



HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST
N. KY • OH • WV

**"Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you."
- Isaiah 60:1**

Dear Friends,

We are so excited about the Heartland Conference Annual Gathering centered on the theme, "Rising Up!" that will be held on September 22 and 23—a new Thursday-Friday format that was adopted after a survey of past attendees. We very much hope you can join in this great gathering and celebration!

After two years in a virtual setting, the Gathering is back as an in-person event with an online option. And we are back at Westerville Community UCC, which has so graciously hosted recent gatherings. If you haven't taken the opportunity to register, we hope you will do so soon by clicking [here](#).

Co-chairs Rev. Beth Gedert and Rev. Brian Burke and the Annual Gathering Planning Committee have organized an event that we believe will inspire, connect, equip, and support us all in this ministry we share.

Stories of "rising up" will significantly energize our time together. Here is just a sampling of things we are looking forward to:

- Rev. Joanna D'Agostino, Sr. Pastor of Lakewood Congregational UCC will preach at our opening communion worship service with the music group, The Many, offering the musical weave throughout our time.
- Stories of "Rising Up!" from local churches and other ministry partners will be shared throughout the gathering.
- Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis, Sr. Pastor of Middle Collegiate Church in New York City, and author of the recent book, *Fierce Love*, will deliver our keynote address exploring how fierce love can transform us all in an age of division and dispiritedness. Her Thursday afternoon keynote will be followed by an interactive Q&A session.
- Workshops will be offered by two of our networks: Creation Care and the WISE/A2A Inclusion Network. Lee Gagen from our UCC national Philanthropy office will lead sessions on generosity and storytelling. And the musical group The Many will also offer a workshop on creativity in worship planning.
- We are both excited to share about the many evolving ministries of our shared life in the Heartland Conference. Dave's Conference Minister "Heart to Heart" will be followed by a time for Q & A.
- The closing worship on Friday afternoon will feature the formal installation of Rev. Dave Long Higgins as Conference Minister. Special guests from throughout the denomination will be joining us. We will be honored to hear from the Rev. Dr. Jack Sullivan, Jr., Executive Director of the Ohio Council of Churches, as our preacher for this special service.

The real highlight of the program is you—the attendee. Meeting in person will allow us to renew acquaintances with longtime friends and associates, as well as build new relationships, which was extremely challenging over the past two years when we needed to meet exclusively online. The



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Gathering presents opportunities for socializing before and between the sessions and during our mealtimes. Thursday evening has intentionally been left unprogrammed to provide additional opportunities to socialize and build friendships.

While the emphasis of this year's Annual Gathering is the return to in-person attendance, we also recognize that travel or other health considerations may remain an obstacle for some. A virtual option is being provided via Zoom which will be user-friendly and facilitate participation. Wearing a mask and maintaining social distancing while in person at the Annual Gathering is a personal choice.

Registration for the Annual Gathering is open and may be accessed [here](#) or via the Heartland Conference website. We hope that you will make plans to join us in Westerville on Sept. 22-23.

God is causing a remarkable "Rising Up!" in our life together. We look forward to celebrating this with you!

Blessings,

Pastor Dave Long-Higgins, Heartland Conference Minister
Mr. Tom Hathaway, Heartland Conference Moderator