Buckets & Kits Challenge goal at 2023 units. Thanks to the dedication and servant heart of churches across the Heartland Conference, as well as the dedication to service of the NWOA's 1-1 matching program, we exceeded that goal! In all, we loaded 2,515 buckets & kits onto the semi in late September! What a testimony to reaching out and helping others! These buckets & kits were shipped to New Windsor, Maryland, and distributed to those suffering from hurricanes, tornados, fire, flooding, etc., along the eastern seaboard and beyond. Thanks be to God.

Our initiatives for 2024, once again include the CWS Challenge Goal of 2024 Buckets & Kits, as well as planning is in motion to sponsor an Emotional & Spiritual Care Team training in August at Temples Hills. The design of this training is the eventual creation of an E&S Care Team here in the Heartland Conference that, when appropriate, can respond to disaster situations. Watch for more information forthcoming in the spring!

Additionally, with the closure of Temples Hills Camp & Conference Center later this fall, we are working with the Disciples of Christ Camp Christian to both house our CWS Depot for buckets and kits, as well as a home for our pickup and trailers. More information will be forthcoming on that as well.

Finally, please know that our hearts are full with the outpouring of love and support that we feel from across the Heartland Conference, especially here in our NWOA. Your outreach of service allows our DM Team to reach out and serve, at a time when those affected desperately need God's love and support. As Gomer Pyle says, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!" Blessings to each of you.

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