The Keystone Connection

A Message to the Conference

September 29, 2026

Members and Friends of Keystone Conference,

"The Lord appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance to of his tent in the heat of the day." (Genesis 18:1, NRSV)

Put seventy people from across the UCC in a room for a discussion about the identity of the denomination and what would you expect to happen? Maybe seventy answers to the question, "Who are we?"

I traveled to Cleveland this past week to do exactly that. More than seventy people representing a wide range of the denomination gathered for a day and a half of intensive conversation about the diversity within the United Church of Christ and how we might converse, work, and thrive across difference. This was A Tent of Our Own Making, the third gathering of its kind exploring the large tent that holds the United Church of Christ. Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson has been at the center of this project from its beginning.

As you'll see in the picture above, we had quite a crew from the Keystone Conference. In fact, more people attended from Keystone than from any other Conference. It was a source of pride to see us represented across so many lines: Faithful & Welcoming to Open and Affirming; liberal theologies to more orthodox ones; rural, suburban, and urban churches. We were a diverse group, and all of us participated deeply in the conversations.

Rev. Philip Peacock, president of the World Communion of Reformed Churches, launched our time with a remarkable keynote address exploring tent imagery in scripture, particularly Genesis 18:1–8, when God visits Abraham at his tent by the oaks of Mamre. He invited us to reflect on how "host" and "guest" appear in scripture, the power dynamics involved, and the question: "Who is host, who is guest, and are we willing to trade places?" That question stayed with us as we considered how we encounter one another across our differences.

Dr. Monica Schaap Pierce of Christian Churches Together pushed us further, asking the practical question of how we remain in relationship with people who offend us, disagree with us, or are radically different from us in worship, theology, or church structure. Her experiences in ecumenical dialogue offered living examples of how such relationships can be built and sustained.

One comment from Rev. Peacock particularly stayed with me: "All tents require tension."

Tensions certainly exist within the UCC, and not only around familiar topics such as race or human sexuality. We do ourselves a disservice when we fail to recognize differences of geography, culture, history, theology, and church experience. These differences exist within the Keystone Conference as well.

Perhaps that is part of what makes Keystone such an interesting and dynamic place to serve—challenging at times, certainly, but also rich with possibility. The goal is not to eliminate every tension. A tent without tension, after all, cannot stand. The question is whether we can learn to hold those tensions faithfully while continuing to make room for one another.

In the coming weeks, you will hear more about A Tent of Our Own Making and from others who participated in this important conversation.

Peace,

Carrie
Rev. Dr. Carrie Call
Transitional Executive Conference Minister
Keystone Conference, United Church of Christ

Christmas Card Project

Greetings. This is Rev. Jeffrey Mensendiek, mission co-worker serving with Common Global Ministries in Japan. I am writing to see if your church is interested to join in the Christmas Card Project with our partner churches in Japan this year. This project was started in 2012 following the great earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that devasted northeastern Japan. At the time, I was serving in Sendai, and my workplace became a national disaster relief center for our partner church, the Kyodan. Global Ministries was deeply involved with the Kyodan at that time to meet the needs of survivors, and accompany the churches that sustained damages. We have strong historical ties to churches there, and this project represents an effort to connect our churches through prayer during the Advent season. For the past fourteen years we have had an average of 40 UCC and Disciples churches join in reaching out globally through prayer. Even as we may feel overwhelmed by the effects of natural and or "man-made" disasters, God calls the church to reach out and care and connect in the name of Christ.

If you decide to participate, I will be asking you to do two things. First, to send a Christmas card to one or two churches in early December, and second, to lift these churches up in prayer sometime during Advent. Once I have a firm count of the number of churches participating, I will match you with Japanese churches and let you know the contact information. If you have participated in this project before, I will be sure to match you with the same churches you had before. Our Japanese partners have asked that we continue this project, and I am encouraged to see how the Holy Spirit is leading us in new patterns of partnership. In January of 2024, when wildfires swept through the Los Angeles area, and one of our UCC churches was burned to the ground, the Tohoku Kyoku (name of the Northeastern Conference of the Kyodan) collected an offering and sent it to the Southern California Nevada Conference UCC. I was deeply encouraged by this gesture, and it showed how our ties across the seas can be truly uplifting.

Please discuss this with your congregation and let me know by October 19th (MON) whether you will participate or not. I will then send you the necessary information pertaining to the partner churches by November 13th (FRI).

Yours in Christ
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