

## On Holy Ground

**T**he **Strengthen the Church Offering** supports the work of our conference and the national United Church of Christ to become a multi-racial/multi-cultural church, accessible to all. The offering funds leadership development, youth and young adult ministries, and new and renewing congregations.

What does it mean for us to become a multi-racial/multi-cultural church? United Church Camps, Inc., an outdoor ministry related to the Wisconsin Conference UCC, took this question to heart. It renamed its oldest outdoor ministry site as the Daycholah Center, incorporating the Ho-Chunk name for Green Lake, chosen to honor the Ho-Chunk people who were the original keepers of this land.

The process began at the 2019 annual meeting of the Wisconsin Conference UCC. The conference adopted a resolution repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine was used to justify the seizure of land from indigenous people. Conversation between Ho-Chunk UCC members and

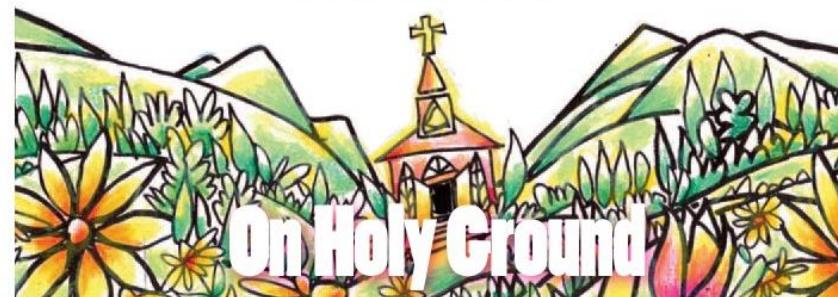
Outdoor ministry leadership identified that a retreat center with "Pilgrim" in it could be offensive and a barrier to living out the camp mission.

The Alliance for Justice, a justice initiative started from the Ho-Chunk UCC in Black River Falls with funding from the national UCC, facilitated a process of deep spiritual work. The multi-year process offered UCCI the gift of a name: Daycholah Center.

People gathered to rededicate the center on Indigenous Peoples' Day, Oct. 11. There were speakers, a fire circle and a shared meal. Karena Thundercloud, vice president of the Ho-Chunk Nation, captured the essence of the day and of Outdoor Ministry when she asked us to "think about the life of this lake, (how it) brought us together, and will continue to connect us in our greatest identity as a community."

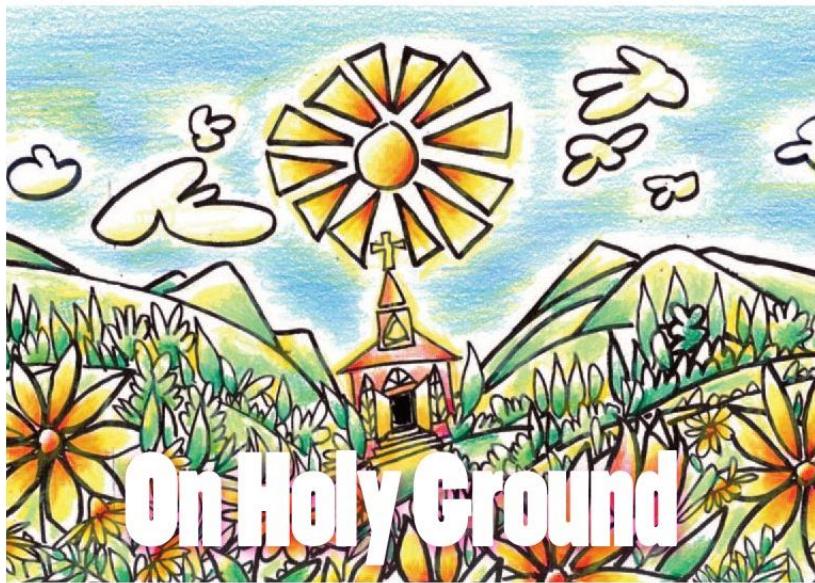
The compassionate and generous spirit of the Ho-Chunk people filled the air. They gave us gifts of blankets and star quilts, leather pouches containing passages of Scripture on small scrolls, fragrant cedar pouches and a hand-carved walking stick. They performed traditional smudging and presented UCCI with a Ho-Chunk Nation flag that will fly over Daycholah's welcome center.

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## The Holy Ground Where God Appears

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon, Associate General Minister United Church of Christ

*“Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”* Exodus 3:5

**S**cripture names many places as holy. Yet my heart resonates most with Moses' encounter with the burning bush in Exodus. God appears in the flames of a burning bush that is not consumed. Yet what matters most to me in this text is not where or to whom God appears, but why God appears.

God appears in response to the cries of God's people who are being treated unjustly. God appears because of the people's cries, and wherever God appears is holy ground.

