

# Ecumenical Connection

A publication of the Illinois Conference of Churches



**December 2018**

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## Please forward our newsletter and share a link to our website on yours

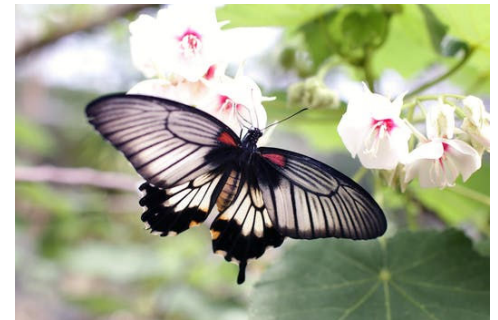
Some exciting and positive progress has happened with the ICC in recent months due to clergy reading our newsletter. Pastors have felt called to join teams, committees and task forces that speak to their passion. Churches have asked to share resources. Congregations have reached across the street to work together as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This all happens because judicatory leaders share our newsletter (four issues/year) with their pastors and congregations. Thank you! If you are not already doing this, please remember to forward our newsletter on.

On a related note, please consider putting a link to our website on yours. We're all in this together! Thank you. [www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](http://www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org)

## Compliments....and thank yous!

During a recent conference call of Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER) the team had a discussion on compliments. Do you give them? Do you receive them? If you receive them how do they make you feel? The group set as a goal to give more compliments in their daily lives. I think this could also include thank yous. Since we reach a wide percentage of Christians in Illinois, if we all took this on as a goal, we could spread a lot of positive feelings in the state. Be sincere. Be genuine. But increase the number of times a day you give a compliment or a thank you. And if you receive one, receive it humbly and graciously - don't deflect it. Maybe next issue we will have some stories about how this opened you to more of God's grace - what a glorious experience! The ICC gave out these butterfly cards at Annual Assembly to remind everyone to have hope!



## You can all be Ecumenical Partners!

The Illinois Conference of Churches voted to forge a new membership structure. Previously, the governing bodies of denominations, located in Illinois were members – judicatories and they continue to be the foundation of our organization.

But the ICC is broadening this structure. Going forward, individual persons, individual congregations or churches (regardless of its judicatory being a member) and organizations, can become ecumenical partners and attend Annual Assembly where they will have a voice at the table. Voting is done by consensus and will continue to be the responsibility of the judicatory leaders and delegates.

All members and ecumenical partners must agree with the Mission Statement of the ICC:

*"The Illinois Conference of Churches seeks to be an inclusive community of churches that celebrates and makes visible our sacred bonds of unity in Christ. We will do this by: Promoting an honest sharing and understanding of both our common and divergent theological convictions; and Making public, prophetic witness to Christ's love for all people, particularly by addressing poverty and racism. To these ends the members of the Illinois Conference of Churches proclaim our common faith in Jesus Christ. In word and deed, we give expression to Ephesians 4:5 – there is "...one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." – as we unite in cooperative ministries."*

To become an ecumenical partner please fill out and submit the form on the website under "news" electronically, or download and print the form to mail. By submitting or mailing this form you attest that you agree with the mission statement. Thank you for your generous support of the ICC.

## Save the date!

# 2019 Illinois Conference of Churches Annual Assembly “Ministerial Alliances: the Cornerstone of Ecumenism”

Dinner the evening before at 6:30 p.m.- open to all! Please pay for your own dinner.

**Friday, Sept. 20**

**8 a.m. - 3 p.m.**

Light breakfast 8-9 a.m.

Worship 9 a.m.

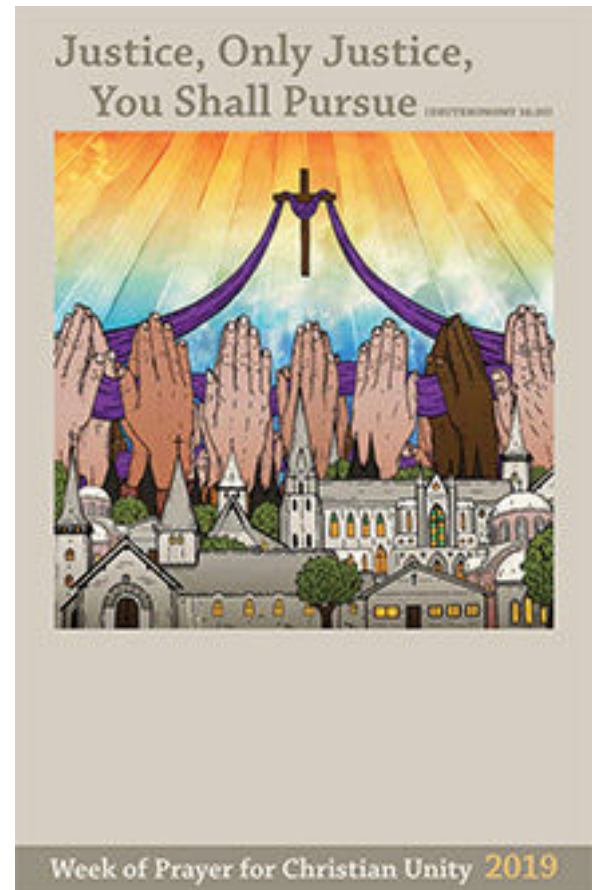
Forum 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Lunch at noon

Business meeting 2 p.m.

**Location: Bloomington-Normal**

**Bishop John Franklin White, African Methodist Episcopal Church, 4th Episcopal District, will deliver the message during morning worship.**



**Bring books you no longer need for a book swap.**

For a copy of any proposed by-law changes go to our website under “events” or request a copy by email, after Sept. 1.

