PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

A Message from PCC

April 24, 2024

Greetings friends and members of Penn Central,

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower." (John 15:1, NRSV)

The metaphor of Jesus as the true vine is a favorite of mine. I love the agricultural image (I grew up in a wine-producing region) and I love the sense of connection. It is also part of a mosaic on the floor of Sage Chapel on the Cornell campus that is important to me (see photo). The metaphorical language is compelling as well as comforting.

This is the last of the declarative "I am" messages from Jesus in the gospel of John. It is also the only one in which Jesus' statement about himself is followed by a declarative statement about the disciples: You are the branches. As part of his farewell discourse this is a pinnacle of Jesus' instruction to the disciples about their true nature as well as what is expected of them in the future, once he is no longer with them.

The branches of a vine produce the fruit. With grape vines only pruning allows the branch to produce as much fruit as possible. Anyone who works in a garden can attest to the difficulty of pruning. There is something counter-intuitive about it. How can removing living material result in greater growth? The ability of a branch to produce fruit is enhanced when it is forced to concentrate its efforts. The same is true of fruit trees, hence the gnarled and twisted trees you may see in a productive apple orchard.

Jesus knows what lies ahead for the disciples. We know too, since we have the benefit of hindsight. They will suffer. Their lives will be pruned significantly. Yet we also know that the church flourished when it was persecuted in those early centuries. Talk about counterintuitive. This is a deep mystery and cannot be reduced to a simplistic (and manifestly unhelpful) "God's going to make you suffer so you bear more fruit." Instead, Jesus knows that as the disciples (and all the disciples to come) share the gospel mes-

Continues on back

Contact us!

PCC Office Staff

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call, PhD - *Conference Minister*
email: ccall@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-433-3196

Rev. Dr. Nora Driver Foust - *Associate Conference Minister*
email: nfoust@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-433-2587

C. Paul Keller - *Office Manager*
email: pkeller@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-652-1560

Prayers for Penn Central Conference

Ephesians 6:18 (NLT)

Pray in the Spirit at all times and on every occasion. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all believers everywhere.

This week, we pray for each other as we continue to live into God's calling...

Locust Grove UCC, York

Mount Zion UCC, York

St. Stephen's UCC, York

Shiloh UCC, York



sage, they will hit up against resistance of all kinds – even from within their own church.

If we abide in Jesus, we will survive the pruning, and we will bear more fruit. The ability to abide in Jesus is perhaps the greatest challenge for me. After all, there are so many options for where to abide these days, so many venues and platforms in which to place my trust, sense of security, or my focus. But when I suffer and fight through all the chaff of the world I come back to the same place: without him I bear nothing. I may still produce things, sure. But I do not bear spiritual fruit when I do not abide in Jesus.

The vine feeds the branches. The branches produce fruit that feeds the world and gladdens the heart. Remember that we are the branches. The vine cannot produce fruit without us, and our fruit comes from abiding in the true vine.

Peace,

Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference



62nd Annual Meeting of the Penn Central Conference

For the first time, all four Pennsylvania conferences of the UCC will be gathering for a shared Annual Meeting on June 7-9, 2024 at The Penn Stater in State College, PA. We will have shared worship, workshops, meals and meetings as well as each conference's separate business meeting.

We will be joined by General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, who will be preaching during closing worship on Sunday. All four conferences will be hosting a reception with her on Saturday evening as well. Register by clicking the Annual Meeting tab on pccucc.org

Registration is now open for **HC Spirit camp at Hartman Center Campground and Retreat Center** - Sunday, July 28th through Saturday, August 3rd, 2024.

https://penncentralconference.regfox.com/hartman-homecoming-week-2024

Camp makes a great Christmas gift. Check out the summer options from our partners at Lutheran Camping Corporation's Kirchenwald (and Nawakwa)

https://www.lutherancamping.org/summer-camp/youth-summer-programs/