The Keystone Connection

A Message to the Conference

June 16, 2026

Members and Friends of Keystone Conference,

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword." Matthew 10:34

About a decade ago, I had the idea to ask the four oldest members of the congregation I was serving about the themes for the four Sundays of Advent. If they were unable to be in worship because of their infirmities, I read excerpts from brief interviews I did with each of them before lighting the candle on the Advent wreath for that week.

For peace Sunday, I interviewed a man who knew war and had fought in the south Pacific during World War II for the U.S. Navy. I visited with him at the Lebanon Valley Home, and I asked him how he would define peace. He said, "It means no friction, no war. You wouldn't need an army or navy anymore."

I followed that up with asking him, what was it like when he and his fellow crewmen heard the war was over, "The first thing we all thought was, it meant that we were going home." I replied, "Maybe peace is like that, going home?" He thought a second and said, "Yes, it would be like going home, because like a family, you need to accept people as they are. Love them and let them know it." He thought a little more and offered, "Jesus wasn't a fighter. He was a person of peace and we should be that, too."

This dear man was not thinking of this week's gospel lectionary passage where Jesus seems to contradict his own blessing for peacemakers. I'm sure the man from my congregation had encountered this gospel passage in worship or in bible studies at some point. But even amid our present day toxic societal and familial divisions that Jesus may have prophesied, even a WW II veteran can come back to Jesus as a peacemaker as the prevailing image for his life for his Savior.

Some may point to this Sunday's passage as a sign of the end times or a sign that our division is divinely ordained. Those may be valid interpretations. I would say that when we're met with an edge of Jesus' teaching that cuts us, we should strive to hold in tension multiple images of the same Savior: One who will ask us to strive for peace, and one who knows that the message of the gospel is one that can also strain relationships. Many of us do this every day: we try to walk in the way of peace, but the core of the gospel can divide us from those whom we love who think much differently.

Following Jesus is both striving to hold an olive branch out to the world while at the same time being cut with the sword of the gospel. Jesus doesn't promise us a way that is easy. He promises that following him carrying a cross and the peace of going home are not opposites.

Dwight
Rev. Dwight Hein
Coordinator for Leadership Development
Keystone Conference UCC

Attention Youth Campers and Families,

Please read the following information carefully, as the Conference policy for supplementing youth summer camping has changed.

For the 2026 summer season, the Keystone Conference will campership or reimburse 30% of the cost for one youth to attend one summer camping experience. If a youth attends more than one camp during the summer, only one camp will be eligible for the 30% reimbursement. Please use the application for additional camps if this creates a hardship.

Learn more and download the application under the campership section of keystoneucc.org/mission-grants-committee/

Living Waters Camp & Conference Center
Schellsburg, PA

Trustin' Jesus! Summer Camps
Fishing Camp - June 28 to July 2, for grades 6 to 12
Primary (grades K - 3) - July 5 to 11
Elementary Camp (grades 4 - 6) - July 5 to 11
Junior-Senior High Camp - July 12 - 18
Grandparent / Grandchild Camp is July 12 to 15
Learn more at livingwaterscamp.org

HC Spirit Camp is hosted at Hartman Center Campground, Milroy, PA . The theme for HC Spirit 2026 is "In the Wilderness." Camp runs from July 26 - August 1, 2026. Registration is now open—check hcspiritcamp.org for more info and registration.

Urban Service Camps Throughout the year, Old First UCC (Philadelphia) welcomes volunteer service groups from colleges and churches for a few days up to a week. Service campers volunteer around Philadelphia, while learning about the challenges facing those living in the city and the joys and rewards (and challenges) of hands-on work in agencies that are making a difference in Philly. The work of service campers is critical to our partner sites, as one-in-four Philadelphians are food insecure and the city's poverty rate is more than 20% – almost double the national average.

The urban service camp experience also includes time for participants to reflect on the spiritual, social and political implications of their experiences. Members of Old First work with group leaders to help groups unpack the structural realities that create and perpetuate homelessness, combining hands-on experience with learning and spiritual growth. And there is usually time for some good, old-fashioned fun, too – such as sight-seeing in the historic district!

We welcome Service Camps for just one day, or up to a week. And if schedules allow, Old First encourages service camps to volunteer with our Saturday Breakfast and/or worship with us on Sunday morning.

Learn more here: https://oldfirstucc.org/serve/volunteer/ and click "Urban Service Camps"