From June 30th-July 4th 2023, myself and a couple dozen other delegates and visitors from Penn Central Conference attended the 34th General Synod of the UCC in Indianapolis. This was the national gathering that currently occurs every two years but a bylaw change was passed to move it to every three years starting after 2025. The theme this year was “Making All Things New”. We had a total of 736 delegates and approximately 2000 people including visitors and other guests. I could write a detailed report about each resolution (more to come about how we can implement resolutions in the coming weeks), the results of each piece of business done, the worship services, and the food and fellowship that I had with the other delegates but I am choosing to reflect on something more specific. My biggest takeaway from the 34th General Synod was how we in the UCC care for one another.

I attended a prayer walk to the state capitol in Indianapolis led by Indiana congresspeople and members of the UCC national staff. A few hundred of the attendees marched and prayed for God to watch over all people but specifically included in our prayers were LGBTQ, the homeless, people with disabilities, migrants, and care for God’s creation.

We also heard from many speakers that gave us insight on how to care for others as well as ourselves. The newly elected first female General Minister and President of the UCC, the Rev Dr. Karen Georgia Thompson, spoke to us about “widening the table and widening the door” to allow for all to be included. I’m just hoping we are able to have discussions about that at both a national and conference level so that everyone along the political spectrum feels heard and cared for. We also heard from outgoing General Minister and President, the Rev Dr. John Dorhauer who reminded us, as always, that “God envisions a world in which you matter”.

We had some 1 minute testimonies from many of the attendees on a variety of topics. I spoke out on youth involvement in our churches because I feel this is an issue of paramount importance and is vital to the future of our church. I also want to highlight another testimony because it shows how we care for one another. There was a large quilt hanging in the back of our meeting hall with the names of people who had died from AIDS. A pastor from the Florida conference got up to remind people to check out the quilt but became too emotional to finish his speech. We would later find out he lost his partner 40 years ago to AIDS. The next delegate in line got up to speak but, instead of promoting her book like she intended, she reminded us that each of the lives on that quilt were a life cut short and a “book to be written”. It brings to mind something that was said by keynote speaker Nadia Bolz Weber when she referred to the men who lowered their friend through the roof to be healed by Jesus. She pointed out that “Sometimes we are the ones lowering our friends down to Jesus and sometimes we are the ones being lowered down”.

I will admit that there were several times this weekend that made me quite emotional. As I was sitting in my hotel room on July 4th looking at the fireworks outside of my window, I was reflecting back on the last 5 days, my place in the UCC, and what God was making new in my life. As I was doing this, the last words my grandfather said to my mother popped into my head, “It was all very beautiful”. My hope for the UCC is that moving forward there is truly a place for everyone at the table and that everyone feels heard. I hope, looking back at the end of my life, I am able to say I was part of something that was “all very beautiful”.