

CAC 62 ANNUAL MEETING
PROGRAM AGENDA (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Friday September 25, 2026

9A-12P - Registration Open

2-6P Registration Open

2:30 -3:30P - Workshops - Various Locations

4-5:30P - Plenary 1 - Presidential Room - Welcomes, Introductions, Recognition of Special Guests

6-7:30P Dinner

7:30P Open Mic - Presidential Room

Saturday September 26th 2026

7- 8:30A - Breakfast

8:30-10:00A Plenary 2 - Presidential Room - EKM Covenant, State of the Conference, 2027 Budget

9-11A - Registration Open

10:00 -10:30A Break

10:30 - 11:30A Workshops - Various Locations

11:45A-1P Lunch

1-2P Plenary 3- Presidential Room - Worship, Preacher Rev. Mia McClain

2:-2:15P Break

2:15- 3:15P - Presidential Room - Celebrations, CAC Board Nominations and Installation of Board Members

3:15-3:30P Closing Communion and Benediction



STANDING RULES FOR THE 62nd ANNUAL MEETING
OF THE
THE CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE

1. Recognition
A speaker shall state his or her name and the church and Association he or she represents.

All speakers who intend during plenary sessions to speak on business before the assembly must be registered for the meeting, and hold credentials in good standing.

2. Resolutions
The Board of Directors, in keeping with the Conference Resolutions process, shall recommend to the Plenum the schedule for the presentation and consideration of resolutions and the allotment of time for debate thereon.

3. Hearings
The Board of Directors will establish hearings to consider business coming before the meeting as appropriate.

The facilitator of each hearing will see to it that all changes and amendments recommended from that which was officially distributed will be provided in writing and distributed through e-mail, as available, for all delegates no later than 9:00 a.m. on the morning of the plenary during which action will be taken.

There will be a minimum of three hours from the scheduled ending time of the hearing provided before action may be taken on any revised resolutions or business.

4. Debate
On any questions where debate time has not been allotted by special order or by unanimous consent, the speech by the mover of an initial motion shall be limited to five minutes. All other statements on the motion

shall be limited to two minutes each. No member may speak a second time on a motion or subject under consideration until all other members desiring to speak have been heard.

The parliamentarian or a member appointed by the moderator will serve as timekeeper for all speakers. When time is called, the microphones will be muted.

Separate microphones will be identified for delegates to speak in favor of a motion and in opposition of a motion. A third microphone will be available for incidental motions.

No amendments will be made from the plenary floor.

The Moderator may decline to recognize any motion or demand for the Order of the Day, or motion to adjourn that would have the effect of terminating debate while delegates are still seeking recognition.

5.. Nominations
No nomination shall be made until the consent of the nominee has been secured.

6. Agenda
The Agenda shall be presented by the Board of Directors. Items may be added to the agenda of a Plenary by submission to the President of the Board of Directors or the Conference Minister before 7:00 am of the day of that Plenary; recommendation by the Board; and approval by a two-thirds vote of the Plenum.

7. Press at Annual Meeting
a. Spokespersons for the Conference: The Chair of the Board, Conference Ministry Team.
b. Access to the floor: Is permitted without being obtrusive (e.g. no camera on the stage)
c. Interviews: May take place outside of the plenary room after the business is completed
d. Identification: Visible press passes provided by the Conference must be worn at all times

Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ
61st Annual Meeting
Little River United Church of Christ, Woodburn, VA
Letting Down Our Nets: Catching Possibilities

Friday, October 24, 2025 – Plenary 1 – 2:00 pm

As the delegates, visitors and guests gathered for the 61st Annual Meeting, Dr. Robert Jefferson provided rousing piano music which included many well-known hymns.

Karson Langenfelder, a member of Zion Evangelical Lutheran United Church of Christ in Baltimore, MD and Vice-President of the Central Atlantic Board of Directors called the meeting to order and after thanking Dr. Jefferson, welcomed everyone, those present in the Sanctuary and those attending online via Zoom.

Rev. Nada Sellers led the gathering in a Call to Community which was written by Rev. Katie Penick (Catoctin).

Rev. Michael Lonergan (Chesapeake) read the Scripture, Luke 5:1-11.

Rev. Michael Vanacore (Potomac) shared a Theological Reflection inviting all to listen for God's voice in other's and in situations, that we might all cast our nets into the deep abundance of God.

The closing hymn which was sung was "Launch Out Into the Deep."

Following Worship, Rev. Dr. Shelli Poe, Pastor at Little River UCC, brought words of welcome to the gathering, including a brief history of the congregation and the land it now enjoys.

Elder Robert "Bobby" Faison, President of the Central Atlantic Conference Board of Directors also shared words of welcome and some opening remarks.

The Moderator, next introduced the Annual Meeting Parliamentarian, Rev. James DeBoer who shared some procedural instructions.

The Moderator then asked the Conference Office Administrator, Ms. Ka Lam, the Registrar for the Annual Meeting to report on the registration numbers for the meeting. Ms. Lam reported that 167 persons, including 92 clergy delegates, 68 lay delegates, 1 visitor, and 6 Conference Staff members were registered for the meeting. She said that based on the CAC Bylaws this satisfied the quorum requirement. Moderator Karson declared a quorum for the duration of the meeting. He then invited Bethany Fuss (Potomac) to lead the gathering in the Passing of the Peace.

Ms. Fuss came forward and led the Passing of the Peace, which included singing "Sweet, Sweet Spirit."

Elder Faison then came forward and moved that the 61st Annual Meeting Agenda, the minutes of the 60th Annual Meeting and the Standing Rules be accepted. He then invited any discussion.

The motion was approved.

Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice, Associate Conference Minister, came forward to introduce several special guests attending the meeting. She then introduced the following guests:

1. Heather Moyer, marketing and Communications associate, UCC Cornerstone Fund
2. John Linzey, President/Chief Executive Officer, Generations United Federal Credit Union
3. Rev. Rachel MacDonald, Generosity Officer for the Office of Philanthropy, Technology, Identity, and Communication of the United Church of Christ.
4. Jill White, Lead Mission Interpreter, UCC Church Building and Loan Fund
5. Rev. Michael Neuroth, Director, Office of Public Policy and Advocacy, United Church of Christ

Rev. Simpson-Rice moved that these guests be granted voice throughout the course of this Annual Meeting. After being seconded, this motion was voted on and passed.

Each of the guests then shared briefly about their work. Following their sharing Moderator Karson invited a representative from Homestretch to speak about their work. Homestretch was the Annual Meeting mission partner.

Following the presentation, Moderator Karson invited Rev. Holly Jackson (Associate Conference Minister) to lead the body in a celebration of all the ministers who have come into the Central Atlantic Conference in the past year. The new ministers celebrated were:

Rev. Jamal Calloway, Plymouth cong. UCC
Rev. Nada Sellers, Holmdel UCC
John Sampson, Glen Ridge Congregational
Leah McCollough, Union Congregational
Paul Cook, Grace UCC
Jared Rice and Adam Basham, St. John's
Michael Basevich, ??
Kyle Powderly, Christ Reformed UCC
Roger Wilmer, Emmanuel Baust

Following that celebration, Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice led the body in a celebration of CAC clergy anniversaries. Those anniversaries included:

2020	5 yrs	Erin Burnette
		Lindsay Franklin
		Mia McClain
		Kaeley McEvoy
		Daniel Ricketts
		Jessica Townsley
		Mahogany Thomas
		Paula Whitacre
2015	10 yrs	Emily Labrecque
		Duane Romberger
		Ron Verblauuw
2010	15 yrs	Kimberly Banks-Brown
		Karen Byrne
		James Estes
		Amanda Hopkins
		Katie Penick
		Sandra Price
2005	20 yrs	Courtlandt Buchanan
		Diane Ford
		Amy Dows
		Diana Gomez de Molina
		Lee Hill Jr.
		Erin Snell
		Craig Sparks
		George Walker
		Matthew Williams
		Ellen Witco
2000	20 yrs	Gayle Bach-Watson
		Pat Barth
		David Beeson
		Ashley Goff
		Marilyn Heishman
		Bev Lewis
		Dan Lundquist
		Kyle Powderly
		Clara Young
1995	30 yrs	Scott Hirano
		Robin Hoffman
		Theodore Randall
		W. John Stieler
		Lisa Vineyard
1990	35 yrs	Martha Eidmann- Hicks
		Terry Fitzgerald
		Gwendolyn London
		Judy Zingaro
1985	40 yrs	Jeffrey Maszal

		Memrie McKay-Cook
1980	45 yrs	Linda Carder
		Jeff Dull
		Bruce Epperly
		Graylan Hagler
		Mike Hoffarth
		Hugh Nash
		Amy Schultz
		Mark Wakefield
		Kathi Wolfe
1975	50 yrs	William Griggs
		Steven Jones
		Carolyn Roberts
1970	55 yrs	Hamilton Brown
		Paul Grosjean
		Phillip Moore
		Jeffrey Stinehelfer
1965	60 yrs	Charles McCullough
		John Silassy
		George Stein Jr
1960	65 yrs	Richard Bayard
		William Lutz Jr
		Christian Tirre

Following the celebration, Rev. Simpson-Rice led the gathering in singing, “Launch Out Into the Deep.” The plenary then went into recess. The attendees were then invited to join one of the two workshops being offered.

The Plenary continued after the Workshops. Moderator Karson invited several of the CAC’s delegates to General Synod to share a report. Rev. Chance Martinez, Mr. Bradley Thomas, Rev. Kirk Johnson and Rev. Nancy Mack reported.

Following that report, the Central Atlantic Conference’s Movement for Palestinian Solidarity shared an update on their advocacy work. This group was formerly called PIN. The representatives, Maryn Goodson and Emily Parker, spoke about the recent pronouncement on Genocide in Palestine that was approved by the most recent General Synod.

After the Palestinian Solidarity report, those who signed up for SpeakOuts came forward to share.

The first plenary was closed with a prayer of grace for our meal together by Rev. Anne Findlay-Chamberlain (Shenandoah).

Saturday, October 25, 2025

Plenary 2 – 9:00 am

Elder Robert "Bobby" Faison, member of the Community Church of Washington DC and President of the Central Atlantic Conference Board of Directors, opened the meeting inviting everyone to give thanks to God with a resounding "Hallelujah." He welcomed everyone and gave a thank you for the tech team, especially Craig Stapert. He then invited everyone to rise to sing the Annual Meeting theme song, "Launch Out into the Deep."

Rev. Dr. Christine Wiley (Potomac) then came forward and shared an opening reflection with the gathering.

Following the reflection, Rev. Craig Peterson, Associate Conference Minister came forward to celebrate churches that had become ONA congregations since the last annual meeting. Centenary/Open Door United Church of Christ became ONA this past year. Rev. Peterson also shared the Rev. Michael Neuroth was honored at General Synod this summer for his "holy refusal to remain silent."

After that celebration, the gathering received a video greeting from the General Minister and President, and Chief Executive Officer of the United Church of Christ, Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson.

Moderator Bobby then shared some remarks about the work of the CAC Board of Directors. Among the things he highlighted were the affirmation of Rev. Holly Jackson as Associate Conference Minister, the sale of Grace Reformed Church and redevelopment of Lincoln Temple's property in DC. The Board has sought to work with transparency and welcome, inviting anyone with interest and gifts to share to join any of the Board's Working Groups without a need to be a member of the Board of Directors.

