



# HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
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## When did we see you?...Reinvigorating Our Disaster Response Ministry

*'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'* – Matthew 25:37-40



Dear Friends in Christ,

I must begin this short epistle to you with a word of deep thanks and appreciation for your affirmation of me at the Annual Gathering of the Heartland Conference as your settled Conference Minister. It continues to be one of the great honors of my life to serve you and the mission of Jesus Christ in this way in this season of our shared life. I especially treasure the alternative form of leadership which the Leadership Roundtable (the Association Ministers and myself) are seeking to embody as peers so that the fullness of our giftedness can have space to flourish. May God bless us all!

All of this said, I have been pondering the nature and practice of our seeing, not only with our eyes but especially with our hearts as a first move of ministry. Such seeing is not dependent on physical sight. My grandfather who was blind would daily "watch" the soap opera "The Edge of Night". Even as a child, I thought this ironic yet also impressive. After each episode, my grandfather would unpack the relationships in the storyline with amazing clarity. The truth is our seeing and our hearing are often intertwined. Tended well, they can form in our hearts an awareness of God's leading love and also the hurt of humanity.

This intersection of God's leading love and the hurt of humanity is where we can begin to discern our multiple vocations or callings. I say multiple because such seeing will awaken an awareness of a full range of urgencies where healing is needed – too many, in fact, for any one person. This is where Christian community can truly be a gift. If we are willing, we can again discover that there is an empowering Holy Spirit that connects, equips, and supports us toward God's vision of a world of full flourishing. Not only are we not alone, but we are also created for each other by God.

At a recent Conference staff development retreat we began exploring what such mutual seeing, listening, and encouragement might look like. This is really what we are seeking to cultivate in our life together through our Conference networks. The hungers and hurts of the world are too large and numerous for any one person or even local church alone to engage alone. Yet, through mutual encouragement each can discern what God's particular calling is and then act in love to respond.

**Currently, we are in a season of discernment around the formation of a renewed Disaster Response Network, and your help is needed.** The Heartland Conference was on the ground level of forming the national disaster response ministry nearly 20 years ago. Many have ably served in this work in our life together. But as in all things, a new generation of leadership is needed for this work of seeing and responding to God's people in need. Our notion of what disaster response ministry looks like has grown from mucking out flooded houses and putting disaster kits together (both very important parts of this ongoing work) to include spiritual care of care-givers, being aware of who can offer child care when disaster strikes, and engaging long-term recovery strategies. In some ways, even these dimensions of this work are not



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entirely new. **What is necessary are new people willing to engage this work. I invite you to consider the possibility of this call and reach out to me to find out more information about what a Disaster Response Network might look like. It is best to contact me via email at [dave@heartlanducc.org](mailto:dave@heartlanducc.org).**

The Christian life is one of both “seeing” and “acting” in love as made known to us in Jesus Christ. I pray that together, we may respond to this call as it relates to those who have suffered disasters of various kinds in our own conference geography and beyond. For in this way, we will meet Christ face to face. May it be so. Blessings on you and Godspeed as you live into the calling God is placing on your life.

-Pastor Dave