**Register online using the events tab on our website. \$15 for students, \$50 for all others, includes breakfast, lunch and materials. Deadline Sept. 13. \$30 to attend via Zoom.**

**Questions? Contact Laurie Vial, Executive Director, at [laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](mailto:laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org) or at the phone number below.**

**Lodging: Rooms are blocked at Eastland Suites, Bloomington at \$85 plus tax. Rooms must be booked prior to Sept. 5 to assure the discounted rate. 309-662-0000.**

1608 W. Church St., Champaign, IL 61821 217-522-7099  
[www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](http://www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org)

Illinois  
Conference  
of  
Churches

## ICC unveils “One Voice” concerts

As announced in our previous issue, the Illinois Conference of Churches will embrace fund-raising in addition to donations to fund its valuable work in Illinois. The ICC operates on an annual budget of \$47,000. After this year’s Annual Assembly we will publish our 2019 budget in each newsletter as the back page in our continuing effort to be transparent.

Our fund raising will revolve around music. We will be holding One Voice ecumenical concerts all over the state. Pastor Joel Jackle-Hugh of United in Faith Church, Pana, and their choir director Whitney Hill have generously volunteered to host our first concert on April 7. We have conversations going in Peoria and other cities in Illinois.

The basic format for these concerts, which will include Christian music of all genres, plus some solos and congregational singing, will be a choir director from any church in the community and a church volunteering its sanctuary. The ICC will pay a stipend to the choir director, organist/pianist and sound board system operator. A free will offering will be taken with proceeds going to the ICC. Some concerts will also include special instruments such as brass or drums.

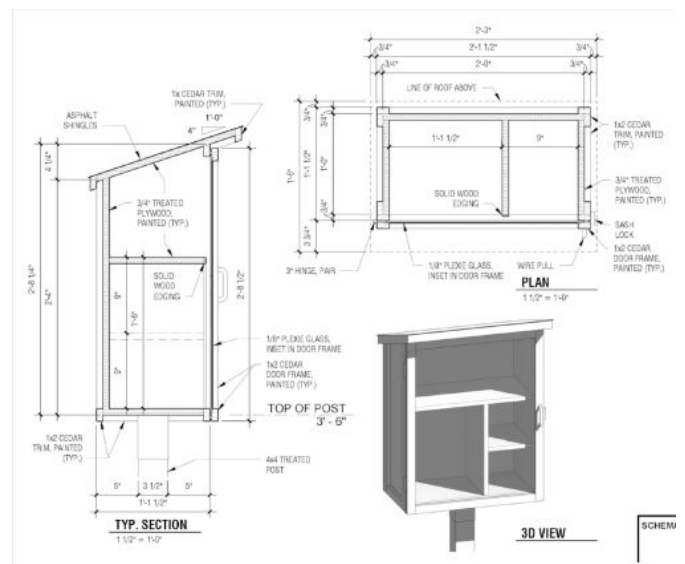
Music has always been an important part of ecumenism. Singing at our Annual Assembly worship service is always a beautiful blending of voices praising God amongst pastors and lay people of many diverse Christian backgrounds.

Please watch future newsletters for announcements of dates of upcoming One Voice concerts. We hope you will consider hosting a concert in 2019. If a concert is held in your area please promote it to potential choir members and get the word out to attend. Contact Laurie for more information.

## Little Free Pantry

Are you aware of the Little Free Library concept in your area? The ICC is interested in learning more about the Little Free Pantry movement. <http://www.littlefreepantry.org/>

If your church has jumped on this bandwagon let us know. Send us a photo of your pantry and some anecdotes. Watch this newsletter for updates throughout the year.



## **Our partner in faith and care for the environment - Faith in Place**

We urge you to go to their website **faithin-place.org** and check them out and find events all over the state of Illinois.



### **Three petitions announced**

There are some pressing issues facing vulnerable communities across the state - policymakers need to hear from faithful citizens. There are currently three FiP petitions on the Faith in Place Advocacy Page: <https://www.faithinplace.org/our-programs/advocacy>. They call for an end to Ethylene Oxide (a known carcinogen) emissions, regulation of Coal Ash Pollution (22 of 24 coal ash ponds in Illinois are polluting ground water right now), and a renewed commitment to Climate Justice.

### **Join us for an Annual Celebration!**

Our Annual Celebration and Fundraiser is quickly approaching and we hope you will register today! We celebrate our Earth care accomplishments and look forward to an inspiring future. While registration for these events is free, all in attendance will be asked to give generously in celebration of the inspiring mission and impactful programs of Faith in Place.

Central Illinois: Thursday, Dec. 13, 8-9am

Breakfast and a generous spirit are wonderful ways to wrap the year with us. See you at the I Hotel and Conference Center, 1900 S 1st St, Champaign, IL!

Register on the Faith in Place website.

### **Rally in the Rotunda**

In the Spring of 2017 the Illinois Conference of Churches held a Rally in the Rotunda of the state capital and prayed for the passing of the state budget. The Public Policy Team, together with the Leadership Team of the ICC, have decided to make this an annual event - praying for the legislative session. We will hold this event with Faith in Place to strengthen their legislative day. Watch for details when we set the date for spring of 2019. This is an interfaith event. Some of our member denominations may join us.

## ***Task Force on End-of-Life Decisions unveils plans***

The Illinois Conference of Churches has taken on a major new project to assist all of our denominations to help their congregations better prepare for and deal with end-of-life issues. We started this program by encouraging churches to participate in the Donor Sabbath to increase awareness of organ and tissue donation. The Donor Sabbath is the second weekend of November each year. We encourage your church to start a discussion and plan to participate from now on. The website is [www.donatelife.net/nds/](http://www.donatelife.net/nds/).