Conference Minister, Rev. Freeman Palmer, then delivered his State of the Conference Address. Rev. Freeman gave thanks for being present and able to stand as a testimony that God is still in the healing business. He spoke of the mission of the Central Atlantic Conference proposing that in the words of our theme, our mission is to all cast out our nets into the deep waters, waters that are uncertain, perhaps dangerous. Rev. Freeman assured the body that God has the power still to bring about an amazing catch. The numbers are down in our Conference as we've gone from 22,000 members to 16,000 members. This shrinkage is not unique to us. There is a broader shift in our culture. People in our communities are grappling with the question of whether the church is even relevant for today. If the church won't go deeper, maybe they don't need or want to be a part of it. People too often are looking for immediate responses, immediate gratification and when we try to provide that, we just tire ourselves out. But Simon Peter let out his nets, not for anyone else, but for Jesus. We are called to listen for God's word and to let down our nets in response to God. Our mission never was and never will be defined by the number of our congregants, size of our buildings, status

of our balance sheet, whether we cross every “t” and dot every “i” of our bylaws. Our mission is dependent on listening to our Still-Speaking God and being courageous enough to let down our nets, even when we don’t think it will work. Rev. Freeman assured the body that churches are renewing and reinvigorating their music. They are changing their Worship time. Some have sold their building to pursue new possibilities. Through the Trinity Trust Grants, the Conference partners with churches that are letting out their nets to do new things to bring in a new catch. Citing Jesus words about Caesar and God in Matthew 2, Rev. Palmer said that we as Christians can never compromise on our responsibility to the spiritual realm. What is happening in the political realm currently is not only concerning, but deeply troubling as these policies are hurting people both locally and globally. Rev. Freeman reminded the body that as the church, we need to remember to follow Jesus in these troubling times, to witness to Jesus. “Jesus was a social reformer and a political agitator and to the religious authorities of his day a heretic. . . .,” he said. We are called to do the same. Rev. Palmer shared Richard Rohr’s conviction that “Compassion constitutes a radical form of resistance. It denounces that the hurt is to be taken seriously. . . .” The hurt is not abnormal. Rev. Palmer reminded those present that resistance is one way we follow Jesus in these times. Jesus spoke truth to power. We cannot be silent in this time. Speaking up is another way that we follow Jesus. Showing up at rallies and marches is speaking up. Our witness is counter-cultural, he said. The witness of the church always has been, but our counter-cultural witness is also salvific in these times. Rev. Freeman shared that he recently learned that commercial fishing nets are quite large. It would take a team of people to cast such a net into the deep. Rev. Freeman highlighted Conference staff and others who do great work as well as the Board of Directors, but we need the whole Conference to cast this net. Rev. Freeman concluded his address suggesting that we could be a guiding light, a source of hope, a force for justice, just maybe if we commit to casting down our net together in response to God’s voice and God’s call to action, that supported by the Holy Spirit, we might catch the possibilities that God has for us today, tomorrow and forever.

Following the Conference Minister’s Address, Mrs. Sue Myers, member of Trinity UCC in Manchester, MD and Treasurer of the Central Atlantic Conference, came forward to present the 2026 Budget for the Central Atlantic Conference. Following her presentation of the proposed budget, she moved that the 2026 Operating Budget of the Central Atlantic Conference be accepted. The Moderator then invited any questions or comments. After a couple questions, the Moderator called for the vote. With two abstentions, the motion carried and the budget was approved.

Rev. Dr. Paula Hall, co-pastor of the Beloved Community UCC in Accokeek, MD and member of the Central Atlantic Conference Board of Directors, came forward and offered a prayer of dedication. Then the body sang a doxology of praise.

Rev. Freeman then led a Celebration of the Saints, recognizing and giving thanks for Conference leaders who have passed into life eternal since the previous Annual Meeting.

- Rev. Douglas Norwood Hodges

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Rev. Freeman then invited the body to lift up the names of those who have joined the cloud of witnesses in years past. Many names were lifted up. The remembrance concluded with the singing of the first verse of "For All the Saints."

To conclude this part of the plenary, the Rhythmic Choir from Peoples Congregational Church in Washington, DC came forward to share their presentation of "I've Been 'Buked."

Moderator Bobby thanked the choir and then gave the body some instructions regarding workshops and lunch. He offered a prayer of grace for the lunch and then concluded the plenary.

Plenary 3

Moderator Faison welcomed everyone back after lunch and opened the floor for speakouts. Numerous speakouts were shared.

Rev. Freeman Palmer then came to the mic to introduce the keynote speaker, Rev. Dr. Julian DeShazier.

After a video sermonic hymn, "Still Alright," created by Rev. Dr. Julian deShazier, the keynote speaker came to the mic.

After Dr. Julian's presentations, there was a brief moment for questions and comments and then the body took a moment of silent reflection.

Moderator Faison closed the third plenary and invited everyone to take a break.

Plenary 4

Moderator Faison opened the fourth and final plenary and invited the gathering to pray for Rev. Dr. Julian, while laying hands on him. The prayer was closed with the singing of "I Need You to Survive."

Mr. Bradley Thomas came forward to present the report of the Nominating Committee of the Board of Directors of the Central Atlantic Conference. He thanked those who worked with him on the Nominating Committee: Katie Penick, Dan Bassett and Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice. He presented the slate of nominees.
President – Jennifer Knighton
Vice President – Benjamin Bragg-Reynolds
Secretary – Debra Duke
Moderator- Derek Ritenour
Vice Moderator – Kendall Moore
Amanda Beresford (Shenandoah)
Bethany Fuss (Potomac)

Sue Bloom (Catoctin)
Parliamentarian - James DeBoer

Mr. Thomas moved the approval of the slate.
The floor was open for questions. After all questions were answered, the Moderator called for the vote. The gathering approved the slate.

Rev. Palmer then rose to honor the departing Board members. After naming those departing the Board who were not present, he recognized Rev. Katie Penick and Elder Robert “Bobby” Faison.

The Conference Ministry Team then came forward to install the new officers and Board members.

Following the installation, Rev. Dr. Katie Low, Moderator of the Shenandoah Association, along with several clergy members who minister in the Shenandoah Association, welcomed everyone to attend the 62 Annual Meeting.