I often have the privilege of standing on holy ground as I travel the breadth of our beloved Church. These are places where God shows up through the work of God's people to treat other's needs as holy.

Plymouth UCC in Des Moines is holy ground, a church that removed the

stairs to the pulpit and replaced them with circular ramps, honoring a God who still speaks through preachers and laity who do not stand.

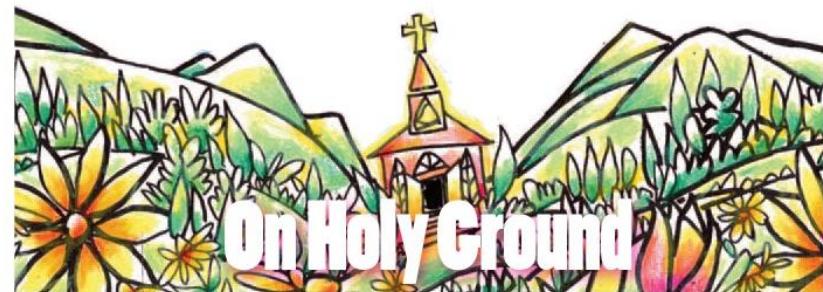
Plymouth Congregational in Kansas is holy ground, a church where one of our unhoused siblings welcomed me to “their church” after worship, before heading back outside by choice with his bags and dog. This reminds us that those unhoused should still have a home with us.

Saint John's UCC in St. Louis is holy ground, a church that partners with the community to feed and clothe those in need of help, and whose members take communion to their surrounding neighbors as an extension of Christ's table of grace.

Trinity UCC in Chicago is holy ground, partnering with the food security network to import organic fruit and vegetables in a neighborhood robbed of access to healthy food options.

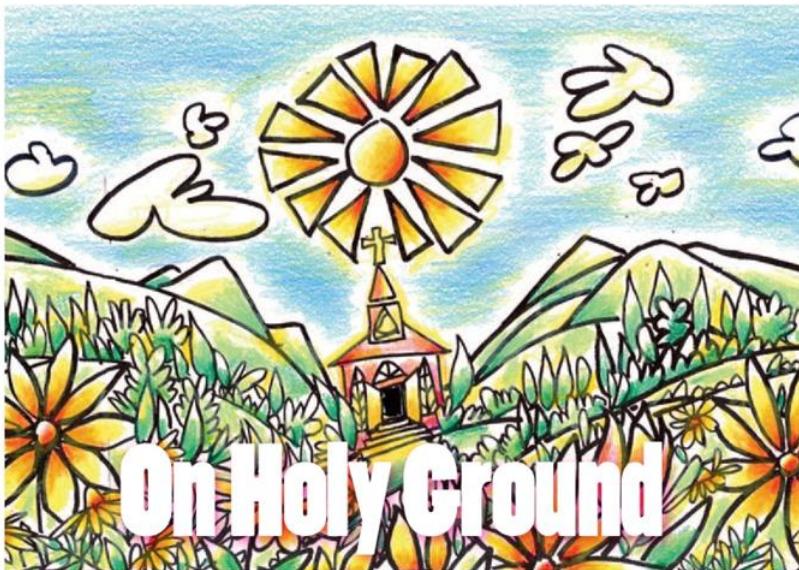
Wherever you are this morning, take the time to see how God is moving through the work and witness of those who gather and know that you are, we all are, on holy ground.

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#### From Holy Ground - A Prayer to Strengthen the Church

*By Rev. Dave Long-Higgins, Conference Minister, Heartland Conference*

Loving God,  
Ground us anew  
In Your deep desire  
For a fullness of flourishing  
Yearning to rise throughout  
Your whole creation.  
  
Plant us deep  
In the soil of Your love

Bursting open seeds  
Often long-forgotten  
Except by You  
Bearing a strength  
For blessing and healing  
In a world of hurt.  
  
Form Your self-giving  
In our deepest selves

Giving grace and space  
For Your strength of soul  
To rise anew in acts  
Of joy-filled giving  
Bearing unexpected hope  
In a world weary with worry.

Grow us in Your Holy Ground  
Supplying every needed nutrient  
Of body, mind, and soul  
In just the right amount  
At just the right time  
Giving rise to a beauty  
And delight not of our making  
Yet requiring our consent.

By this, O Love,  
Strengthen the covenant

Of Your Christ-formed community  
Gifting a renewed energy  
To bear Your deep desire  
Into a world that hungers  
For resurrection risings.

Now, strengthen Your church  
With Your self-giving Spirit  
That we may strengthen others  
For Your holy work of unfolding  
Abundant, blessed, beloved, joy!

Yes, O Love, raise us up  
From your Holy Ground  
For nothing less than this  
And let it be more than enough.

Amen.

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