

SECTION G

HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

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Heartland Conference Report
Rev. Dr. David Long-Higgins, Conference Minister – 2025 NWOA Report

Dear Friends in Christ,

What a delight it is to bring you greetings from the 237 other congregations that make up the Heartland Conference and also the ministries of our national and global settings – all joining with you to daily to deepen the experience of God’s love in so many different ways.

The past year has been full indeed. I would remind you that **one of the best ways to get connected to the ministry resources we share across the Conference is by clicking on this QR**



code. Further, I would like to **urge you to put this QR code in your bulletins** every week so that more and more of our local congregations can easily connect to the resources for which they may be looking. This code will take you to a “link-tree” where you can easily find out about our latest network connections. There are 16 networks now ranging from Faith Formation to Harm Reduction to disaster response.

I again want to draw your attention to the STAR Network. This stands for **S**mall **T**own and **R**ural church network. As many of you know, there are nuances to these settings of ministry that call forth attention to particular needs. Pastor Darla Metz has been partnering with several to organize monthly speakers who help to inspire, connect, equip, and support pastors and congregations in small town and rural church settings. This group meets via zoom, on the second Thursday of the month at 10 a.m. Interested in finding out more? Contact our Conference Network Coordinator, Rev. Karen Bruno, at networks@heartlanducc.org.

Many of you are aware that **Outdoor Ministries is continuing in new forms and in new locations this year!** As many of you likely know, the Conference Board of Directors made the difficult decision in early January of 2024 to sell our one remaining outdoor ministry site, Templed Hills. While the cost of sustaining our site for outdoor ministry was no longer financially sustainable, the mission of forming people in faith in an outdoor setting is still a high priority. I hope you will support people of all ages in these opportunities. You can find out more about these by going to [hTps://heartlanducc.org/storycon;nues](https://heartlanducc.org/storycon;nues).

Finally, together with the Indiana Kentucky Conference, we have been gifted with a \$30,000 grant to fund a process of extended exploration about how our various ministry entities can more effectively live out our shared mission. This will be a professionally facilitated process gathering stakeholders in each of our settings of ministry across our shared life over a two year period. There is no pre-conceived idea of where this might lead. There is a deep sense that in this season of great change in the life of the world and in the life of the church, such conversations are necessary for us to be faithful and effective well into the future. As you are invited into these conversations, I hope you will say an enthusiastic “yes!”

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 (now retired – thank you, Joan), Kim, and Deb, for their remarkable gifts of ministry that help to cultivate this covenant we so cherish. Blessings on you all!

Pastor Dave



Outdoor Ministries Update 2024-2025

Heartland Conference of the United Church of Christ

Thank you for your support in 2024!!

Summer Camp 2024 was a success! We served 373 campers, about a 9% increase from 2023. At **CAMP** we also focused on and campers grew in

Community, Acceptance, Mindfulness, and Prayer. One camper stated that they learned, **“God cares about us, and I have grown to be more confident and to share my things”**. Another camper said, **“I’ve gotten better with taking losses and good sportsmanship as well as connecting to God through many ways”**. Campers experienced the energy of being close to God and understand that they are loved unconditionally by God. One camper said, **“I know that God will always love me and give me grace”**.

The Next Chapter of Outdoor Ministry is off to a great start! Summer Camp 2025 registration is now open! Join us for some of your favorites for **Children, Youth, and Adults: Sports Camp, Music, Mindfulness, Arts, Dance and Drama (MMADD) Camp, Camp “out” (LGBTQIA+), Grands and Family Camp, and Seek and Sip (Adult only camp for 21+)**. Most of our camp sessions, as well as **Lantern Fellowship, the All-Conference Women’s retreat**, held in April and September, will be held at **Camp Christian, Christian Church of Ohio** camp between Marysville and Delaware. **Check out the [conference website](#) to register and for more information.**

We are also excited to announce that our very popular **Grands and Family camp session will be held in three locations this year.** One will be at **Camp Glen just outside of Tiffin, OH in the Northwest Ohio Association.** We hope that you will **consider promoting this camp and joining us** if you have children 4-13 in your life.

Templed Hills Camp and Retreat Center has been put on the market for sale as of January 2, 2025. The Heartland Conference Board of Directors have enlisted Carleton Realty to manage the sale of the property. Although we have had interest in the property, it has not been sold as of February 18th, when this report was written. Check out our [website](#) for updates.

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

- Please consider helping to **promote camp by hosting a Camp Sunday Worship**, Check out our [website](#) for liturgy, prayers and other resources.
- **Participate** in a camp session
- **Please prayerfully consider a financial gift in 2024.** Click link or mail to Conference Office.
 - [Campership Fund](#) goal of \$20,250.00 by the end of April. Please help us ensure all campers attend camp. We anticipate a continued increase in requests for help.
 - [General Outdoor Ministries fund](#) to support the executive leadership and overhead expenses to ensure Outdoor Ministries will continue to flourish in our next chapter.

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 Response Ministries

Your Heartland Conference Disaster Response Team continues to be both busy, and responsive. During the past year, we:

- monitored & responded to tornado activity that moved across Ohio
- delivered cleanup buckets & hygiene kits to the Pioneer Larger Parish, for the floods occurring in the Ohio River basin
- represented the Heartland Conference at the National VOAD conference, as well as the West Virginia VOAD conference
- loaned our DM pickup and Tool Trailer to the Indiana-Kentucky Conference to assist in tornado restoration in the Mayfield, Kentucky community
- coordinated work groups that assisted in cleanup efforts in Cleveland, Kentucky, and West Virginia
- Exceeded our 2024 goal for CWS clean up buckets & kits, amassing 2,470 units for 2024!
- Prepared and moved our Heartland Conference CWS Depot from Temple Hills to Camp Christian, just north of Marysville

We now are in a continued period of Partnership. Our Disaster Response Team has grown to 18 members, thanks to the Ohio Assembly Disciples of Christ now active in partnership with us. Our CWS buckets & kits goal for 2025 is 2500 units, and we hope to meet that goal through partnerships with our Associations...such as Northwest Ohio Association. We are grateful that the NWOA continues to offer matching opportunities...bucket for bucket, kit for kit! Thanks be to God.

We also are continuing our training for creation of a Heartland Conference Emotional & Spiritual Care Team. This Team will ultimately stand ready to be responsive to disasters through requests of local church pastors that have been affected by disasters.

At our February DRT meeting, we identified 4 main goals for 2025:

- Emotional & Spiritual Care training
- Church Preparedness
- CWS Cleanup Buckets, Personal Hygiene Kits, Period Packs
- Creation of an inventory of Local Church Resources available (trailers, chainsaw teams, cleanup teams, etc.)

Lastly, as is always the case, to achieve these goals requires financial support. To respond to disaster sites with buckets and kits requires financial support. To maintain our DR Pickup and Tool Trailer requires financial support. To get the Emotional & Spiritual Care Team up and running, and to deploy them, requires financial support. These are some of the examples of how your church could support our work, if looking for a mission to support. We graciously offer up our Heartland Conference Disaster Response Mission as one option. Donations can be sent to the Heartland Conference Office with Disaster Response notations. Questions can be directed to myself (gehreskb@gmail.com), or any of our DRT members. Blessings to each of you, and the churches of the NWOA, as we continue this journey together...responding to the needs of our sisters and brothers when they are at one of their lowest points. Thank you!

Kevin Gehres, Heartland Conference Disaster Response Coordinator

Ed Karges, NWOA DRT member

Jim Huckemeyer, NWOA DRT member