



# PENN CENTRAL CONFERENCE



Celebrating 60 Years of Ministry

## A Message from PCC

**November 16, 2022**

### **Greetings Members and Friends of Penn Central Conference,**

*Therefore encourage one another and build up each other...rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

*(1 Thessalonians 5:11a, 16-18, NRSV)*

Yesterday I was part of a meeting on Zoom with our General Minister and President John Dorhauer and other Conference Ministers. Our GMP asked us what was heaviest on our minds as we look at a new living-with-Covid reality. Several things were raised, and I want to share the top two concerns so that you know what's happening in the wider church – and what I pray our response will be.

Numerous clergy across the denomination have reported that their congregations are not returning to in-person worship. Naturally, some members have returned and there are some clergy who have not felt this particular sting. For others, this is a source of confusion, hurt, and even despair. The reasons for the lack of return are mixed. Some still feel under threat of Covid (particularly older members) while others have adapted to a new way of life that doesn't include church. The reasons are many. The face of our worship life is different now. In some places, local church pastors have prayed for God to call them to a new (secular) vocation. Others are retiring early or seeking calls other than a local parish. The changes to in-person worship have affected our leaders deeply.

While the 'delayed return' is a recent development, the other topic raised has been building for some time and now appears to have

*Continues on back*

## 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...

**Emmanuel UCC, Hanover**

**Grace UCC, Hanover**

**St. David's (Shermans) UCC, Hanover**

**St. Paul's (Dubs) UCC, Hanover**



reached a tipping point. I am referring to the clergy shortage and the difficulty we face in finding and securing clergy for our churches. Available (and interested) clergy profile numbers have bottomed out. Several colleagues agreed this was the primary crisis in their Conferences. When the Conference and Associate Conference Ministers meet in two weeks in Atlanta, we will find a way to make sure this topic receives the attention it requires. In the meantime, however, I want to acknowledge this is a crisis for our Conference as well. There are multiple forces that bring us to this place: decrease in numbers overall, various changes in seminaries, decline of interest in parish ministry, and the role of the church in the wider culture, to name a few. It is a complicated problem.

This information is not meant to depress or dissuade you. Instead, I want you to know that you are not alone if you have felt discouraged, confused, conflicted, or even despairing about the church and your role in it. There will be no quick fix. However, your PCC staff members are deeply committed to seeking root causes, encouraging deep conversation, providing needed help, and navigating through these troubled waters. We are joined by our other Pennsylvania colleagues who are also committed to seeking, encouraging, providing, and navigating. What we experience here in Penn Central is a microcosm of the entire denomination. We are not alone. You are not alone.

In closing I ask three things of you: First, pray for one another and for our churches. Bring the state of the church into your daily prayer and Sunday worship. Pray for perseverance, hope, insight, and inspiration. Pray for our clergy by name. Pray for churches searching for a new pastor. Pray for the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Second, please tell your clergy and clergy colleagues that their ministry matters. Thank them for how they have touched your life or helped to sustain you. Pull in closer to one another and intentionally build each other up. Ask them how they are and if there are ways you can help. Bake bread for them, share meals together, read scripture in preparation for Sunday. Demonstrate in person that we are not alone.

Finally, do not be afraid. With Jesus as our teacher and guide, we will lean into the challenges we face. Do not shy away from the truth about what is happening in the church. God calls us to encounter the present and the future without fear. In the place of fear then, let us pray ourselves forward, step by step, trusting completely in God's providence and the presence of Christ beside us. Building on that trust, there is nothing we cannot face together as God's people.

**Peace,**

**Carrie**

Rev. Dr. Carrie Call  
Conference Minister  
Penn Central Conference

**Looking ahead:**

### **ADVENT DAY APART at The Wittel Farm**

December 3

We don't like to wait for anything, and especially Christmas. With all its secular attraction, this holiday is often a focus on over-indulgence, and too often neglected is the best gift of all... one worth our waiting. You are invited to The Wittel Farm for a day apart from the busyness of life for prayer and contemplation as we journey toward the celebration of Christmas. \$15 registration includes lunch.

More Information - <https://www.lutherancamping.org/event/advent-day-apart-2022/>

**"Making All Things New"**

### **General Synod 2023**

"Making All Things New" will be the theme of the 34th biennial General Synod of the United Church of Christ, scheduled for June 30–July 4, 2023, in Indianapolis.

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ will get back to business a year from now. And it will do so in person.