

Wisconsin Conference UCC Year 2024 in Review

“Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and rejoice.” Isaiah 60: 1 and 5

I write this year-end Wisconsin Conference UCC summary on Epiphany Day and send it with prayers of light and love to you and your congregation. This day happens to coincide with the certification of Electoral College votes and the formal election of the next president of the United States. Four years ago, our Capitol was under siege by people seeking to undermine a free and fair election. This year we pray that the peace of Epiphany will abide. Inauguration Day, Jan. 20, this year coincides with the holiday commemorating the life and work of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. In true UCC spirit, I invite you to pray for the dignity, equality and basic human rights of all who are marginalized or poor or feel unwelcome in this country.

The Epiphany season is about Christ’s incarnation through the way we embody the teachings of Jesus. The role of the wider United Church of Christ is to resource, equip and support local churches in this vital ministry of incarnation. We do this in myriad ways, from guiding the Search and Call process and facilitating pastoral authorization, care and oversight; to our Damascus Project coursework and the training we offer on “best practices” for the church; to faith formation retreats and the many justice working groups that are eager to support your church’s local efforts.

Sixteen months ago, the Conference Board of Directors and staff met in a retreat setting to begin conversations about the restructuring of our Conference life. Those discussions were an acknowledgment of the challenges inherent in maintaining two midlevel judicatories – the associations and Conference – in a Conference less than half the size of our founding membership in 1962. We wondered if unburdening ourselves of the many committee slots in the current structure might allow us to redeploy volunteer time and talent according to people’s passions.

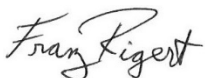
Throughout our conversations with stakeholders two ideas stood out like bright epiphanies – first, our desire to nurture UCC **relationships beyond the local church**, and second, our desire to **collaborate in the sharing of ministry ideas and resources**. This reframed the question about structural change from *What are we letting go of?* to *What are we living into?* Last fall, after several listening sessions and in consultation with Association leaders, the Board and staff recommended that we dissolve our four Associations at the Wisconsin Conference Annual Meeting in June. We have scheduled additional conversations in each Association in late February and early March for the purpose of sharing more details and illustrating the ways in which we might connect and support one another for greater ministry impact.

So far, we have nearly completed the proposal for a unified Committee on Ministry with regional representation. We appreciated the generous mission and scholarship support provided by the Associations and have made provisions for continuing them. We have drafted a new framework for membership dues and are preparing to streamline Association finance ledgers. And we have created a graphic that explains the Conference-wide resource web by showing the connections among our many resource hubs and active working groups. Imagine all the innovative ideas that will surface!

I feel the heart of this beloved Conference rejoicing at the advances we made in 2024:

- We launched a new website. Check it out at wcucc.org.
- We offered several marketing resources around the theme “Where God Is Still Speaking.”
- We made progress on the Leadership Forward campaign, with more than \$1.1 million pledged.
- We expanded Damascus Project course offerings and added an online Confirmation program.
- We created a volunteer Legacy Team that will accompany churches in closing decisions.
- We challenged our congregations to surface 20 new potential pastors over two years.
- We continued to strengthen our partnership with United Church Camps Inc.
- We advanced our anti-racism training through a course taken by Board and staff in the fall.

Joyfully submitted,



The Rev. Franz Rigert
Conference Minister