



One Year In: A Retrospective Report from the General Minister and President

As we are approaching my one-year anniversary, I want to take a moment to share with you a bit of my journey these last 12 months.

It has been a very rewarding year for me, personally. I have had the unique pleasure to travel the breadth and width of this beloved Church. I get to see us at our best – and I have to tell you, our best makes me pretty damn proud. Far from being unified in thought, we are nonetheless one in a commitment to the proclamation of a gospel that changes lives. Seeing this first hand every week is a true joy.

I was at Ascension UCC in Norristown PA when they raised their first Pride Flag as they celebrated the 5th anniversary of the ONA vote.

I was in Hillsborough NC after they had their Pride Flags stolen and they put up new ones, with over 40 in reserve in case they needed them.

I preached to a parking lot of cars on a Sunday morning as St. John's in Newark OH celebrated their 150th anniversary (you will have to ask me about that).

I was at NYE where almost 3,000 youth gathered for a week of devotion, mission, worship, and education. What a grand and very moving experience that was.

I gathered in a fireside room in Spokane for an evening with area clergy; preached at an anniversary celebration in Grinnell IA; attended annual meetings in over a dozen Conferences; led privilege workshops in places as far and wide as Hillsborough NH, Philadelphia PA, Wake Forest University, and Seattle WA.

You really do make me very proud. I witness week in and week out what our churches and Conferences do. It matters. You matter. Lives are truly changed by the mission we engage in.

In this year we have undertaken some bold initiatives. What follows is a quick update on each of them:

- Still-Speaking 2.0 – tool-kits went to every congregation with a variety of marketing materials, instructions for social media usage, and tips for marketing their church and its mission; a new video is just weeks away from being launched with the hope of going viral, produced by the same team that gave us the bouncer ad, the ejector ad, and the ‘here is the steeple’ ad. We will be following up with you to provide some additional promotional materials to engage conferences and congregations in the video’s release.
- White Privilege – I have done about 30 workshops in various settings on White Privilege, keynoted in at least a dozen other cities (including a presentation to the Federation of Christian Ministries); meanwhile, five authors have contributed to a curriculum that is set for release in two weeks and will be available for use in every setting of the United Church of Christ. It will be available as a downloadable link free of charge, and promises to engage every setting in safe, substantive, meaningful and bold conversation not just on race, but on white privilege.
- Our Still Speaking Voice: a Bold, Public Witness - From January, when we ran a video by Traci Blackmon entitled “Why I Protest” (and which overnight got more hits than any other effort we had theretofore run), through the April collaboration with the Mass Conf. on Keep It In the Ground, through the May collaboration with Minnesota Conf. on Gun Control, through this month’s collaboration with the Pacific Northwest Conf. on Building Bridges (an initiative to invite our churches to reach out in love to our Muslim neighbors), we have spent time each month fulfilling our commitment to be a bold, public witness. In October, I will fly to the Southwest Conference and participate in a border event designed to bring more attention to Immigration Justice, and we will close the year with a video contest for our youth on the Syrian Refugee Crisis.
- Congregation Connections - Over 30 National Staff have been making random and daily calls to connect with local churches throughout the life of this denomination. The stories we are hearing about how we live out our shared mission in burghs, villages, towns and cities across this country is very inspiring. This fall, we will be launching a website where our local churches can come together to share stories and ideas.
- Strategic Planning - The first task force was formed last October, and in six months completed what is to date the largest survey effort ever undertaken by the denomination. They produced a 30-page report that they gave to our Board of Directors, and which I attach with this update, describing what a healthy, vital,

and relevant United Church of Christ looks like in ten years. A second task force has formed, and has been asked by the UCCB to make preliminary recommendations to them about what actions need to be taken to help architect that future. They will have a very preliminary report to bring to the Board at their October meeting.

- At 700 Prospect, we have launched a new leadership development series geared toward nurturing staff members to drive and manage change and innovation in our work and ministries. And we have launched an organizational assessment to help ensure that how we are structured is aligned with the church we need to aspire to be in the future.

In addition to these initiatives, one other primary undertaking is in progress. As you know, we have been working hard to go into next Synod proposing a shared Purpose, Vision, and Mission statement for the denomination. As I write this, Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi is just returning from her sabbatical and will begin work collating data from the survey that went out in mid-June. I will try and forward to you results from that survey as soon as I can get it. It is my expectation that by the time the Board meets in October, we will be proposing language that we will commit to regarding our shared Purpose, Mission, and Vision. After that, we will include you in deep conversation about how to go into Synod with the intention of living fully, interdependently, and collaboratively into that shared mission.

Thank you. I have appreciated your prayers, your support, and your commitments to making the United Church of Christ a movement for transformation in the world, and a faithful witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You make me very proud, and I look forward to the years that will follow.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim C. Jones". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Jim" being the most prominent.