The Keystone Connection

A Message to the Conference

June 16, 2026

Members and Friends of Keystone Conference,



As I begin to look over the lectionary passages for this coming week in preparation for this message and my sermon, one verse recalled images of our recent annual meeting:

"*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me.*" (Matthew 10:40)

As I think back over those few days together, I don't really remember motions passed, reports presented, or workshops attended. I remember the welcome and the tables. Round tables in plenary where strangers became colleagues, perhaps friendships began. Communion tables where we remembered whose we are. Meal tables filled with conversation, laughter, and stories. Workshop tables where ideas were shared freely. Even hallway conversations that felt like an extension of the table. These were all places where people made room for one another.

Our theme was Joy at the Table Together. Looking back, I know those gathered experienced more than a theme. I wonder if we experienced a glimpse of how God forms a community. We live in a culture that often expects transformation to happen quickly. But the life of the church has always been different. Jesus didn't build his community through grand gestures alone. He built it meal by meal, conversation by conversation, welcome by welcome. Healthy relationships take time. We have been Keystone Conference for only six months. Annual Meeting showed glimpses of that as time well spent.

Perhaps that is why his words resonated so vividly for me, "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me." Every act of hospitality becomes an opportunity to encounter Christ. Every seat offered at the table, every chair added, every new relationship begun, every story received with care becomes part of God's patient work of shaping us into the Body of Christ.

We are still learning who we are and will be as the Keystone Conference. Communities are not assembled overnight. They are cultivated through shared worship, shared mission, shared meals, and the countless ordinary moments in which we choose to make room for one another.

I invite you to think of ways to connect with nearby congregations – and then do it. Perhaps you could choose a partner congregation somewhere further away in Keystone and share cards, stories, possibly even pulpit exchanges in planned ways to get to know, and truly welcome, one another across our Keystone Conference.

As summer carries us along different rhythms in our local churches, may we continue practicing what we experienced together. May our tables in outdoor pavilions, fellowship halls, church basements, coffee shops, or local parks remain places where Christ is welcomed, neighbors become friends, and the Holy Spirit quietly continues the uniting work that has only just begun.

Shalom,

Nora

Rev. Dr. Nora Foust
Transitional Regional Conference Minister
Keystone Conference UCC

Global Missions Notes: Germany

As I write this, I am sitting in the Berlin airport waiting for my gate to be posted for my flight home after four wonderful days with the missionary arm of the church in Berlin and vicinity, the Berliner Missionswerk. We just spent time in prayer, study and discussion about how to deal with right wing populism and extremism in the world today, and Jes Kast and I were able to bring some wisdom from the Keystone Conference on navigating churches where not everyone is on the same page, theologically. Though it was intense, and I am tired, I return home with friendships and relationships renewed, new ones established and deepened, some great new insights, and with a good basis for taking this topic further in a month with our friends and colleagues at our colloquy.

The relationships we have with the German church are our most active. We meet as equals and colleagues across the miles, for prayer together and study. We discover that our churches, especially our small and rural churches, are surprisingly similar, both in demographics and in the issues presented within them. We find that our liturgies function well a quarter of the world away, and we enjoy time together. Our relationships have informed and supported sabbaticals, provide a bi-annual colloquy, like this summer's, and have energized the younger clergy in our circles. Discussions during this meeting resulted in a plan for a shared study, probably in the Fall, of the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The Keystone Conference has relationships with three churches in Germany. The Evangelical Church of Berlin-Brandenburg and Silesian Upper Lusitania is the most urban of these, and is centered in Germany's dynamic capital, Berlin. The Evangelical Church in Anhalt is largely rural, and located deep in the Eastern portion of the country, a couple hours from Berlin. Visits there take you to places that most American Tourists miss, and also near the heart of Luther Country. and the Church of the Rhineland lies among Reformed Christians in the West of the country, along the scenic Rhine River.

You are always invited to learn more, to join us for a single day (Monday, July 27) at our upcoming Colloquy, to peruse our page on the Conference web site (https://keystoneucc.org/global-ministry/), to talk to us during any conference event, to contact those who participate more fully in these ministries, or even to join the Global Missions Team or the Germany working group (contact links on the web page).

Rev. Julie Holm