Moderator Faison thanked everyone for attending and thanked the Planning Committee for their work in making the meeting happen: Rev. Holly Jackson, Yvonne Hinkson, Rev. Dr. Shelli Poe, Carrie Douglas, Ka Lam, Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice, Rev.Katie Pennick, Karson Langenfelder, and Rev. Freeman Palmer. He thanked Rev. James DeBoer for serving as our Parliamentarian. He also thanked Rev. Holly Jackson, Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice, Rev. Katie Penick, and Yvonne Hinkson for creating the altar and crafting the worship experiences throughout the meeting. Moderator Faison also thanked Ka Lam of the Conference staff for logistical brilliance in the planning and making this meeting a success. He offered another thank you to Ryan Hubler for his communication work and to our volunteers at Little River UCC, Angie Megna, and Ka Lam for helping with registration and hospitality, and Dr. Robert Jefferson and Greg Watkins for music. He also thanked the Rhythmic Choir and Rev. Regina Boyd for her liturgical dance, as well as celebrants for worship- Rev. Karen Mann and Rev. Benjamin Bragg-Reynolds. He also offer another vote of thanks to Craig Stapert, for the transportation team from Little River UCC who shuttled Rev. Dr. Julian DeShazier, to Rev. Dr. Shelli Poe and the members of Little River UCC who so graciously hosted everyone.

Moderator Faison then declared the plenary closed.

Central Atlantic conference Board of Directors Report
2025-2026

"May we, as the body of Christ, pull up stakes and pitch our tents and go where God is and where God needs us. And may we, following in Jesus' way, love unreservedly, seek justice persistently, and work faithfully for the Shalom of the World..."
— Rev. Freeman L. Palmer, Conference Minister CAC

When I read this statement I said, YES! YES! This is what it is all about.

We believe in the church and seek to serve God, faithfully.

How do we do that? Individually (lay and clergy), as a church, as an Association, as a Conference...

"The Conference exists to provide its Associations, churches, clergy and laity with an extensive and varied support system, challenging them to a higher, broader and deeper vision of Christian ministry; strengthening and sustaining them in their efforts to be faithful in mission, and linking them to wider church agencies and to each other. It strives to lift and celebrate our unity in Christ, the gift of our heritage and the richness of our diversity; and to be an agent of mission in our society and the global community." Website CACucc.org

The Board of Directors works diligently to guide the mission and vision of the Conference in partnership with the Ministry Team. The Ministry Team is a very faithful, talented and dedicated team. They give their all and demonstrate the qualities of outstanding leadership. I am very grateful to each one - Freeman Palmer. Craig Peterson, Holly Jackson, and Sheresa Simpson-Rice. I am also grateful to Ka Lam, Angie Megna and Ryan Hubler for their invaluable administrative support.

Developing relationships is a key part in the Board's responsibilities. It is the main difference between other organizations and the church. To work toward the vision of Christ's ministry as we support our Associations and local churches, as well as National ministries and missions, makes us unique. There is great care and love for people. Our overarching goal is to embody and carry out our ministries in ways that manifest our unity in Christ and the richness of our diversity.

A highlight this year was the Board retreat with facilitated conversation around Missional Opportunities led by Alexei Laushkin. (Strategic Principles LLC. specializing in faith strategic engagement encouraging missional opportunities in church planting and youth programming.) The topic opened discussion on what a new church start might look like and how reimagining might intersect revitalization and legacy planning in congregational renewal. It was a time of discovery which helped us look to different ideas and possibilities.

It was a huge boost to then help us focus on tasks of the Board at hand. Some of the Board's work is administrative, and often invisible at the local church level, but important to the function of the Conference. Some of the administrative work is done in Working Groups.

The Working Groups are an important foundation for the Board's work. Each has specific goals and tasks.
New Church Development – engages churches in formation
Congregational Vitality – exploring new ideas for ministry
Justice and Witness – empowers leadership to act prophetically
Finance – develops and monitors financial health of the conference
Leadership and Government – resource, by-laws etc.
Human Resources – personnel manual, policies, evaluation process
Legacy Planning – aid to congregations in discernment of future plans.
Nominating – suggest and connecting with future participants.
Working Groups are open to anyone who is interested, and Board membership is not a requirement.
My thanks to everyone who serves on a working group and especially to the Chairs of the groups.

The Board of Directors is a hard-working group dedicated to working" faithfully for the Shalom in the World.."

We are a people of possibility. In the UCC, members, congregations and structures have the breathing room to explore and to hear … for after all, God is still speaking, …

With appreciation, faith and joy,

Rev. Jennifer Keiser Knighton
Board President
Central Atlantic Conference of the United Church of Christ

CENTRAL ATLANTIC CONFERENCE UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
CONFERENCE MINISTER ANNUAL REPORT

Grace and peace to you to as we prepare to celebrate 62 years in ministry as the Central Atlantic Conference. I look forward to seeing you either in person in Harrisonburg or online as we ask the question together "And Who is My Neighbor?(Luke 10:29a)." This is not merely a rhetorical question. It is a profoundly spiritual query that challenges our faith and witness individually and together not only as the CAC, or even the United Church of Christ, but the church of Jesus Christ. As I look back at some of the events that have occurred since last year's Annual Meeting in Annandale, I have increasingly recognized that our neighbor is not only the one who is on our street, or down the road, or in another neighborhood, town, city, state or country. Asking "Who is My Neighbor?" is a challenge to find the common ground where the sacredness of every human life and all life in creation is acknowledged and honored. If we are going to the church of Jesus Christ, our witness needs to be in such a way that everyone, with no exception, is our neighbor, and deserves not only to live, but to thrive in their God given personhood. My prayer for our Conference is that we live up to the call and the challenge of being neighbors to one another and to all in God's neighborhood, which is the world, and those who live in it (Psalm 24:2b)."

