



# PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE



Celebrating 60 Years of Ministry

## A Message from PCC

**November 30, 2022**

### **Greetings Members and Friends of Penn Central Conference,**

*I keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:42)*

*Bear fruit worthy of repentance. (Matthew 3:8, NRSV)*

The lectionary readings from the first and second Sundays in Advent are a wake-up call. Both readings speak of preparation, but of different kinds. One is from the end of Matthew and one from the beginning. At the end of Matthew, we read about the coming of the Son of Man on clouds of glory following cataclysmic events here on earth. Chapter 24 in Matthew is a hair-raising read especially when some of the things listed by Jesus are familiar to us. The placement of this reading makes sense when we remember that Advent was originally a penitential season similar to Lent. And in the case of Advent, we were to prepare ourselves for the Second Coming when Jesus would return, and all would face judgment.

The reading for the second Sunday goes back to the beginning of Matthew and paints a vivid picture of John the Baptist and his wild teachings and practices in the desert. While not as cataclysmic as Chapter 24, the passage about John is still a bit unnerving. We may wonder, what does this wild-eyed desert prophet have to do with the God of love we usually hear about? And why all the talk of repentance?

Both passages are about accountability. At the end of Matthew, Jesus' words remind followers to be ready for the coming judgment lest we be asleep when he arrives. The parables in chapters 24 and 25 indicate that the Son of Man will come ready to discern between people as to their faithfulness and prac-

*Continues on back*

## Contact us!

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## 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...

**Salem UCC, Harrisburg**

**Trinity UCC, Hallam**

**Davids UCC, Herndon**

**St. Pauls UCC, Herndon**



tice. The way to be prepared is to live the life Jesus has called us to, which is the hard ethical work of discipleship. And if we back up to the beginning of Matthew, the whole story begins with repentance. John the Baptist's first word is "repent".

So why would accountability – of all things - bookend Jesus' ministry? The writer of Matthew demonstrates that Jesus is the great spiritual teacher. Jesus knows the way we want to be seen by others and knows that self-deception is a fundamental sin. What the ancients knew about human nature has been borne out by recent research showing that we tend to assume ourselves to be "better than most people". Our own shortcomings, mistakes, biases, sin, and judgments are regularly glossed over in comparison to those of others. Yet John the Baptist and Jesus remind us that to prepare to meet God we must begin by examining our own hearts and entering a place of humility and teachableness. That examination of our own hearts works best when done with someone who functions as a compassionate mirror. The role of accountability in discipleship can be very difficult. We fear judgment and condemnation from Jesus (and the church). Yet we also know that humility, especially about ourselves, opens us to receive what God will bring to us. Consider asking yourself some tough advent questions in the next few weeks. Do it with a person you trust. How and in what ways have I been deceiving myself? When have I not lived up to the life Jesus has called me to? What is the root of that? Where is my own ego getting in the way of who God calls me to be? When do I fight repentance?

This is a time of preparation. Be not afraid. May our hearts be opened, examined, and receive the mercy God waits to pour out upon us.

**Peace,**

**Carrie**

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call  
Conference Minister

Looking Ahead:

### "Making All Things New"

#### General Synod 2023

"Making All Things New" will be the theme of the 34th biennial General Synod of the United Church of Christ, scheduled for June 30–July 4, 2023, in Indianapolis.

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ will get back to business a year from now. And it will do so in person.

After an all-virtual experience in 2021, the UCC's biennial national meeting will require all voting delegates to be in Indianapolis in 2023. That's according to the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, the associate general minister who serves as Synod administrator. Delegates and visitors will meet June 30 through July 4 at the Indianapolis Convention Center.

UCC national setting hosts a variety of webinars for clergy and lay people alike. See the upcoming events and register for them online at: <https://www.ucc.org/events/>