Members of the Task Force met for a half day session to plan a page on our website with materials covering issues such as:

- hospice
- living wills
- wills
- advance planning
- funeral planning
- green funerals
- and much more

While this is a sensitive topic, it's one that our members and friends face through the loss of loved ones, and eventually themselves. As Christians we want to give our members the tools and information to ease these decisions whenever possible.

Members are Mike Wakeland, Gloria Marshall, Kathy Gingrich, Katherine Ball, Kristel Clayville, Anna Lee Hisey Pierson, and Amy Zietlow. They are enthusiastic and organized. Please pray for this Task Force as they do research and writing.

God's blessings, Laurie





**This can be observed any time during 2019. For additional information and materials see the website [www.geii.org](http://www.geii.org).**

**2019 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity  
Justice, Only Justice, You Shall Pursue  
(cf. Deuteronomy 16:20)**

By: Fr. Thomas Orians, SA  
Associate Director – Graymoor  
Ecumenical & Interreligious Institute

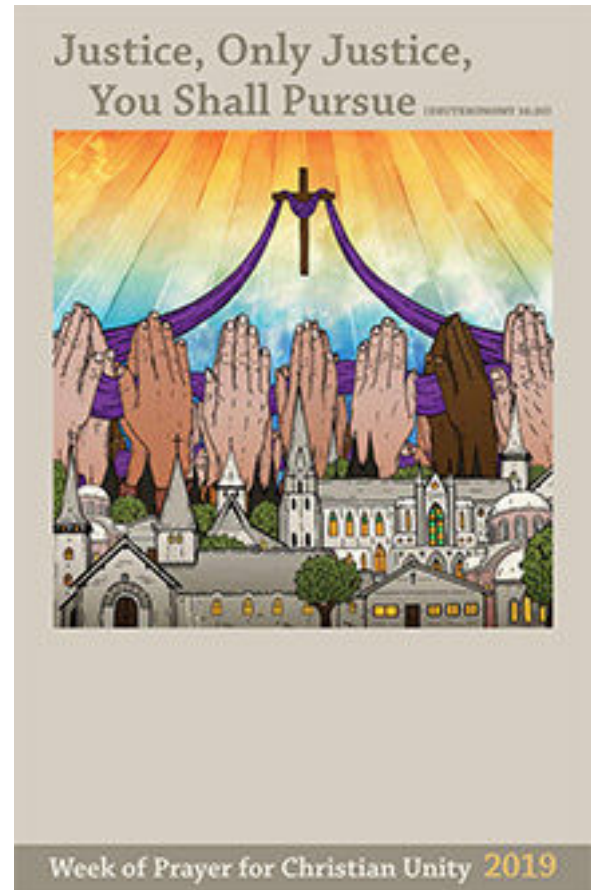
The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2019 theme has been selected, and finds its origins in Deuteronomy. “Justice, Only Justice, You Shall Pursue” (cf. Deuteronomy 16:20) was chosen for its powerful message of promoting truth, equality and unity.

The initial work on the theme for this year’s Week of Prayer was prepared by a group of representatives from different parts of Indonesia, including the Communion of Churches in Indonesia and the Indonesian Catholic Bishops’ Conference. The texts were finalized during a meeting of the International Committee of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Fr. Tom Orians, SA Associate Director of the Graymoor Ecumenical and Interreligious Institute noted, “Every year, Christians across the world gather in prayer for growth in unity. We do this in a world where corruption, greed and injustice bring about inequality and division. We are called together to form a united witness for justice and for Christian Unity that becomes a means of Christ’s healing grace for the brokenness of the world. Only by heeding Jesus’s prayer “that they all may be one” can we witness to living unity in diversity.”

The Christians of Indonesia found that the words of Deuteronomy, “Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue ...” (cf. Deuteronomy 16:18-20) spoke powerfully to their situation and needs, and recognized this common need throughout the world.

The traditional period in the northern hemisphere for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is Jan.18 to 25. Those dates were proposed in 1908 by Servant of God, Fr. Paul Wattson, Founder of the Society of the Atonement, to cover the original days of the Feasts of the Chair of St. Peter (Jan.18) and the Conversion of St. Paul (Jan. 25), and therefore have a symbolic significance.



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## **The National Workshop on Christian Unity**

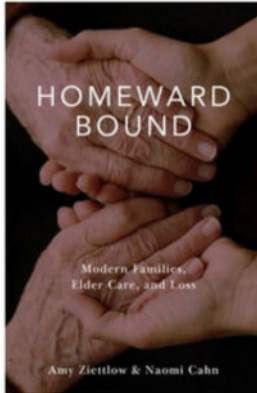


**St. Louis, Missouri**  
**April 1-4, 2019**  
[www.nwcu.org](http://www.nwcu.org)

# Book Corner

Rev. Amy Zietlow is an ELCA Lutheran pastor serving Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Decatur. She is a member of our End-of-Life Decisions Task Force. She co-authored this book, *Homeward Bound: Modern Families, Elder Care, and Loss*, on a related subject and spoke about it at our Annual Assembly.

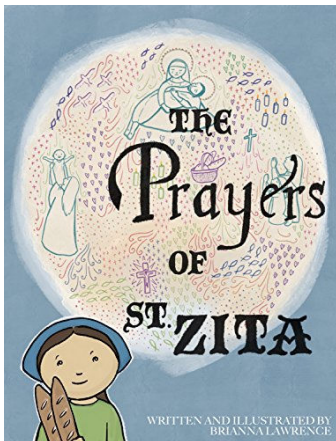
*If you know of a book that has an Illinois tie or is related to the work of the ICC please recommend it for a future Book Corner. Thanks. Laurie*



## Homeward Bound

By Amy Zietlow and Naomi Cahn

(Oxford | 2017 | 232 pages | \$29.95 | 9780190261092)



## The Prayers of Saint Zita (The Lives of Lesser Known Saints)

By Brianna Lawrence. \$3.99 as a Kindle book from Amazon

Saint Zita is a 13th century Italian saint who demonstrates that hard work, prayer, and charity can lead to closeness and peace with God, even when one faces obstacles. Zita is the patron saint of domestic workers and servants.