Since our last Annual Meeting I have performed the following on behalf of our Conference:

- Provided Search and Call support for several churches in transitions
- Advised our Conference Ministry team in local church and Association matters
- Counseled and provided advise to pastors
- Attended Association, Council, and Committee on Ministry meetings
- Preached at churches, including anniversaries, pastoral installations, and special occasions
- Assisted in mediating churches in conflict
- Managed the business operations and finances of the Conference
- Supervised our Associate Conference Ministers and Administrative staff
- Coordinated the work of our Conference Board of Directors
- Coordinated the presence and participation of our Conference delegation to a special meeting of the 35th General Synod of the United Church of Christ. At that Synod on May 9th, Rev. Jennifer Sowell was elected Associate General Minister, Love of Church.
- Participated in the wider United Church of Christ by serving as a member on the Council of Conference Ministers, on the Board of Directors for UCC Media Justice, and on the Board of Trustees for the Moravian School of Theology (comprising Moravian School of Theology Lancaster Theological Seminary). I concluded my service this year as a member of the Board of Directors of the Church Building and Loan Fund and served on the Search Committee for the Minister for Ministerial Formation for the Ministerial Excellence, Support and

Authorization team of the UCC national setting. This year I also began as a quarterly contributor to UCC Still Speaking Devotionals.

In addition to the above, highlights over the past year for me include the following: participating in a retreat with the Conference Ministers of Color last December at Franklinton Center to Bricks NC, participating with these wondrous colleagues in an online Good Friday service in April, serving communion with Rev. Bill Frederici at his final service with the United Church in Washington DC, preaching at part of Black History Month at the Richmond Hill Retreat Center in Richmond VA, attending an in person Good Friday service sponsored by the Potomac Association African American Women in Ministry, and attending excellent retreats for our clergy in February and our Board of Directors in July.

I remain grateful for the good work and witness of our Associate Conference Ministers. I am, and we are, so are blessed to have Rev. Holly Jackson, Rev. Craig Peterson, and Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice. And we as a Ministry Team cannot accomplish what we do without our Administrative Staff. I am, and we are, equally blessed for the work of Ka Lam, Angela Megna, and Ryan Hubler. I also thank here Rev. Dr. Vertie Powers, who has ably aided with our pastoral transitions, Maddie Kasander, who has helped to coordinate our Justice and Witness ministries, and Bethany Meier-Evans, who serves as Coordinator for our Communities of Practice. Please thank them for the work they do. Also, please pray for all of us as we serve to support our witness together as the Conference.

I also remain grateful for our Conference Board of Directors, with particular gratitude to our Board President Rev. Jennifer Knighton. Rev. Knighton's positive and supportive leadership is a blessing to our Conference and to me. The Conference also owes a debt of thanks the entire Board for their faithful and joyful leadership. During the annual meeting we will thank several outgoing members of the Board: Bradley Thomas, Rev. Michele Beadle, Rev. Francine Vinson, and C.J. Santiago. They have blessed our Board with their ministry among us and they will be missed.

We also miss several ministers whose witness blessed our Conference, the United Church of Christ, and beyond. This year I attended celebrations of life for Rev. Graylan Scott Hagler, Rev. Gordon Forbes, Rev. Susan Henderson, and Bishop Yao Albert Kwabena Rainer "Rainey" Cheeks. These were giants among us and may their memories bless and inspire us. We not only mourn their loss for Rev. Derek Terry, Executive Director of the UCC ONA Coalition and Rev. Barbara "Brown" Zikmund ("BBZ"), whose contributions to the United Church of Christ will impact many for years to come.

We will gather during a time that is hard for many of our neighbors: our immigrant neighbors subject both to dehumanizing treatment and deportation, our neighbors harmed by climate change disasters, our neighbors of color, in our LBGTQ+ communities, neighbors of other faiths, and more, being harmed by the evil of Christian nationalism, and more. My prayer is that as we gather together in Harrisonburg as neighbors, looking out for, supporting, affirming, and living in Beloved Community. Not only we, but the world around, needs that kind of neighborhood.

Thank you Central Atlantic Conference, for the witness of the United Church of Christ that you are. It is an honor and privilege to serve as Conference Minister, and I thank God for you all.

Blessings,



Rev. Freeman L. Palmer

Conference Minister

62nd Annual Meeting of the Central Atlantic Conference
Associate Conference Minister Report- Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice

September 2026

Church Transitions–

This year has been one of beginnings and endings for the churches of Catoctin and Shenandoah Associations. I anticipate that three of our churches in the Catoctin Association will close this year. The congregations of Grace Trinity UCC and Mt. Pleasant UCC are in the final stages of legacy, and Incarnation UCC completed its worship life in June. We honor the history of these congregations; the roots that built them up and the strength of their leadership that discerned that their time together would come to an end. We hold dearly their work in the name of Jesus Christ over centuries of devotion.

I rejoice in the successful searches our churches have completed since last Annual Meeting. Congratulations to Grace UCC in Taneytown on the leadership of Rev. David Nau, Apples UCC on their call to Rev. Michelle Beadle, and Evangelical Reformed on the arrival of senior pastor Rev. Joshua Privitt. We also acknowledge the departures of Rev. Mary Norville from Christ Reformed UCC, Hagerstown and Rev. Chris Spruill from Incarnation UCC. We wish Rev. Spruill well on his relocation to England.

Communities of Practice- I am a firm believer in the power of communities of practice to support and sustain clergy. Our program is changing its program year to January through December and is currently registering participants for the new year https://www.cacucc.org/events . Our COP program serves 28 pastors across 7 groups: Clergy with Children, Catoctin/Shenandoah, LGBT, MIDs, AAWIM, Del-Mar, and Facilitators. I could not do so without a cadre of excellent facilitators who lend a listening ear and a caring heart to their groups. I heartily thank them for their ministry of presence. I am deeply indebted to my coordinator, Rev. Bethany Meier-Evans. I wish to celebrate the dedication of our facilitators: Rev. Amber Neuroth, Rev. Anne Findlay-Chamberlain, Rev. Anne Holmes, Rev. Ruth Harvey, Rev. Sharon Fenema, and Rev. Amy Sens. We value their service in service to their fellow pastors.

