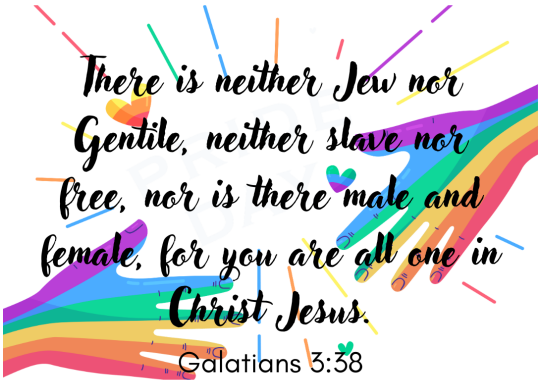
The Keystone Connection

A Message to the Conference

June 02, 2026

Members and Friends of Keystone Conference,



At a church I once served, the pastor's rallying cry was Galatians 3:28. He did not soften it or domesticate it into something poetic and harmless. He meant every word. For him, the verse was a declaration that no one stands outside God's promise or the beloved community. The human labels we cling to, the ones we assign so much value, meaning, and purpose, are not the measures God uses. The categories we sort one another into may feel powerful in our world, but in the eyes of God they ultimately mean nothing. What endures is the truth that every person is held in the same expansive, boundary breaking love revealed in Jesus Christ.

June first means it is Pride Month which is an invitation for us to remember that God's love is not selective, conditional, or reserved for a narrow few. It is embodied, liberating, and poured out on every person without exception. For LGBTQ+ people who have been told that their identity places them outside God's embrace, Pride becomes a sacred act of truth telling. It is a reminder that the God who created us also delights in us, and that the gospel of Jesus Christ is good news for our bodies, our relationships, and our flourishing.

In Christ, we encounter a God who breaks down every barrier used to divide or diminish human beings. Paul's declaration in Galatians 3:28 that in Christ "there is no longer Jew or Greek… slave or free… male and female" is not a call to erase difference but a proclamation that no human category can limit the reach of God's love. For queer and trans people who have been harmed by the weaponization of scripture, this becomes a word of liberation: God refuses to let the world's hierarchies define who belongs.

For many LGBTQ+ people, the church has too often been a place of wounding rather than welcome, a place where the promise of liberation was preached as if it applied only to certain bodies and certain lives. As a queer, postmodern pastor who never expected to find myself in a pulpit, let alone writing these words to an entire conference, I carry both the trauma etched into my own body and the truth inscribed in my own skin: God's call is wider, wilder, and far more generous than the limits some churches try to impose. And because I have lived that truth, I can say with conviction that the gospel's power is found not in gatekeeping but in the expansive, boundary breaking love that insists every person belongs in the beloved community.

Pride Month also calls us to speak honestly. There are churches whose theology restricts God's welcome, whose teaching suggests that liberation is available only to certain people those who fit a particular mold, identity, or way of

being. This is not the gospel Jesus preached. When the church narrows God's love, it does not protect the faith; it betrays it. The good news of Christ is expansive, boundary breaking, and rooted in the flourishing of all God's people.

Pride is celebration, but it is also resurrection. It is the holy insistence that love is stronger than shame, that liberation is God's desire for every person, and that in Christ we are free to live fully, joyfully, and unapologetically as the people God created us to be.

Shannon

Rev. Shannon Garrett-Doege

Coordinator Faith Formation Youth

Keystone Conference UCC

Board of Directors Meeting Report

At the May 18, 2026 meeting, the Board first checked in with Pastor Dave Mears, a Board member, whose congregation suffered the fire loss of their sanctuary. Dave expressed his thanks for all of the outpouring of prayers, concerns, and assistance.

The Board then reviewed ideas from the April visioning session on Marketing and Website suggestions.

The Budget and Finance Committee shared the latest Statement of Financial position prepared by our accounting firm. This new report is being modified to align with budget categories. The Committee has also finished a collating of nearly 50 investment accounts held by the four historic conferences.

We heard a report from the Mission Grants committee that grant applications will be posted on the website for camping and continuing education grants.

We look forward to gathering with hundreds of delegates at the Annual Meeting in June.

Rev. Dr. David H. DeRemer, Moderator

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/