Brianna Lawrence is an Urbana, IL author. Her husband, Brian Gaines, spoke at the 2018 Annual Assembly

## URGENT NEED:

### Email lists - media and state and national legislators

A friend of the ICC recently shared their media email list with the ICC - thank you so much. It is not a comprehensive list that covers the entire state. If you have an up-to-date email list for most all media in Illinois - newspaper, radio stations, TV stations etc, please share it with us for our public policy work.

Also, we have an urgent need for an email list for our state and national legislators. Thanks very much.

## Judicatory visits and major meetings

Laurie Vial, executive director of the Illinois Conference of Churches, is traveling around the state and meeting individually with all Judicatory executives.

Another of Laurie's goals is to attend the major meetings of each denomination and where possible have an information table in the exhibition space. Please help out the ICC by communicating about your major meetings and forwarding registration forms for exhibition space. She could also address these gatherings and bring a brief greeting from the ICC.

## Would you like to join an ICC Team?

### Team members needed

The ICC operates with five teams: Leadership, Public Policy, Annual Assembly Forum (planning the Forum) Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER) (anti-racism) and Interreligious (a newer team trying to deepen our relationship with other faiths). Our Interreligious Team is seeking new members, particularly those of other faiths. And the other teams are also accepting new members. These teams meet mostly by conference call and only a few times a year. If the mission of any of these teams speaks to your heart please contact Laurie at [laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](mailto:laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org) for more information.

## Grants

Now that the Illinois Conference of Churches will be seeking grants to supplement denomination donations in our working budget, we need you to be our eyes and ears. If you hear of appropriate grant opportunities from foundations or your own denomination, please notify the executive director. Thank you for helping in this way.

## Is there a way for Judicatories to share more resources such as training sessions?

The Christian Church Disciples of Christ has led the charge by opening their annual anti-racism training to anyone in our 13 member denominations. Everyone is watching their budget including travel budget and trying to be good stewards of the environment by not driving as much. If your denomination has a training session, a special speaker, an event, a workshop or any other "happening"



that you would like to open to your fellow ICC members, please let us know. We will promote these events on our website and in our newsletter. Our Leadership Team would really like to grow this opportunity for more ecumenical encounters. And we'll all meet more brothers and sisters in Christ and have more networking opportunities.

## Like us on Facebook!



Keep up with the Illinois Conference of Churches and be prepared to have a little fun along the way.

[www.facebook.com/pages/Illinois-Conference-of-Churches](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Illinois-Conference-of-Churches)

## Continued from page 15

I would conclude by saying that even if US policy is to cut back on immigration, which I oppose, our nation should not ignore violation of religious rights in any country. This includes persecution of Muslims by Hindus, Muslims by Buddhists or any other religious persecution. Many countries that tolerate persecution of Christians are generally thought to be allies of the US, or at least having a detente with America. Simply making public the dirty little story of persecution would cheer our fellow Christians who think we have abandoned them.

Article in Religious News Service on countries that persecute Christians:

<https://religionnews.com/2018/10/18/as-refugee-admissions-drop-fewer-persecuted-christians-admitted-to-us-world-relief/>

Article in Christianity Today on dramatic cutback in refugees into the US

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/october/persecuted-christians-refugees-entering-us-hits-record-low-.html>



The Illinois Conference of Churches, a state Christian ecumenical organization representing 13 denomination, affirms the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago's statement in response to the shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, PA on Oct. 27, 2018.

A statement by The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago  
Response to the Synagogue Massacre in Pittsburgh, PA

The Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago is horrified by the vicious anti-Semitic murders at Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh. We remember with bitter sorrow the Shabbat morning worshipers killed and injured in this attack, and we honor the police officers who were wounded while coming to their aid. We pray for comfort and hope for the families and friends of those affected by this act of hate.

But we are also outraged.

- We are outraged by the increasing normalcy of racist violence in a sacred space. The victims at Tree of Life join the victims at the Sikh gurdwara in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.
- We are outraged by the frequency of such violence. Tree of Life is the 294th mass shooting in the United States this year. Almost 12,000 people -- including 441 in Chicago -- have died from gun violence in 2018.
- And we are outraged by the regularity of our reactions. All of us -- news networks, first responders, political leaders, and yes, faith leaders -- know just what to do following a mass shooting. We follow a script, we mourn the dead, and we move on.

But we are past the time for mourning without meaningful response.

Placing armed guards in America's more than 300,000 religious congregations is not the answer. Churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues already have taken steps to "harden" their security, and the injuries to police officers in Pittsburgh show that even trained responders are at risk. This strategy mistakes the effects of gun violence for its means and sources.

We need a different path.

(1) We call on the President of the United States and leaders at every level of our society to remember that their words matter. Pittsburgh reminds us that the rhetoric of violence begets violence. Everyone has the moral responsibility for what they say.

(2) For our part, we will convene meetings in congregations across this region on ways to reduce the potential, frequency, and lethality of gun violence. We welcome people from across the political spectrum. Our only condition is that participants share a commitment to strategies and outcomes that reduce gun-related deaths and injuries.

In every religious tradition, human life is sacred. Our democracy is diverse, boisterous, and very contentious, but we cannot express our differences through violence if we expect to long endure. Let us honor the dead by having the courage to live with our differences and to realize the vision of America's founders, *e pluribus unum*, "out of many, one."