I encourage you to register for one of these groups, at a very affordable $250 for 10 months or $25.00 per month or encourage your pastor to participate by offering to underwrite this cost. The return on your investment will be tenfold- if not more!

Clergy Retreat- I am in the planning stages for a clergy retreat set for February 2, 3, and 4th, 2027. We were blessed to learn and relax with Rev. Dr. Marcia McFee earlier this year.

Lent 2027- Stay tuned as we build a Lenten weekly practice around the book *Something Between Us: The Everyday Walls of American Life and How to take Them Down*. by Anand Pandian

Boundary Awareness Training- Our mainstay course, Foundations, is changing. We're unveiling it in October. Likewise, I am always on the lookout for Specialized BAT courses that are relevant and challenge us to see the ethics of our ministry in new ways. If you have an idea, please reach out!

Conclusion

I have been blessed with the incredible gift of a sabbatical this year from mid-May to mid-August. It was a time of reconnection and restoration, filled with amazing opportunities and beautiful learnings. I spent a good amount of time dedicated to the things we put off for another day, like cleaning closets, and made time to strengthen bonds (that week with our granddaughter was an exhausting one!) My spouse said he noticed a difference in me, and I took that observation seriously. How can I move forward holding this important work lightly but also seriously so that my life outside of my call isn't diminished by it? It's the work of my life to help folks find balance and perhaps that was the unspoken theme of my time away. I invite all of us to seek the thin space of being a child of God not bound too much by this earthly realm that we lose the value of loving and being loved. After all, it's the closest we come to God.

With grace and joy,

Rev. Sheresa Simpson-Rice*, Associate Conference Minister for Leadership Development*
Staff support to Western Region (Shenandoah and Catoctin assn.)

Annual Report for Congregational Development

Just before I arrived in the conference four years ago, the Congregational Vitality Working Group of the Conference had a retreat where they explored something called the Infinity Model for Congregational Development. The model, captured by the ∞ symbol, suggests the life cycle of local churches no longer reflects the tradition Bell Curve Model: meaning the cycle consists of a clear beginning, middle, and end. Instead, there are points of intersection in the life of the church where the future is full of possibilities. At the point of plateauing, for instance, a congregation can choose to either take risks and launch themselves on a trajectory toward revitalization; or it could instead choose to play it safe until things reach a point of no return and then close its doors.

In the Infinity Model, associations and conference played a pivotal role because they can step forward, provide valuable feedback and resources, and thereby empower a church to make decisions about its future. In this model, the relationship between local churches, their association, and the conference became more important than ever!

With this in mind, the conference has worked hard these past three years to strengthen our relationships with local churches and associations. Here are a few of the things we have done:

1) We have established a Children & Youth Ministry Network designed to bring leaders together to share resources and collaborate at a time when most local churches are unable to jump-start their youth ministries on their own;

2) Rev. Mia McClain and Rev. Benjamin Boswell have provided the resources necessary to help our local churches decolonize their worship life and ways of being so they can better reflect the lives and the experiences of ALL their neighbors;

3) Rev. Jennifer Knighton facilitates our Retired Clergy Network. The network helps retired clergy find new ways to contribute to various settings of the church at this stage in their lives;

4) Dr. Sharon Fennema has created the Lay Worship Leaders Institute as a program to help local churches first find and then equip lay members who feel called to lead worship during the absence of an authorized minister;

5) We are working in tandem with the new STAR (Small Town & Rural) Coalition to help identify and deliver resources to our more remote churches who don't feel well served by our current denominational resources.

In the year ahead, we will be pursuing other exciting projects to keep our momentum going. Rev. Dr. Marty Kuchma will help local church leaders explore what it means to be a "nimble church", so the bylaws and structures of our local churches better reflect the realities of our time. Dr. Sharon Fennema will continue to expand the Lay Worship Leaders Institute to help lay preachers ground their sense of identity and proclamation in the values of our tradition. We will also continue to collaborate with both Practical Resources for Local Churches and the STAR (Small Town & Rural) Coalition to provide the essential resources our churches need to meet the emerging needs of our time.

Our three working groups (New Church Starts & Affiliations, Church Vitality, and Church Legacy) are looking forward to a planning retreat in 2027 that will help them better coordinate their efforts so they can empower our local churches to better understand the future is not something that simply happens to them but is something their choices help create.

We look forward to journeying with you and your local church into the exciting future that lies before us!

Grace & Peace,

Rev. Craig Peterson

Central Atlantic Conference Ministry Report, September 2026
Rev. Holly R. Jackson, Associate Conference Minister for Justice and Witness Ministries

Never a Dull Moment: After living into this position over the past year and four months one thing has become abundantly clear: there is never a dull moment in Conference Ministry! It is also true that no week ever looks the same. What we are called on to do is constantly changing along with the needs of the church, the situation of the world around us, and the people involved. Sometimes that work is joyous and worth celebrating like new ministries, worship and service that changes lives, and innovative ways of being and doing church in the 21st century. While other times it is simply difficult as we navigate church decline, react to unjust laws and situations, and maintain hope despite the overall stress and exhaustion facing many church leaders, both clergy and lay. Regardless of the tasks before us or the obstacles we must overcome, I continue to believe that the key to wider church ministry is building relationships that help us to increase capacity, make it easier to join together our skills and resources, and remind us that we are not alone in doing the good work of the Gospel.

Getting To Know You - Local Church Edition: In the past year I have visited 28 local churches throughout our Conference. Many times I have been privileged to preach at these congregations and other times I shared greetings from the Conference, simply attended worship, or been part of a special service in the life of that church's ministry. I have been part of two services of release, seven installation services, and three ordinations. I led a women's retreat focused on justice, spoke at a church as part of their work to become an Open and Affirming congregation, met with Church Councils as they navigated difficult situations, and spoke with several lay leaders and committees about how to do the work of justice in their neighborhood and beyond, in addition to educating churches on UCC history and polity. Getting to know our local churches and seeing them in action has been one of the highlights of my ministry this past year. I have also been busy connecting with our clergy and reminding them that they are not alone in the difficult work of leadership. I consider it a privilege to be a pastoral presence to them when needed.

