

Advent 2021 eNews

How Do We Change



Rev. Dr. Marc Ian Stewart

***Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
Because of God's great love we are not consumed, for
God's compassions never fail. They are new every
morning; great is your faithfulness. Lamentations
3:21-23***

How does a person change their way? I have asked this of myself in my time of sabbatical. I ask this of our Conference in our times of mission discernment, leadership recruitment, and budgeting. I ask this of our American culture as I see the political process fragment into factions that hate on each other. I ask this as a person trying to keep faith in these times of continued pandemic.

Three thoughts come to my mind about change:

Getting lost will instantly change a person's way. This is not always a bad thing. It can make all the more room for unexpected blessings to emerge. One of the lessons of the lost coin parable is its reminder that relationships are more valuable than money. There is real loss, though, for what has happened to all of us during the ongoing pandemic. The impact on our relationships can hurt more than lost income or lost assets. Loss of

relationship is distressing, especially as we miss those interactions that have been like signposts on how to make it through life. When the person we love is not there as they had been, where is there a love to be found? I know what it is to be embittered and miserable in feeling such loss. I also have seen people rise out of their desolation with such new direction for their lives, that my only response can be, “there must be God somewhere!”

Getting shocked out of all normalcy can change a person’s way. It often comes out of the blue, like Paul getting knocked off his donkey and blinded. It is sometimes painful, like the sudden "positive" test result or the realization that we are no longer able to function as we once had. The whole world has been upset by CoVid and its variants. We put so much of our own selves into trying to manage our way. What we have counted on from the world may not be there for us anymore. When the whole world seems hopeless, where does a person go to not give up? Mary and Joseph vanished (an alternate reading of “fled”) from Bethlehem with baby Jesus when Herod ordered the massacre of infants. Perhaps the only hope they could find for themselves was a voice from within a deepest place of love that moved them to preserve family. Given all the turmoil in the world, isn’t it amazing to rediscover something within our deepest being that offers a reorienting voice?

Getting tired of the “same old” can change a person’s way. Exhaustion and exasperation can be reminder gifts that something has to change with us. Even the cosmic order once had its fill and so sent signs in the stars to guide the way to Jesus. Where are the signs today? Some might say the world is in a time of apocalypse. Apocalypse does not mean “the end times” but rather means “revelation of great knowledge” (as Rev. Anne Knighten reminded the Buffalo congregation in her “First Week of Advent” sermon). When the “same old” has reached its end of being able to inspire and energize us, where in the world can we see the light of those with whom something sacred is happening?

Being away on sabbatical helped me see some changes that have happened among us in the nearly 10 years I have been in Conference Ministry here. Most of our churches have called new pastors during the past decade, and all our pastors are serving with great faithfulness. All our churches served by full-time clergy are open and affirming, and our rural churches are all welcoming of all who would come into their communities.

We know there are changes that have happened to us, and some are exacerbated during the CoVid pandemic. Perhaps we do not even know the changes yet-to-come, but I trust we will meet them as people of faith who find that God-is-with-us no matter what.

God-speed,
Marc Stewart



Conference News



Jennifer Jeffries Thompson | Helena Jewish Community Seeks to Buy Back its original Synagogue

Plymouth UCC's Menorah Project

European Jews first came to Helena in the 1860's during the gold rush on Last Chance Gulch. They stayed, eager to contribute to business starts, and as a group were instrumental in contributing to a firm financial foundation of the early settlement. By 1890 the Jewish community was large enough to support the construction of a synagogue, the first temple between St. Paul and Portland. The beautiful Romanesque/ Moorish building, completed in 1895, still stands and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places,

though the owners of the building have changed frequently over the past 90 years. The current occupant, the Catholic Diocese of Helena, is selling the building back to the Helena Jewish community, now consisting of approximately 100 people.

Plymouth Church – UCC is pleased to offer some financial support to the Jewish community in hopes that the transaction will come to a positive conclusion. In recognition of the ancient Hebrew celebration, Hanukkah, Plymouth calls this fund-raising initiative “The Menorah Project”. For every \$100 raised, a candle is lit to celebrate this accomplishment. During worship on November 21, lay leaders invited those in attendance to support the effort. By the conclusion of Fellowship Hour that very day, the congregation contributed over \$800. All Menorah candles were lit!



136th Conference Annual Meeting

Our 2021 CAM consisted of a business meeting to vote on the [2022 Budget](#), hold elections, welcome Rev. Marc Stewart back from sabbatical and receive [reports](#).

New Board members include:

Charlie Smilie, Chairperson for Faith Formation

New Church and Ministry Commission Members

Rev. Dwight Welch, west area clergy rep, 1st term

Pat Christian, west area layperson rep, 2nd term

Rev. Meg Hatch, central area clergy rep, 2nd term

Rev. David Murchie, east area clergy rep, 1st term

Vacancies remaining

Conference Vice-Moderator

Board of Directors, central area rep

Church and Ministry west area rep

Church and Ministry central area layperson rep

Church and Ministry east area layperson rep

Outdoor Ministries

Planning is well underway for the 2022 youth, adult, and intergenerational camps and retreats. A big announcement will come soon about where we will hold camps.

Remember that a registration promise to help pay for Camp is a great stocking stuffer!

Camp Leaders and Counselors are needed as we seek to return to conference-led programming. Youth camps that the Committee for Outdoor Ministries is able to fully staff by February 1 will be able to meet this summer between July 10 - 16. Email COM chairperson, [Trudi Downer](#), with your possibilities for serving during this week.