(Oct. 29, 2018)

# Illinois Conference of Churches Annual Assembly sermon shared

Exodus 15:1-21; Psalm 118:5-24; Romans 8:12-27; Mark 5:21-43

## Another Way

by Rev. Kevin Kessler

Greetings to you all on behalf of the Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren. And thank you for the opportunity to share a few thoughts with you this morning.

In way of introduction, I am Kevin Kessler. I serve as the District Executive for the Illinois/Wisconsin District of the Church of the Brethren. I also serve as the pastor of the Canton, IL, congregation of the Church of the Brethren. I have also served on the Illinois Conference of Churches Leadership Team, 2 or 3 years as co-chair.

Enough about me. I value this ecumenical body, or to say it better, I value the ecumenicity of the church, of the body of Christ. We all bring our unique perspectives. And while we hold tightly to our various understandings, we come together acknowledging that we can learn from one another, and with one another. In our gathering and sharing, we bear witness to...The Way...the way which calls us to love one another, to hold each other in respect, to value the dignity of all. We do so despite our varied understandings and practices.

As we model this way of love, respect, and dignity, hopefully it is attractive to the world we live in today. Hopefully, the attraction helps in bringing change to our world that too often consents to and accepts gratification from being right and setting the other straight.

This attitude of being right and the other wrong seems to be more prevalent today than ever before.

Several weeks ago I made a visit to a congregation in our district. I had the opportunity to enter into conversation with one of the members, a person about 25 years my senior. We talked about the division that is so ubiquitous in our society. Knowing his life experience exceeded mine, I asked him, "Do you sense that division and this pattern of being right and the other wrong is greater today than at other times in history?" I had fully expected him to respond quickly. Instead, he paused for a moment, pondering an answer, and then said, "You know, my parents talked about the difficulties with communication in their time, too." He added, "Each generation is affected. But, yes, it does seem that I've experienced the issues we face worsening.

I realized at that moment that maybe I was asking the wrong question, or at least an inadequate question. Should I have asked about conditions of our time worsening, or would it have been better to ask, what is the cause of so much of our difficulty in relating respectfully to each other? What can we do to make a difference? What am I, what are we, missing with regards to the problems of public discourse and division among us, at any and all times?

I've given considerable thought to these questions. But I'll be transparent. It was when I accepted the invitation to speak today that I began paying more attention; pondering more deeply the nuances of our present situation; what can be done; what is at stake; what are areas of concern; what am I missing?

I read and re-read the scripture texts that have been shared during our worship this morning, and thinking about the connections to the topic of division. I found a great book entitled *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt, which offers a somewhat scientific approach to the issues we face. I recommend the book. I read another book by brothers Chip Heath and Dan Heath entitled *Switch* following some of the premise of Haidt's book. I read Martin Luther King, Jr. sermons, and found plenty of good and helpful wisdom within Dr. King's messages.

But it was after reading a chapter in a book we are using for a study in our congregation, the *Mockingbird Parables* by Matt Litton, that something clicked. I began to connect the dots between the scripture references, my Church of the Brethren heritage, and a key concept from the book. Kind of an aha! moment.

Litton uses a quote from Toni Morrison at the beginning the chapter in the book entitled *The Parable of the Last Word: Communicating to Build Community*.

Morrison upon her acceptance of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993 said: (quote) Oppressive language does more than represent violence, it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge; it limits knowledge. (end quote)

Oppressive language is violence. This is not a new concept or one that I am unfamiliar with, but to read it in the context of Morrison's statement was the aha moment. That's it. A helpful way of effecting change is to raise awareness about the words that we use. To raise awareness that some words we use endorse violence.

Litton, in his book suggests, that as humanity, we take pride in our aggressiveness, and that it is evident in our language. We can feel smug when our worldview is upheld and we put our opponent in his place.

Headlines are notorious for doing this. Some of them make me cringe, especially when they include words such as slammed, roasts, blasted, obliterates, destroys, crushes, clobbers, conquers. It's difficult enough to see these headlines in newspapers, or on the internet. But I'm especially disturbed seeing them in Facebook newsfeeds, when posted by persons who profess to be peace-loving citizens of God's kingdom.

We may not think about the words we use or post on social media, but how quickly words, if used violently, can have a negative impact.

Litton says, "one terse line can empty out a good measure of relational trust."

Sadly, from personal experience, I know the truth of Litton's statement.

Several years ago I had the privilege of engaging the youth group in our congregation. We were enjoying pizza while at the same time trying to have conversation, which wasn't going well. Rather than having a group discussion, as planned, the kids were talking among themselves. The din of voices was chaotic, diminishing the effectiveness of our time together. I felt like I needed to bring order to the gathering, so, in haste, without giving thought to the consequences, I shouted, "Quiet!"

A headline describing that experience might have read: Pastor Quiets Youth Group.

The way in which I brought order to the group was a violation of their trust.

It was a side of me they had not witnessed before. My reaction to the cacophony of voices was a means of violence, not physically, but certainly verbally. Even upon apologizing I was unable to establish the level of trust that had been enjoyed before. Although, not stated, the youth were likely wondering, when will he shout at us again? And if he does, what can we do to protect ourselves? What can we do to prove he is wrong and we are right?

Violence in the way we speak to each other diminishes, possibly eliminates trust. It fosters fear. And it seeks retaliation.

This cycle of lost trust, increased fear, and seeking retaliation is the dilemma that has hounded humankind for millennia and it continues today.

Because of this ongoing violence, how, then, can we expect anything better than the division which haunts us? (Pause for effect)

The scriptures we've heard this morning provide a response.

Scripture, in my view, does not provide answers to our problems, but rather serves as a guide, offering us another way of moving forward.

The 6th verse of Exodus 15 sums up this other way: Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power—your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy.

