The Keystone Connection

A Message to the Conference

Mya 05, 2026

Members and Friends of Keystone Conference,

I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. (John 14:18)

The Gospel reading from John appointed for May 10 contains one of the most searching and uncomfortable statements Jesus ever makes: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." It is a simple sentence, but not an easy one. We UCCers are often more comfortable discussing belief than obedience. Yet Jesus does not say, "If you love me, you will admire me," or "If you love me, you will attend worship occasionally." He speaks instead about commandments — about an entire way of life.

Just a handful of Jesus' commandments are enough to occupy us for a lifetime: love God with all your heart; love your neighbor; forgive seventy times seven; feed the hungry; welcome the stranger; pray for those who persecute you; love your enemies. That last commandment alone could consume years of spiritual struggle and practice. I fear we sometimes spend more energy on institutional concerns, internal conflicts, or political ideology than on wrestling seriously with the actual commandments of Jesus. Last week, for the first time in 40 years of ministry, I heard a prayer for enemies included in the Prayers of the People at a church I visited. Yet this remains one of the clearest commands Jesus ever gave.

Perhaps we avoid some commandments because we know how demanding they are. They require letting go of grudges, resentments, and hurts that become woven into us. We may find it easier to pray for neighbors than for enemies. Left to ourselves, we quickly discover the limits of our hospitality, generosity, and mercy.

The Christian life is not mastered through occasional exposure. Someone once told me that you cannot become a golfer by taking one lesson a week and never practicing in between. The same is true of discipleship. We are shaped by repetition, habit, failure, correction, and practice. Becoming Christian is not merely agreeing with ideas about Jesus; it is learning, slowly and imperfectly, to live as he taught.

That is why the promise of the Holy Spirit — the Paraclete — matters so much in John's Gospel. Jesus does not command his followers to live a certain way and then abandon them to frustration. He promises the Advocate, the Comforter, the Spirit who teaches, encourages, and remains with us. The commandments of Jesus are impossible as mere moral achievements. They become imaginable only through the continual work of the Spirit within ordinary people like us — a Spirit of truth and love that transforms hearts through prayer, grace, and persistence.

The church will never embody Jesus' commandments perfectly. But perhaps faithfulness begins with taking them seriously enough to struggle with them honestly. To pray for help where we resist. To practice love where it feels costly. To trust that the Holy Spirit is still shaping imperfect people into disciples. And perhaps, step by step, that is how the church becomes recognizable as the body of Christ in the world.

Peace,

Carrie

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call

Transitional Executive Conference Minister

Keystone Conference UCC

Keystone Conference of the United Church of Christ's first Annual Meeting will be held June 5-7 at Millersville University in Millersville. Overnight accommodations will be on campus as well as the DoubleTree Hilton in Lancaster. Registration is now open! Register here: **https://keystoneconference.regfox.com/2026-spring-meeting** (or go to keystoneucc.org and click on the Annual Meeting tab under News & Events.)

Our theme is "Joy at the Table Together" and our centering scripture is Acts 2:46-47 "Every day they met together, breaking bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God." The meeting will include a Service of Consecration for Keystone Conference.

Speakers will include Rev. Dr. Marcia McFee, author of Think Like a Filmmaker: Sensory-Rich Worship for Unforgettable Messages; Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, General Minister and President of the United Church of Christ; Rev. Dr. Mary Luti, author of Do This: Communion for Just and Courageous Living; Rev. Greg Edwards, Executive Director of POWER Interfaith, Secretary Russell Redding, PA Secretary of Agriculture, and Rev. Freeman Palmer, Conference Minister for the Central Atlantic Conference.

50 Days of Easter Food Challenge

A People of the Table Mission Project for Keystone Conference's 1st Annual Meeting

The Challenge: Churches across the Conference are challenged to donate non-perishable food to a local food bank between Easter (04/05/2026) and Pentecost (05/24/2026) and to report the quantities of their donations.

Each church will report its totals (by category) via a web link, and the Conference-wide total will be revealed at the 1st Annual Meeting, June 5–7, 2026. Using categories such as canned fruits and vegetables, cereal, pasta and rice, toiletries, and more will provide an easy-to-visualize picture of the breadth of donations.

Learn more at **keystoneucc.org/people-of-the-table/**

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.