Pastoral Ministry

Check-in Visits with Conference Minister

Active clergy have been invited to meet with Rev. Marc Stewart for a time of check-in, either by zoom or in-person. The Conference office now uses an online scheduling app called Calendly that allows people to see available meeting times and then receive automatic reminders and a zoom link for their chosen time.

Active Clergy Retreat for 2022

Plans are underway to offer a retreat this winter to active clergy and their spouses. The Conference has assessed venues and times with the help of a survey sent to pastors and chaplains. We are looking at February 21-23 for a venue that provides rooms, food, and hot springs. It is hoped that congregations will support their pastors participation in a sorely needed retreat time with their colleagues.

Church Vacancies

Broadus Powder River UCC, searching with ELCA to share a pastor

Baker UCC

Sidney Peoples UCC and Savage UCC

Big Timber UCC

New UCC Profile Portal

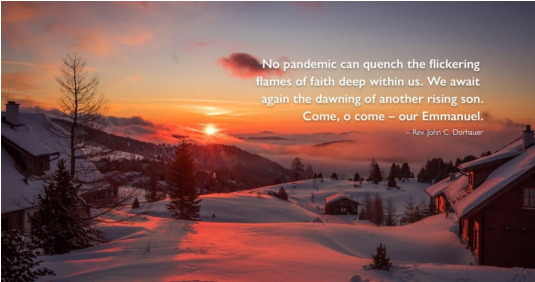
MESA has developed a new online portal for filling out your ministerial profile. [Zoom](#)

[trainings](#) on this new system will be offered on December 14 , 2 -3 pm. MESA will also be posting a video of the training on the [UCC YouTube Channel](#).

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In Ministry Beyond

United Church of Christ News



UCC General Minister Advent Letter Published
Nov 26, 2021

Faith Brings Hope that no Pandemic Can Quench

In his 2021 Advent letter to the church, United Church of Christ General Minister and President John C. Dorhauer acknowledges the world's second COVID Christmas. [read pastoral letter here...](#)

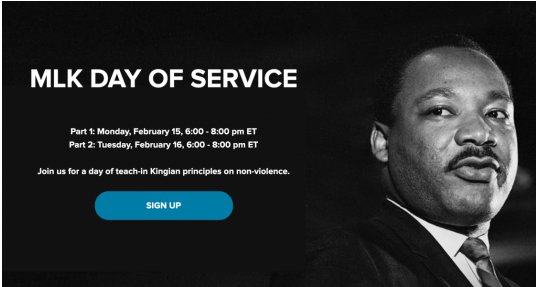


UCC Associate General Minister Rev. Traci Blackmon | published Nov 23, 2021

Last Amistad Chapel worship service, on Amistad Sunday

The chapel's last worship service, originally slated for Dec. 4, at 2:30 ET, has now been moved to the second Sunday in March, March 13, 2022, which is traditionally Amistad Sunday. [read more here...](#)

Resources



from frontline-faith.teachable.com

MLK Day of Service

Our UCC Frontline Faith online portal



offers a 2-day teach-in of Kingian principles of non-violence, February 15-16, 2022 4 - 6 pm MT Time. [register here...](#)

from UCCResources.com online shop

2022 UCC Desk Calendar

The UCC Desk Calendar includes Sunday Lectionary text listings, a national office directory, and an index of UCC Resources. [order here...](#)



December 14 1:30 pm UCC webinar

The State of Rural Churches & Communities

In the United Church of Christ, rural and small congregations make up 60% of the denomination and are the backbone of the UCC. [click here for registration link...](#)



Thursday at 1:30 pm

Current Church Issues

Thursdays for the Soul is a webinar series to care for the whole church. Topics are wide ranging, and are focused on the spirituality and care of people. Prayer, worship, music, psalm readings, or compassionate teaching are included.

[click here for topics and registration link...](#)

In Global Partnership



Video of Dec 1 Blue Christmas available

reflective liturgy, music, and preaching

This service seeks to recognize and stand in solidarity with the experiences of those aggrieved or displaced by disaster or forced migration in 2021. We remember that we are called to stand in solidarity with the captive and the oppressed, and work together with God’s guidance to create a just world for all. UCC clergy and choirs engaged in humanitarian ministries across the denomination will be providing reflective liturgy, music, and preaching during this event. [find video link here...](#)



Global Ministries Mission Partner in Costa Rica, Wally Burman

Universidad Biblica Latin America soon to celebrate 100 years

Because of the pandemic, UBL has moved all its classes to a virtual format since April 2020. UBL currently has 100 students who participate in the bachelor’s and licensure programs. These students are from approximately seventeen different countries and twelve different churches, including Catholic and Indigenous. [read more...](#)



Calendar

Send calendar items to [Conference office](#) by the 10th of each month

December 4 Marc Stewart preaches at [Pilgrim UCC Bozeman](#) 10 am

December 8-11 Marc Stewart at Council of Conference Ministers retreat

December 16 [Executive Committee meeting zoom](#) 10 am - noon

December 16 [Thursday for the Soul Blue Christmas Service](#) 1:30 pm

January 11 [Green Team zoom](#) 2 pm

January 12 [Committee for Outdoor Ministries zoom](#) 7 pm

January 14 Last day for the Conference office to receive and credit local church offerings to 2021 fiscal reporting

January 20 [Conference Board of Directors zoom](#) 10 am - noon

January 27 [Clergy Cluster zoom](#) 10 am

February 15-16 [UCC MLK Teach-in on Non-Violence](#) zoom 4-6 pm

March 13, 2022. [Last Service at Amistad Chapel](#) zoom 12:30 pm

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Montana - N.Wyoming Conference United Church of Christ

editor, Marc Stewart

2016 Alderson Ave., Billings
MT 59102 United States

406.656.8688

ucc@mnwcucc.org



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