It is important to keep this verse in context. The Israelites are escaping from their enemy, the Egyptians, and they have crossed the sea on dry land. As the enemy pursues them, God, according to this text, allows the parted sea to merge and drown the Egyptians. Is this the way it happened or ancient hyperbole? To answer that question is a whole other sermon or lecture.

The point of verse 6, in my view, is this: it is not our station, nor should it be, to put our enemies in their place. It is God who will do that for us.

Yet, God does so without retaliation and hate, but rather with grace and love. Granted, we have to work a little harder to arrive at this understanding in this Exodus text. But the other texts offer helpful insight. From the Psalms, the Psalmist proclaims, the Lord did not give me over to death. The Lord has become my salvation. The Psalmist proclaims that God is in the business of loving and caring for and inviting people into a good place. The Psalmist says: This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

Paul, in Romans, talks about fear as the enemy. God, through the Spirit, lifts us from the dread of that enemy. The implication is that God does not retaliate against the enemy, but rather loves us boldly to bring us out of our enslavement to that oppressor.

And then we come to the healing narratives in Mark. The enemies we encounter in these narratives are illness, long-time disease, death. Jesus doesn't rail against these enemies. Jesus doesn't retaliate. Jesus doesn't provide various methods of overcoming the enemy. Rather, he loves the people back to health, to life.

Oh, yes, God shatters the enemy, not by hatred and retaliation, but with grace, and justice, and mercy, and compassion, and love. God shows us a way other than violence.

So in our divided world, where humanity uses the violence of language and words as a means of winning, of putting another in their place, we, the church, the body of Christ, in all its ecumenical beauty and capacity, can follow the example of God, through Christ, and the Spirit, and offer another way.

I like to find evidence of this other way of living; stories that can be told which portray the shattering of our enemies, not by force or violence, but with compassion and love.

One of these stories involves the late Senator, John McCain. McCain didn't always get it right while working in the political arena that is so heavily divided. But there moments when we did. One of those moments is when Senator McCain was on the campaign trail, addressing an audience at a rally, when opportunity was given for those in attendance to ask questions. A woman was given the mic and began to share concerns, ending her comments by referring to then Senator Obama as an Arab.

McCain could have gone along with that erroneous line of thinking, but instead he opted to respond in another way. He politely and gently, shook his head and said, "No, no, he is not. He is a decent family man, citizen, that I just happen to have disagreements with on fundamental issues."

I imagine a headline about this encounter could have read: McCain Crushes Woman with Erroneous Perception of Barack Obama. I don't see it that way at all. Rather I think the better headline would be: McCain Embraces the Value and Dignity of His Opponent. Such a headline would not fly politically, but it would provide a reality check, and offer a ray of hope.

A more personal example of shattering enemies with love rather than violence happened a few years ago as I was visiting a congregation in our district. Our district at the time was going through a difficult time because of disagreement about matters of human sexuality. The congregation I visited was upset, hoping district leadership would take a different approach to the issues at hand. I thought I was prepared for the meeting. I was not prepared, though, for the verbal violence leveled at me by one individual. Instinctively, I wanted to respond in kind. Alternatively, although literally and physically trembling, I responded with kind words and a non-anxious demeanor.

As you've likely noted from the earlier story about my experience with the youth group, I don't always get it right. When I don't, I own the error of my ways. When I feel as though I've got it right, the impact is much more positive.

In this instance, the distanced relationship of that congregation to the district began to strengthen.

The right hand of the Lord shatters the enemy when we practice another way of being, another way of living. Not with violence, but with compassionate understanding and love.

Examples such as I've just shared are not the exception, and are abundant, but we tend to elevate the stories of violence. In order, then, to give witness to non-violent methods of building community, Will you, with me, strive to advance the stories that raise up another way of being, another way of living? Will you, with me, strive to shatter the enemy, not with violence, but with compassion and love? Will you, with me, help to undo the chains of violence that hold us and this world captive from enjoying the freedom of God's love and grace and mercy and justice? Will you, with me, help to make this "way of being" attractive to a world so desperate for another way? Amen.

## **Books cited**

The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion by Jonathan Haidt

Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard by Chip Heath and Dan Heath

A Gift of Love: Sermons from Strength to Love and Other Preachings by The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Mockingbird Parables: Transforming Lives Through the Power of Story by Matt Litton



Photos from  
**Annual Assembly  
2018**

Top left Rev. Kevin Kesler accepts the Don Mason Ecumenical Award on behalf of the Canton Area Ministerial Alliance, from Rev. Gary McCants. Top right, Rev. Walter Carlson ends of the Assembly leading a song. Above, Rev. Gary McCants moderates the Forum with Fr. Richard Chiola and Prof. Brian Gaines.





## Diocesan priests witness impact of immigration debate at border

By Suzanne Koziatek, staff writer  
From *The Messenger* Sept. 2018

The hardships of families detained at the U.S./Mexican border can seem far away and out of touch from our daily lives – even in southern Illinois, which has its share of Mexican immigrants living and working here.

But a diocesan priest who visited the troubled region last week says the struggle is as near as Pulaski County, where a few hundred illegal immigrants are being held in a Department of Homeland Security detention center.

And it's as relevant as the Gospels, says Father Bob Flannery, pastor of the parish of Saint Francis Xavier in Carbondale.



Fr. Bob is third from the right.

“We’re not following what the Scriptures say about welcoming the stranger among us,” Father Flannery says. “Jesus, Mary and Joseph themselves went into Egypt because they were threatened. It’s part of our faith tradition to love one another and to reach out to help.”

Father Flannery and Father Uriel Salamanca, administrator of St. Joseph Parish in Cobden, were among 16 priests from across the country who traveled to the border near El Paso, Texas and Juarez, Mexico, to learn how the lives of Mexican and Central American immigrants are being affected by the current escalation or zero tolerance policy in border enforcement by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (or ICE).

