



PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE



Empowering churches to proclaim the reconciling love of Christ.



A Message from PCC

June 8, 2022

Members and friends of Penn Central Conference,

"Forget the former things;
do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing!
Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
I am making a way in the wilderness
and streams in the wasteland." Isaiah 43:18-19

This question has been on my heart and my mind for many years, especially these past 2 years as we have emerged from the ravages of the pandemic. How shall our churches be alive and thrive now and into the 21st century? God needs us, the world needs us, even as we are recovering from our pains and struggles; even as we know pain and struggle. The world is filled with enmity and division, endless violence and war in our country and around the globe. Maybe another way to ask the questions is "How is God calling us NOW to be church? To whom is God calling us? Where is God calling us?"

If we are expecting church to return to how it has been in the past when our churches were teeming with people, including families and children, we will soon be disappointed. "Because we built it" no longer translates into "they will come." During the last 60 years membership and attendance have decreased, fewer families are coming to church, and there is a rise in the unchurched who do not trust institutions, including the institution of the church.

In workshops with small churches, I suggest that God is calling us anew, in ways that we have not known before, in ways that are vital and relevant,

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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 - Walmers UCC, Annville

Salona UCC, Mill Hall

St. Paul's UCC, Schaefferstown

St. Paul's UCC, Selinsgrove



in ways that bring the love of Jesus Christ in the flesh, through us to individuals and families, all ages and orientations; the hungry, the shunned and marginalized, and the oppressed, just as Jesus brought love to these folks. God is calling us to reach out beyond our four walls and meet and greet folks in our neighborhood. God is calling us to join with community partners to reach those most in need.

This past Monday evening our Annual Meeting began with a plenary in which our keynote speaker UCC's Associate General Minister of Global Engagement, the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, presented new ways we engage with mission partners around the world. Missionaries no longer impose their beliefs on those they are called to serve. In the 21st century they are partners who listen closely to the people, work in collaboration with them to discern their needs, and help them to heal and move forward, or cope in impossible situations. The main purpose of mission partners is to love with the love of Jesus, even as they are the hands and feet of Jesus.

And it makes me wonder: what about mission here? There is a mission field right here in our backyards. How do we find new ways to partner with our neighbors, with anyone who is seeking meaning and purpose, relief and comfort? If we consider Rev. Thompson's model, we first listen closely: to the spiritual but not religious, beleaguered families too tired for Sunday morning, GenZ and millennials who don't have any interest in the institutional church; the homeless, hungry, shunned and marginalized; the oppressed. We reach out with one heart, honoring the diversity of experiences and let them know God and we care. Just as Rev. Thompson outlined a stance of listening carefully and partnering, right where the people live, we need to take the same stance. Listen carefully, get to know, develop relationships, work with partners in our greater communities to help folks to make lasting and life-giving decisions.

There is hope, there is vision for the future as we contemplate God's words to us in Isaiah 19: "Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!" But, God, we may cry, what new

thing are you doing? And the promise of God is as good as it always has been: "Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland."

Beloved, as you attend Annual Meeting workshops this week and attend the worship/business meeting on Saturday, listen for our still speaking God who is giving us a vision for the future. Wonder and discern together in your churches the new thing God has for you as Christ's church of the 21st century. Seek to be of one mind and one heart in the love of Jesus, honoring your own diversity, and with God's help and guidance, bringing the love of Jesus—the hands and feet of Jesus—to the people in our backyard of Penn Central Conference.

May God give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts to know, and spirits that discern the wisdom and guidance of our God. And when we speak, may our words always be preceded by love.

May you know richly the love of God through Jesus Christ,

Marisa

The Rev. Dr. Marisa Laviola, Ph.D.

Associate Conference Minister

Penn Central Conference

HC Spirit Week - What's in a Name?

"Naming and Claiming Who God Made Us to Be"

Saturday, August 6 through Friday, August 12

Camp Mt. Luther

<https://penncentralconference.regfox.com/hc-spirit-week>

Learn more about camping opportunities here: <https://pccucc.org/outdoor-ministry/>