Now Hiring - Search and Call: I continue to learn how to navigate the careful work of supporting churches through the search and call process. I also spend time talking to clergy looking for positions and helping new pastors in our Conference to settle into their ministries. This year I worked with six different churches through various parts of this process. Seeing a pastor thrive in a new position and watching them begin to bond with their new congregation is such a joy.

Getting To Know You - Wider Church Edition: While I was no stranger to the Potomac Association when I started this position, there continues to be things to learn as new leaders and initiatives bubble up in Boards and Committees. Potomac is a very active Association engaged in justice work and church development and their work is both intense and transformative. Attending meetings, talking with leaders, and working to both communicate with and resource the Board of Directors in this Association is no small task. The work is different, but no less engaging, in the Chesapeake Association where we are working on leadership development, focusing on an evolving identity, and revitalizing ministries and churches. I helped each Association to prepare for their biannual fall and spring meetings assisting with creating engaging programming, providing logistical and technical support, and ensuring communication

efforts. I also worked extensively with both Association's Committees on Ministry attending meetings, providing leadership and knowledge when necessary, and assisting with accountability efforts.

Bending the Moral Arc: Jesus commands us to love our neighbors as ourselves and so we are called to live this out through our efforts to create a more just world for all. In our Conference each church decides how they will live out that call, but I am tasked with both supporting those efforts and pushing such efforts forward whenever possible. I have continued to work with justice groups networking throughout our Conference. This includes statewide/geographic based groups in New Jersey, Virginia, and Washington DC, and issue based groups like the Racial Justice Network, and the CAC Movement for Palestinian Solidarity. We are also working to develop groups around LGBTQ+ issues, justice for native peoples, a new statewide group for Maryland, and welcome new efforts like a Climate Hope Affiliate chapter in Silver Spring, MD. Many of our local churches and clergy have been engaged in justice issues around our immigrant neighbors including protesting at detention centers, advocating for legislative issues both in state houses and on the federal level, working with organizations like Congregational Action Network to support affected families and provide citizen oversight of ICE, and more. I was part of several of these efforts attending protests and advocacy in DC, Baltimore, and Annapolis. I also attended Ecumenical Advocacy Days in partnership with our UCC Policy and Advocacy Office in Washington DC. With the midterm elections approaching we have the opportunity to learn how to vote with love on behalf of our neighbors, with the hope of impacting many of the justice issues we have worked on this past year. I have been putting together resources for this effort, finding outside resources to share, and gathering leaders to help them offer their work, knowledge, and experiences in this area to others. Together, we will work towards a more fair and free election and prepare ourselves for whatever the results of the vote may be.

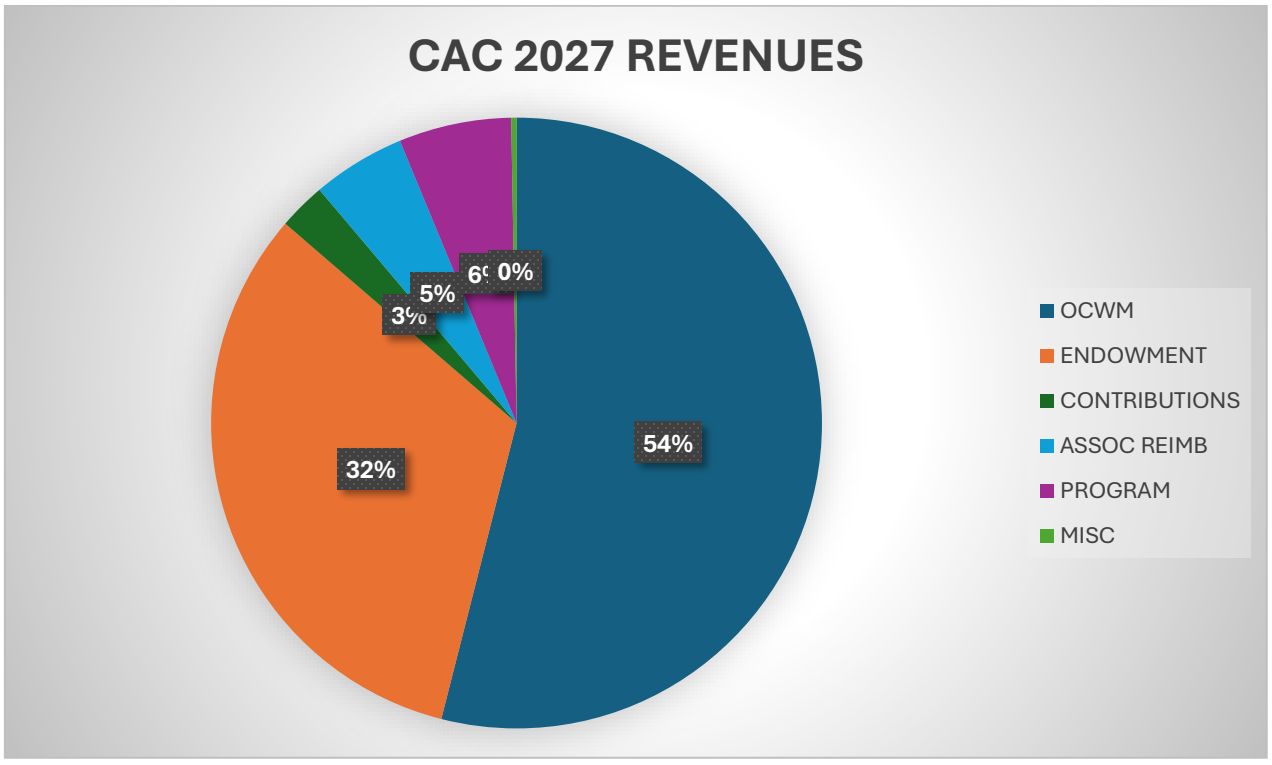
One thing is for sure, the work of Conference Ministry is never boring! I look forward to whatever this coming year brings, while being thankful to serve the ever dynamic, faithful, and diverse Central Atlantic Conference.