The two priests are not new to this issue – they have been involved with a Carbondale group, the Southern Illinois Immigrant Rights Project, and Father Salamanca has visited the detention center in Ullin, Illinois. But this was Father Flannery’s first experience along the border fence.

He and Father Salamanca were invited to participate by a group called Faith in Public Life, a network of clergy and other faith leaders who pursue social justice issues. Father Flannery says money for transportation to the event was provided by a grant.

Father Flannery spent Sept. 4-7 in El Paso and in Juarez, meeting with immigrants, leaders of other faith communities and immigration activists. He traveled to “hospitality centers” on both sides of the border that provide help and services to migrants and refugees.

In one case, he says, a hospitality center helped a man who had been abandoned on his trip north and his shoes stolen. The man walked 40 miles in his bare feet before reaching help and medical care.

Father Flannery says his eyes were opened to the real fear immigrants face in leaving their home countries. “Most people are leaving because of life-threatening conditions – because of cartels and other violence,” Father Flannery says. “Some are fleeing domestic violence. Before this, I think I thought most people were just looking for a better life. But they’re seeking asylum because they fear for the lives of their families.”

In May, U.S. border officials began separating children and adults who were entering the United States together, sending them to different detention centers. The policy, part of a new immigration strategy by the Trump administration, was rolled back in June in the face of widespread protests, and a large number of the families have been reunited. However, in recent weeks, the Trump administration has announced its intention of indefinitely detaining migrant children with their families, overturning a 20-year-old agreement that would limit child detentions to no more than 20 days.

Father Flannery says the disruption in the lives of the separated families has far-reaching consequences.

“It’s causing psychological damage in these families.” He tells the account he heard of a man reunited with his son after 41 days apart. “He thought his son would be so happy, but all his son could say was, ‘Dad, why did you leave me?’”

Father Flannery says that as our country tackles immigration reform, leaders must seek solutions that are humane and compassionate. He compares the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers at the border to past injustices against American Indians and to the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II.

On the final day of his trip to the border, Father Flannery participated in a prayer vigil at the border fence, led by Bishop Mark Seitz of the Catholic Diocese of El Paso, Texas. Father Flannery was among those who offered petitions during the vigil.

He returned from the trip reinvigorated to keep working to aid Mexican immigrants in southern Illinois. Part of the training participants received during their time in Texas included how to get their message out through media and other means.

On his first Sunday back, Father Flannery says he tied what he’d learned to that day’s Gospel, in which Jesus calls out “Ephphatha!” or “Be opened!” to restore a deaf man’s hearing and speech.

“I said that that healing is addressed to us,” he says. “Jesus wants to open our ears and our hearts as disciples.”

## **How are we responding to the persecution of Christians?**

By Greg Krohm, volunteer with the Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Chicago Catholic Archdiocese  
Nov. 11, 2018

A well-reasoned and fact laden article in the National Review takes the position that there is more persecution of Christians today than during the early Church (before the Edict of Milan in 311). This conclusion is based, in part, on current scholarship that throttles back the rhetoric about how much blood Rome spilt to end Christianity. Read the article cited below to learn the reasons. The above conclusion is also based on the massive evidence of persecution of Christians in Asia and Africa. If there is such a dramatic increase in persecution beyond any historic level, why is it that we as Christians in America turn a blind eye to it?

The first point I would like to raise is the widespread nature of Christian persecution in the world. An article in Religious News (referenced below) presents a fascinating map showing the countries with high degrees of persecution of Christians. The source of the map, Open Doors USA, monitors persecution patterns. Christians face the most persecution: North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan, Eritrea, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, Iran and India. With 20 or so other countries rated with lessor but still high persecution levels. It is astonishing how widespread persecution of Christians extends.

We see a continuous stream of news reports of violent persecution of Christians (church bombings or mob beatings) in these 30 or so countries. But non-violent persecution is probably just as frequent and troubling to refugees from persecution. This non-violent persecution would include: legal actions against Christians for trying to convert people, denying permits for building churches and holding processions, and discrimination in jobs. The second take away for this is closer to home. Why is America closing the door on bone fide refugees from persecution? According to Christianity Today refugee resettlement hit a record low over the past year, with the United States taking in fewer than half the amount permitted under a reduced refugee ceiling of 45,000. Christians do make up the majority of admitted refugees (understandably given the conditions they are fleeing). In the 2018 fiscal year, 15,748 Christian refugees entered the country, a 36.4 percent decline from the previous year and a 55 percent decline from fiscal year 2016.

**Continued on page 8**

# SAVE-THE-DATE

## 2nd Annual Spiritual Leaders Retreat

(for college and university Spiritual Leaders, Chaplains, Campus Ministers etc. in Illinois. This is an interreligious opportunity)

Thursday, April 11

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.

Eureka College

Cerf Center Terrill Room

300 E. College Ave., Eureka, IL

Free parking east of the Cerf Center in the gravel lot.

9 a.m. Light Breakfast

10 a.m. Program begins



Please share with anyone who would benefit from this experience and have them email Laurie Vial to be added to the database.

## Networking, networking, networking

Spiritual Leaders will have the ability to contact each other throughout the year through a private Facebook page where they can post concerns and receive suggestions.

**Bring books you no longer need for a book swap.**

**Sponsored by Eureka College and the Illinois Conference of Churches**

Register online using the events tab on the ICC website. Registration includes light breakfast, lunch, snacks, materials and facilitators.

**Deadline is April 1.**

Questions? Contact Laurie Vial, Executive Director, at [laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](mailto:laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org) or at the phone number below.

Lodging: Sleep Inn Washington, IL (309) 481-0450 is the closest lodging.

