



PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

...equipping and empowering congregations and clergy for the declaration and demonstration of the courageous love of Christ!

A Message from PCC

Hartman Center

October 02, 2019

Dear friends of Penn Central Conference,

I spend quite a bit of time on the road. When I'm driving around this beautiful state I am often struck by the sheer number of small churches. In the United States there is at least one church present in every hamlet and many more located outside of towns. Some of the churches I see are no longer open as churches. They may be shuttered or turned into a private residence or repurposed for a community center or a real estate office. I often wonder what happened to the individuals who attended when it was a church. Where are their descendants now?

Some of you may know that the majority of Americans attend small churches of less than 100 members. This makes sense – social psychology research shows that people can keep track of and function well within groups of about 100. And churches of less than 100 members can and do thrive. Thriving is a holistic concept and involves several aspects. Within thriving small churches the congregation has a vital sense of their own Christian mission. They know and embrace their unique role is within the wider community. They uphold an outward focus. They care for their own while also sharing Christ's healing power in the wider area with those who are, for example, hungry, victims of disaster, struggling with addiction, or needing educational support. A church that only takes care of its own has forsaken its primary duty: to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and follow in his ways.

A thriving church also prays – for its own ministry and for the world. And it practices hospitality by welcoming the stranger. I know of one very small church that was reluctant to hold ESL classes (a ministry the pastor had suggested) because the members feared that the people they were serving might "steal the stained

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Penn Central Conference's FIRST Men's Retreats

This promises to be the beginning of a new tradition in the Conference or maybe a first step in a Men's movement!

Seasons of a Man's Life is the theme of the January 17-19 Men's Retreat at Hartman Center. Using the familiar text of Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (To everything there is a season), the men will have an opportunity to experience the phrases of that text in multiple ways (talks, workshops, interactive displays, films, and worshipful moments.)

THE IMMEDIATE NEED is for anyone interested, to join the planning team at the next meeting, Tuesday, October 8 (7 p.m.) at the Conference Office in Harrisburg. If you or a layperson(s) from your church would come just let me know at abushnell@aol.com The cost of the retreat will be \$120. Online reservations are now available at the Hartman Center Website. The Retreat begins Friday, Jan. 17 at 7 p.m. and ends Sunday, Jan. 19 early afternoon.

Fall Festival

October 12th, 2019 10:00AM-3:00PM

Mark your calendar and join us for live music, memories, games, and fun. Events include a rededication of our renovated Craft Shop. And this year, we're introducing Rachel Hartman's own locally famous chicken and waffles! Come get it while it lasts.

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...

St. Paul's UCC, Sacramento

Salem - Walmers UCC, Indiantown Gap

Salona UCC, Salona

St. Paul's UCC, Schaefferstown

Message from the Conference cont'

glass windows." That is not an example of a thriving church. Living out gospel values as a community can be deeply challenging. This is the cost we willingly bear as the cost of discipleship, because we know that living this disciple-life connects us to a well of joy that is beyond what the world offers.

Thriving churches are focused on the here and now. They are not beholden to the past, although they might celebrate it. But more importantly, they are not beholden to the future. They are not clinging to questions of their future or what will happen to them. Instead, they recognize that with the time they have they must respond to the call of Jesus in every way they can. And they trust that God is with them now and into the future.

Finally, thriving churches are not necessarily growing in numbers. When I meet with small churches they often ask about growth. They ask me, how can we grow? As if growth in numbers is the most important aspect of ministry. I encourage them to set aside talk of numerical growth. After all, in some communities this will not be possible due to demographic and historical reasons. However, thriving is possible, no matter the size. A church with a clear sense of mission and purpose rooted in the transformative power of the gospel has the potential to bring living water to those who are dying of thirst.

Look around you. Who is in need of living water? Remarkably, once we focus on that question our concern with numbers recedes. And we can show the world how many of our churches are small AND mighty.

Peace,

Carrie

Coming Events:

Fall Festival
October 12th
11:00AM—5:00PM
Dreisbach United Church of Christ
875 Dreisbach Church Rd, Lewisburg, PA

Organ Spooktacular
October 13th
4:00PM
Lancaster Theological Seminary
Santee Chapel
555 West James St, Lancaster, PA 17603

Upcoming Events

Mission Central's 5th annual 5K Run/Walk

October 26th

9:00AM (Registration begins at 7:30AM)
<https://missioncentral.org/events/>
5 Pleasant View Drive
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

If your church isn't already participating—join a CROP Walk near you for the 50th Anniversary! Find one at <http://www.crophungerwalk.org>

Check out other upcoming events on our website:
<https://pccucc.org/calendar/>

Read our full weekly eNews:
<https://pccucc.org/enews-archive/>

Sign up for our weekly eNews:
Link at bottom of any page on www.pccucc.org

More From Hartman Center

A Marriage Enrichment Weekend - "It's a Wonderful Life"

Friday, November 8, 2019 at 7 p.m. - Sunday, November 10, 2019 at 3 p.m. register online.

Fall Women's Retreat: Living Well—In The Moment

Friday the 15th at 7 p.m. to Sunday the 17th at 11 a.m.
Leaders: Sue D'heedene and Winnie Kowalik. Register online

Contact us!

PCC Office Staff

Rev. Carrie Call, PhD - *Transitional Conference Minister*
email: ccall@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-652-1560 ex. 12

Rev. Nora Driver Foust - *Associate Conference Minister*
email: nfoust@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-652-1560 ex.13

Rev. Patricia Dodds - *Coordinator of Camps/Retreats/Youth Ministry*
email: program@hartmancenter.com / Phone: 570-506-0677

Scott Watts - *Facilitator of Care to Clergy & Clergy Families*
email: swatts@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-652-1560 ex. 15

C. Paul Keller - *Office Manager*
email: pkeller@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-652-1560 ex. 14

Laura Dalton - *Administrative Assistant/Search & Call Assistant*
email: ldalton@pccucc.org / Phone: 717-652-1560 ex. 10