Central Atlantic Conference
United Church of Christ
Summarized Budget for the year 2027

Operating Income can be categorized as follows:

OCWM	$669.500
ENDOWMENT	399,990
CONTRIBUTIONS	31,000
ASSOC REIMB	60,914
PROGRAM	73,596
MISC	3,500
TOTAL	$1,248,500

CAC 2027 Operating Income can be represented graphically as below:



Operating Expenses can be categorized as follows:

Supporting Congregations and their Pastors: 35%

- Helping congregations call a new pastor
- Participating in the worship of congregations, particularly in times of celebration
- Coordinating clergy consultations when there are issues or concerns that would benefit from an "outside" perspective
- Providing spiritual and professional support through Communities of Practice

Supporting Church and Ministry Committees: 10%

- Supporting the work of the Church and Ministry Committees including:
- Participating in Ecclesiastical Councils for Candidates for Ordained Ministers
- Participating in Ordinations and Installations
- Supporting Committees on Ministry in ministerial authorizations and oversight

Supporting other activities in Associations: 10%

- Participating in other aspects of the life of Associations including
- Staffing Regular Board and Council meetings
- Attending clergy gatherings
- Representing Conference at Association-wide gatherings

Supporting growth of the Conference – Financial and Church Development/ Revitalization: 15%

- Supporting the Leadership of the Board with stewardship and fundraising activities
- Providing leadership to new church development and church revitalization activities

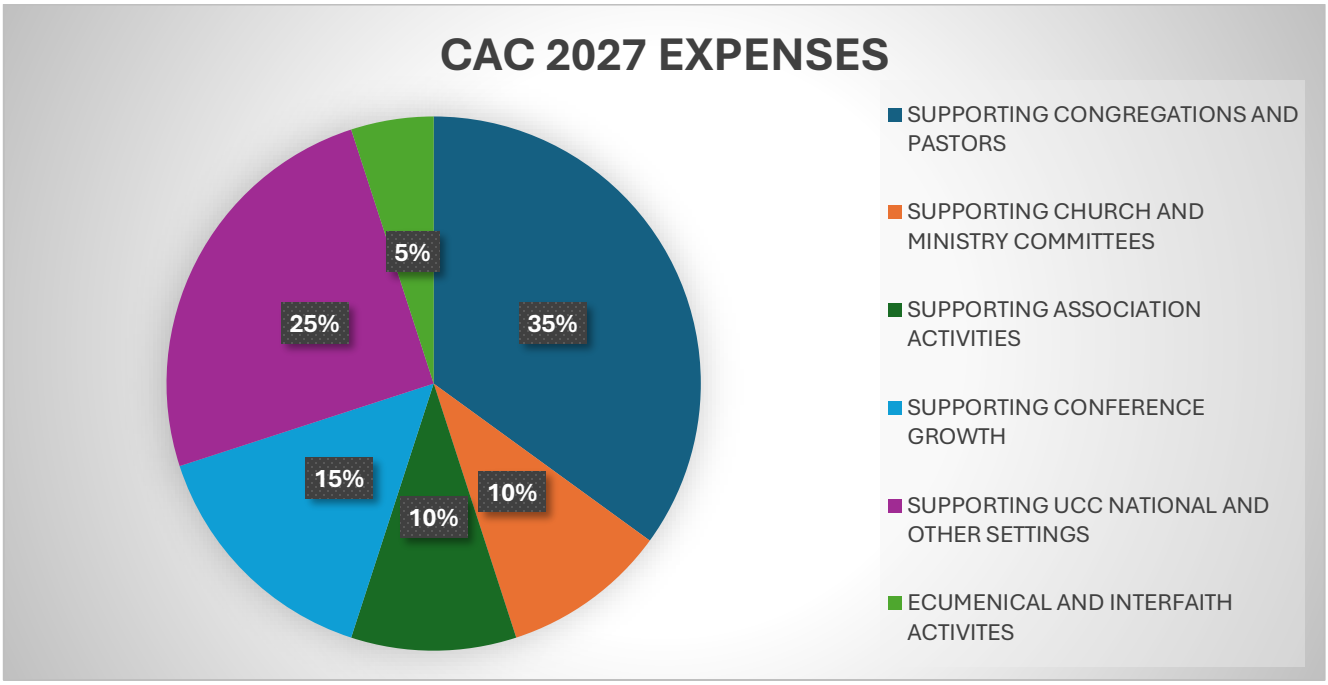
Supporting National and other related UCC: 25%

- Providing to National the portion of Our Church's Wider Mission funds that are not retained within the conference.
- Supporting Missional aligned organizations with small donations (e.g. Franklinton Center, ONA Coalition, etc.)

Ecumenical Activities: 5%

- Working with peers in other denominations and faiths to foster ecumenical strength

Graphically, the operating expenses can be presented as follows:



Operating Results

The 2027 Operating Budget has a projected deficit of $29,623. This is lower than the forecast deficit of $68,756 for 2026, and substantially lower than last year's deficit of $136,720. A portion of this result comes from proceeds from the anticipated sale of the Federated Church in Livingston NJ. We continue, however, to be challenged by revenues in Our Churches' Wider Mission (OCWM). We make every effort to minimize expenses in order to maintain our current staffing with the goal of engaged ministry with our congregations in each of the five Associations. We can reduce this deficit with higher giving by congregations to OCWM, support by individuals to Friends of the Conference, and exploring a larger portfolio of revenue streams and streamlining operations. As a last resort, the deficit will be reduced by drawing down from the Conference's operating reserve fund.