Illinois  
Conference  
of  
Churches



1608 W. Church St., Champaign, IL 61821 217-522-7099

[www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org](http://www.illinoisconferenceofchurches.org)

# Teams of the Illinois Conference of Churches

We welcome new members to our teams. Please contact Laurie Vial, executive director, with questions or to join a team.

## Leadership Team

### **Rev. Gary McCants, co-chair**

African Methodist Episcopal Church  
4th Episcopal District  
Springfield

### **Rev. Wally Carlson, co-chair**

United Methodist Church  
Great Rivers Conference  
Peoria Heights

### **Dr. John Charlton, treasurer**

American Baptist Church  
Great Rivers Region  
Rochester

### **Fr. Kevin Laughery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Troy

### **Rev. Galda McCants**

African Methodist Episcopal Church  
4th Episcopal District  
Springfield

### **Dr. George Johnston**

Presbyterian Church – USA  
Southeastern Illinois Presbytery  
Monticello

### **Rev. Megan Dean**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Bartlett

### **E. Garnet Fay**

Religious Society of Friends  
Oak Park

### **Rev. Sharon Patton**

Christian Church, Disciples of Christ  
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin  
Charleston

### **Greg Krohm**

Catholic Church  
Archdiocese of Chicago  
Wilmette

### **Fr. George Pyle**

Greek Orthodox Church  
Springfield/Champaign

### **Alicja Lukaszewicz-Southall**

Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Chicago  
Wauconda

### **Rev. Catiana McKay**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Galena

## Annual Assembly Forum Team

### **Rev. Wally Carlson, chair**

United Methodist Church  
Great Rivers Conference  
Peoria Heights

### **Rev. Catiana McKay**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Galena

### **Fr. Bob Flannery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Belleville  
Carbondale

### **Rev. Robert Sherman**

United Church of Christ  
Illinois Conference  
Minier

## Illinois Christians Encountering Racism (ICER)

### **Rev. Kevin Laughery, co-chair**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Troy

### **Rev. Galda McCants, co-chair**

African Methodist Episcopal Church  
Springfield

### **Rev. Mark Harkness**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois District  
Cherry Valley

### **Martha Herrin**

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)  
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin  
Stewardson

### **Rev. Christine Hopkins**

Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Champaign

### **Rev. Megan Dean**

United Methodist Church  
Northern Illinois Conference  
Bartlett

### **Rev. Sharon Patton**

Christian Church, Disciples of Christ  
Region of Illinois/Wisconsin  
Charleston

### **Rev. Ryan Landino**

Presbyterian Church - USA  
Presbytery of Great Rivers  
Peoria,

**Continued on next page**

**Interreligious Team**

**Rev. Catiana McKay, chair**

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Northern Illinois Conference  
Galena

**Dr. John Charlton**

American Baptist Church  
Great Rivers Region  
Rochester

**Fr. Kevin Laughery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Springfield  
Troy

**Hakan Berberoglu**

Niagra Foundation  
Chicago/Peoria

**Alicja Lukaszewicz-Southall**

Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Chicago  
Wauconda

**Greg Krohm**

Catholic Church  
Archdiocese of Chicago  
Wilmette

**Fr. Bob Flannery**

Catholic Church  
Diocese of Belleville  
Carbondale

**Rev. Joel Jackle-Hugh**

Presbyterian Church USA  
Southeastern Illinois Presbytery  
United Church of Christ  
Illinois South Conference  
Pana

**Rev. Cory Hartz**

United Church of Christ  
Illinois South Conference  
Belleville

**Pastor Debra Sutter**

Mennonite Church  
Champaign-Urbana

**Rev. Tim Doty**

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Clinton

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Archdiocese of Chicago  
Chicago

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4th Episcopal District  
Springfield

**Rev. Wally Carlson**

United Methodist Church  
Great Rivers Conference  
Peoria Heights

**Rev. Dr. John Rickard**

Presbyterian Church - USA  
Blackhawk Presbytery  
Oregon

**Dr. Mary Milano**

Episcopal Church  
Diocese of Chicago  
Chicago

**Dates to remember:**

April 7 One Voice concert in Pana

April 11 Spiritual Leaders Retreat in Eureka

Sept. 20 Annual Assembly Bloomington-Normal with dinner the evening before.

**\$\$\$\$\$ Thank you for your generous response to our 2019 pledge drive. If you have not yet filled out and returned your pledge card please do. Donations are always welcome - one easy way to donate is to use PayPal on our website. Again, thank you for your generous gifts. A copy of our budget is always the final page of our newsletter**

**Illinois Conference of Churches**

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**Laurie Vial, executive director**

**laurie@illinoisconferenceofchurches.org 217-522-7099**



## 2019 Illinois Conference of Churches Budget

			2019 Budget
<b>Income</b>			
	Member Denominations		\$ 28,000
	Contributions (individual/congregation)		\$ 4,000
	Fund raising		15,000
	<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b>47,000</b>
<b>Expense</b>			
	Personnel		
		Exec Director Salary	35,971
		Payroll Taxes	2,589
		<b>Total Personnel</b>	<b>38,560</b>
	Governan		
		Meeting Expense	250
		Annual Assembly	500
		Annual Meetings	900
		<b>Total Governance/Mission</b>	<b>1,650</b>
	Travel		
		Mileage	1,800
		Professional Development	900
		<b>Total Travel</b>	<b>2,700</b>
	Administra		
		Payroll Expense	475
		Bookkeeping/Accounting	90
		Insurance	1,300
		Computers/Software	1,000
		Office Supplies	300
		Postage	100
		Telephone	650
		Printing	100
		Miscellaneous	200
		Public Policy	300
		<b>Total Administrative/Operating</b>	<b>4,515</b>
		<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>\$ 47,425</b>
		<b>Surplus / Deficit</b>	<b>(425)</b>